

Farmhouse Owned

Faye Valentine

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Sitting on more than six hundred acres of pristine farmland, Rainbow Ridge got its name from the cliff face that ran along the northern edge which, through untold years of rain, erosion and the perfect combination of minerals looked like a giant rainbow that was absolutely stunning to behold. Adding to the serene privacy were Oaks, maples, pines, aspens and several other types of trees running along the east and west sides of the farm and around nearly all the front leaving only forty or fifty feet on either side of the driveway exposed to the world beyond.

As she slowly drove down the long paved driveway towards a house she was certain could hold at least thirty of her apartments, Heather's eyes darted from stables, grain silos and barns to the dozens of horses and cows lazily grazing and she was taken back to her childhood. *It's not easy work*, she thought *but at least I was good at it*.

The driveway turning into a small parking lot capable of holding thirty or forty vehicles, Heather pulled into the closest one to the house. After a few calming deep breaths she got out of her eleven year old Civic, smoothed out her navy blue skirt and walked up onto the front porch. Giving the door three hard knocks, she waited.

The door opened and Heather was greeted by a tall, round-faced brunette dressed in a lavender summer dress that hugged all the right curves. "Can I help you?" Sabrina asked, staring at the young blonde woman standing on her front porch.

"I'm Heather. The ad in the paper said you were hiring milk maids?"

"Ah, I see. You'll want to talk to my husband about that. He does all the hiring, but seriously," Sabrina said, making no attempt to hide the fact she was looking Heather up and down "do you even know what that means?"

"I may not look like your typical country girl thanks to living in the city the last decade, but my parents owned a farm when I was growing up and I've milked my fair share of cows."

"Well, if you think you can handle the job you'll find Ben in the barn behind the house. I'd show you the way, but I've got my hands full making lunch for seventeen people."

"No problem. I'll find it."

Leaving the farmhouse, Heather walked along the cobblestone path around the felt side of the building – passing a shirtless man on a tractor and another placing mulch around the base of several ancient oaks. Her eyes lingering on the muscled chest of the man mowing the yard, she nearly tripped over an exposed root. Catching herself, face blushing as she felt their eyes staring in her direction, she got back on the path and followed it to a large structure sitting about thirty yards behind the house.

Approaching the open double doors she saw a tall, well-muscled man standing over what looked like a charcoal grill using a long metal rod to stir the white-hot embers while a chestnut colored stallion was tethered to a four foot pole jutting from the floor. The rest of the place was filled with bales of hay and various farm equipment that did not interest her. Entering, she got to within three feet of the man. "Excuse me?" No answer. "Excuse me," she said a little louder, causing the man to jump.

Spinning around, hot iron in hand, Ben struck Heather squarely in the left hip – the red-hot metal searing through the light material of her skirt and into her tender flesh. Time stopped as the two looked at each other and then down at the branding iron still pressed firmly in place. Seeing it triggering a response from her brain, Heather let out a blood-curdling scream and began hopping around like a chicken with its head cut off. "Aaaahhgghhh! Oh my motherfucking god!"

Dropping the iron back into the brazier, Ben reached up and removed the wireless earbuds from his ears, dropped them into the pocket of his flannel shirt and turned back to the intruder. Who in the hell are you and what are you doing lurking around my property?"

Not thinking about a strange man watching her, Heather yanked her skirt up and stared at the horseshoe and triple R's permanently burned into her flesh. "Y-Y-You branded me! Oh my god! Oh my god! Holy fucking hell it hurts."

"I'm sorry, but I'll ask again: who are you and what are you doing sneaking around my property?"

"YOU BRANDED ME!"

"And I apologized for it. Now tell me who the hell you are or you'll be arrested for trespassing. Also, nice panties," he added with a half grin as he looked at the lacy pink and red garment.

Pulling her skirt down, Heather let out another yelp as it brushed against the brand. "Son of a bitch! My name is Heather and your wife sent me back. She said I had to talk to you about the milk maid job, but if this is how you treat people I don't think I want it after all."

"Look, I'm sincerely sorry I branded you, but you scared the hell out of me sneaking up on me like that. And my wife knows better than to send people around the farm without a guide."

"She said she was busy making lunch. God damn it hurts."

"Well, this is some way to kick things off. Let me take a look at it to make sure it's not going to get infected or anything."

"Stay away from me!"

"Fine, but at least let me take you in the house so that my wife can dress it for you and then we can talk about the position and what it entails. Assuming you're still interested, that is."

"If I didn't need the money so badly I would have slapped you across the face and left by now. Lucky for you I'm in a desperate situation right now." Looking down again, Heather sighed. "And it had to be my favorite skirt."

"I think Sabrina should have something to fit you. I really am terribly sorry for branding you, but you scared the shit out of me."

"Lesson hard learned," Heather forced a smile. "So, how many cows do you have that need milked?"

"You're still interested in the job?"

"Yeah. I've been out of work for a while now and things are getting tight. Fuck, how long is it going to hurt like this?"

"I'm afraid it's going to hurt for a few days. Hmm," he said bending down to look at the brand. "It's clean and well placed and looks as if some of the dyes from your skirt may have been absorbed into it. Don't be surprised if it heals with color."

"Awesome! I've always dreamed of being branded like cattle! God, can my day get any worse?"

"Probably, but let's try to make it better, shall we?"

Going in through the back door, Ben looked at the men and women sitting at the table and his wife serving them lunch. "Hey honey, got a minute?"

"Let me put the rest of the food on the table and I'm... why does it look as if she were just kicked by a bucking bronco?" Sabrina asked, her eyes focused on Heather. "Dammit Ben, what did you do?"

"She snuck up and scared the shit out of me in the barn and I accidentally branded her."

Heather's face blushed as everyone sitting at the table looked her up and down in an attempt to find the mark. "Found it!" A farmhand named Jasper said. "God damn that's hot!"

Sitting a pot of beef stew on the table, Sabrina wrapped her arm around Heather's shoulder. "Jesus Christ, Ben! What the hell were you thinking? Oh, you poor thing, come on, let's get you out of here before the wolves pounce. We'll be safe in the bedroom and then I can take a look at it for you."

Feeling as if her energy had suddenly been drained, Heather did not argue as the caring older woman guided her out of the kitchen, through the living room and into a massive bedroom. Her silence continued even when Sabrina knelt at her side, but was broken when hands raised the hem of the ruined garment. "W-What are you doing?"

"Sorry sweetie. It's hard to see it with the skirt in the way. Why don't we go ahead and take it off and I'll replace it with one of my own?" Unbuttoning it, Sabrina tugged the skirt down Heather's legs – careful not to hit the brand. Turning her attention to the branded skin, she smiled. "Well, at least it looks like a clean hit. Meaning it is straight, well placed and should heal up nicely in time. I still can't believe my bone-headed husband did this to you."

"It was my fault for sneaking up on him. I said excuse me, but he didn't hear me. I did not see the buds in his ears so I said it louder and that's when he did it."

"Sneaking or not, there's absolutely no excuse for what he did to you, Heather. Did he at least hire you?"

"We didn't exactly get that far, but it was mentioned."

"Well, if he doesn't then I'll kick his ass for you."

Eyes once again going to her branded hip, Heather partially smiled. "I guess this means I belong to you now," she said, trying to make light of a shitty situation before having a complete meltdown. "I mean, I am branded as your property, right?"

"True. I'll make sure Ben puts you in one of the nicer stalls. Do you prefer oats or hay?"

"Oh, definitely oats!"

"You'll have all you can eat. A young filly needs to keep up her energy, after all."

"Mmmm...I can see it now, long days lazily grazing in the fields without a care in the world."

"And let's not forget about being ridden," Sabrina chuckled. "Oh dear! Now that would be a sight to behold." Seeing Heather's face blush, she pushed on. "Nothing to worry about, honey, you'll get used to it with enough practice and before you know it you'll look forward to being saddled."

"I, um, oh lord kill me now."

"I'm joking of course. Sorry, couldn't help myself. Anyways, let's get that brand taken care of, Sabrina said as she picked up a small tube of salve. "This is going to sting but I will try to be as gentle as possible. Hold still and don't move." Applying a few drops of the milky white cream to her finger tips, she slowly massaged it into the area around the brand and then over the brand itself – pleased at how well she took it. "Here you go, you can have the rest," she said, handing the small container to Heather. "Apply it twice a day for about a week and you'll be set. Go ahead and help yourself to any skirt you like from the closet."