



Affaires privées (Tome 1) - Coup d'éclat

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Molly O'Keefe

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Format: Ebook Kindle

Présentation de l'éditeur

La sulfureuse Monica Appleby est de retour à Bishop. Sa célébrité, elle la doit au drame familial qu'elle a autrefois vécu et qu'elle souhaite coucher sur le papier. Or, ce projet n'est pas du goût du maire, Jackson Davies, qui, pour sauver la ville d'une faillite économique, vient d'inscrire sa commune à un concours télévisé ultra médiatisé. Son objectif : offrir à Bishop un nouveau départ. Son ennemi numéro un : Monica, qui risque d'accaparer la presse. Et si cette apparente hostilité entre l'homme de pouvoir et la séduisante écrivaine dissimulait en réalité une profonde attirance ? Extrait

Chapter 1

Six months ago

Jackson Davies knew better. He really did. There were friends you could do free hard labor for, and there were friends you couldn't.

Sean Baxter was decidedly a friend you couldn't. And yet Jackson managed to be shocked when Sean sat down to watch TV while Jackson was still sanding drywall.

"You've got to be joking!" Jackson threw down the sandpaper. He was covered in dirt and grime and sweat. He itched. Everywhere. Agreeing to help Sean renovate his family's old dive bar, The Pour House, had seemed like a good idea four months ago—a little physical labor, some laughs with friends.

But so far Jackson and Brody, Sean's brother, were doing all the work.

Why are you surprised? It's grade school all over again.

"I just want to see this clip on America Today." Sean's face mask was pushed up into his red hair, revealing a clean circle of skin around his lips. No doubt Jackson and Brody looked equally ridiculous. Jackson needed to shower before heading to City Hall. "Monica Appleby is going to be on. You know, that writer—"

"You know, I've actually got work to do. Real work." Jackson took off his tool belt. Behind him, Brody kept scraping away at the mahogany bar he was refurbishing. Brody was in town for a week between jobs and he'd committed to slave carpenter labor for that time.

Jackson couldn't help the man.

"I'm sure Bishop will do just fine without you on a Friday morning."

"I'm mayor, Sean. I can't just take the whole morning off." And the truth was, working out here at The Pour House was easier than going into City Hall today and almost every other day.

Bishop, Arkansas was dying. Slowly, from a financial wound Jackson didn't know how to fix. And Jackson took a lot of pride in being able to fix anything.

At least sanding walls made him feel like he was doing something.

"I'm out," Jackson said. "I've got a meeting with the city council, and . . ."

“Shhhhh, there she is!” Sean turned the volume up, and even Brody was forced to stop his relentless work and watch the screen.

Monica Appleby sat on the couch in the America Today green room. The reality-star-turned-author was everywhere these days. And every time Jackson caught a glimpse of her on a magazine cover or TV show, he thought the same thing: that girl is trouble.

Her black-haired, purple-eyed beauty was diamond bright but lined in smoke and sin. Something about Monica managed to put a spotlight on every single wrong and dirty thing he’d abstained from in the last seven years. Expensive bourbon, cheap tequila, beautiful women whose names he didn’t want to know, steak dinners, the Las Vegas strip, unpaid parking tickets—all of it.

She was the human and stunningly gorgeous personification of everything he wanted and couldn’t have.

It hurt to look at her.

“Remember her?” Sean asked. “From when we were kids?”

A terrified six-year-old, clinging to her battered mother’s legs.

“Of course I remember her,” Jackson said. That girl’s brief nightmarish stay in Bishop was a low point, for him and for the town. It had turned them all into voyeurs, decent people with better things to do than lining up outside the police station for a glimpse of Monica and Simone Appleby and all their pain.

“I loved that show she was on with her mom,” Sean sighed.

Jackson did not want to get into the reality-television horror show that Monica and Simone Appleby had inflicted upon the world, years ago. Monica had been a nightmare teenager, and Simone’s inability to control her had made for hugely popular though short-lived television.

Simone had her own show now, by all accounts equally bad.

“I gotta go,” Jackson said.

“See you later?” Brody asked, his black hair held back with a bandana. He looked badass, as much as his brother looked like a leprechaun with drywall dust in his hair.

“I’ve got to pick up Gwen after school. She’s got an interview down at Ole Miss.”

“I can’t believe your sister is old enough to go to college,” Brody said.

She wasn’t. But she was smart enough. And he was just desperate enough to let her go.

“Can you guys cut the chatter?” Sean asked. “I’m trying to listen here.”

“We’ll talk with Monica Appleby right after we discuss one CEO’s effort to bring industry back to small-town America,” said Jessica Walsh, the America Today host.

“Oh, Jessica, I always knew you were a tease,” Sean said, and he grabbed the remote to turn down the

volume.

“Don’t,” Jackson said. Industry and small-town America were kind of his current obsessions. “Leave it.”

Riveted, Jackson stepped closer to the TV, as a handsome man with sharp blue eyes and shaggy blond hair that made him look like a cross between a surfer and a movie star filled the screen. His teeth were like pearls. Little white Chiclets.

“Dean Jennings, CEO of Maybream Crackers, makers of Crispity Crackers and Maybream Crème cookies, is moving his factory from South America back to the United States,” Jessica said, managing to make crackers sound sexy.

“Those cookies are gross,” Sean said.

“I like them,” Brody answered.

“You would.”

Jackson grabbed the remote and cranked up the volume.

“But that’s not all,” Jessica said, working her long blond hair like a stripper dancing around a pole. “He wants to bring his factory back to small-town America. Can you tell us about that decision, Dean?”

“Maybream was started in a small factory outside of New York. Twenty years ago we moved it down to South America.” Dean’s earnest-salesman charm played well on the screen—Jessica could barely keep her eyes off the man. “But all across America right now there are factories lying empty and American workers are without jobs. And I just realized . . . I couldn’t stand by and watch American industry vanish, not when I could do something about it. Now, I’m a small company and I can’t change the economy, but I realized I could change one small town by bringing the Maybream Cracker headquarters and factory back to America.”

“This is all really exciting,” Jessica said. “But I think the most exciting, and frankly, PR-savvy, part about it is that you are teaming up with us, America Today.” Jessica smiled into the camera. “And you, our viewers, get to choose the lucky town.”

“It is exciting and I don’t know about savvy, but I thought it would be fun.” Dean made it sound like saving a small town was a trip to the seashore.

“Tell us how it works.” Jessica leaned forward across the desk, hanging, it seemed, on Dean’s every word. Or perhaps just hypnotized by his teeth.

“The application to nominate a town is available online, and my staff and I will look through every entry,” Dean said. “We will pick six that best match what we need in a factory and community. Once we have our six semifinalists, America Today will travel with me to take a good, hard look at those towns.”

“That’s an interesting aspect of this contest,” Jessica said. “What are you looking for in a community?”

“Well,” Dean sighed. “Since we’ll be moving our headquarters and staff, we need a place where people would want to raise a family. Someplace wholesome but forward-thinking, with opportunities for kids and parents. With a factory.”

Oh, God, it was like the man was singing Jackson love songs!

“That guy wouldn’t know wholesome if it bit him in the ass,” Sean muttered.

Jackson shot a scowl over his shoulder.

“What?” Sean cried. “The guy’s a sleazeball—anyone can tell.”

Behind him, Brody was nodding.

Jackson dismissed them both, because his heart was about to burst.

We’re wholesome, we’re forward-thinking.

And best of all, Bishop had a factory: an okra-processing plant that had been closed for five years. It just sat there, empty, on the south side of town. A reminder of what this town used to be. A graveyard to nearly one hundred lost jobs.

Jackson had been trying for three years as mayor to bring in new business, new industry that would keep this town afloat—but he’d never dreamed of getting the factory open again.

“After I narrow down my choices from six to three and make sure the top three have factories that can be retrofitted for Maybream Crackers,” Dean said, “I’m going to let America vote which town wins. And together we will change that town’s future.”

“Deadline for applications is the end of the month,” Jessica pointed out. “So if you know a town that you think would be a good fit for Maybream Crackers, check out our website.” A website address scrolled along the bottom of the screen.

“Give me a pencil,” Jackson said, holding out his hand toward his friends. “Now. Now before it’s gone.”

“Christ, man,” Sean said, slapping a small oblong carpenter’s pencil into his hand. “You can google that shit, you know.”

Jackson scrawled the information on the wall he’d just been sanding. It would be painted over, but that didn’t stop Sean from moaning as if Jackson were defacing the Taj Mahal.

“Dean,” Jessica continued, “thanks so much for coming in today and partnering with us on this great project. I hope more American companies take note and bring their factories back to U.S. soil.”

“Me too, Jessica. Thanks for having me.” One last movie-star smile and Dean Jennings was gone.

The show cut to commercial, and Jackson turned down the volume before facing his friends.

Their wary expressions bounced right off his ebullient mood.

“Did you hear that? It’s like he was talking about Bishop!” He punched the air in victory. It felt so good, so right, that he did it again. There hadn’t been a whole lot of reasons for fist-pumping these days. “This is it!” he cried. “This is exactly what Bishop needs.”

“A TV show?”

“Someone to reopen the factory. Bring back jobs. New jobs. For Bishop!” Jackson was light-headed with relief and excitement. “Oh my God, can you believe that? It’s perfect.”

“It’s a long shot,” said Brody.

“I believe in long shots,” Jackson said. “I am the king of long shots.” Not entirely true, but he was riding a wave here.

Sean, who made being a cynic his life’s work, frowned.

Now Jackson’s good mood was dented.

“Just because you don’t like the guy after a clip on television—”

“Guys who look like that can’t be trusted. It’s a fact. They get everything they want,” Sean said.

“Bishop is dying, Sean. Dying. We need this.”

“But a TV show?” Sean asked. “And letting America vote? That shit is always rigged.”

“You want people coming into The Pour House?” Jackson asked. “Not just the regulars, but new business? Young people? Hot girls?”

“Hot girls would be nice.”

“You want your kids—”

“I don’t have kids.”

“But you will someday, and you’re not going to want to bus them to school an hour away, are you? If we don’t change our tax base, we lose the schools. That’s it. A chance like this might not come again. The town is in a bad way, Sean. A third of our population has left—”

“You don’t have to tell me.” Sean held up his hands in surrender, but he didn’t lose that scowl.

“Then what’s your problem?”

If Jackson were the punching kind, he would have punched Sean Baxter years ago. In kindergarten, maybe. And probably another hundred times since. For that face alone. Always the doubting Thomas. Always the fly in the soup.

“Remember when we played baseball in high school?”

Jackson shot a “can’t you help me here, he’s your brother?” look at Brody, who only went back to sanding. “Of course I remember, Sean. We had the worst record in the state.”

“We sucked. It’s true. But you know what I remember about you?” Sean asked.

“I can’t even imagine.”

Sean leaned over the bar, through sunlight and a snowstorm of dust in the air, catching Jackson in the crosshairs of his light blue eyes.

“You swung for the fences, every time. Even when a base hit would have sufficed, you went after that ball like it had insulted your mother. Like the fate of the world rested on you knocking the leather off that damn thing.”

“That’s why I led the team in home runs.”

“And strikeouts.”

True.

“What’s your point, Sean?”

“I thought you were nuts when you decided to run for mayor, but I supported you. But this show . . . this idea . . . It feels like you’re swinging for the fences.”

Jackson stepped forward and poked his old friend in the chest. “That’s exactly what I’m doing, Sean. And I’m doing it right now.”

He glanced at the wall and memorized the website he’d scrawled there.

The whole texture of his day had changed. He had to get on that application process, and quick. He wasn’t even sure who had keys to the factory. Shelby Monroe’s mother used to run it; maybe she had the keys. He grabbed his wallet from the windowsill where he’d left it and walked out of the bar into the bright Arkansas morning.

As mayor of Bishop, population 4,200, he’d been working hard to fix what was wrong with the community, all so that he could leave it.

And this show might just be his ticket out of here. *Revue de presse*

“Molly O’Keefe is a unique, not-to-be-missed voice in romantic fiction.”—*New York Times* bestselling author Susan Andersen

Praise for *Wild Child*

“If there is one contemporary romance novel you must read in 2013, this is it. . . . This book, *this book*. . . . I could go on and on . . . but I will just end with this: not only was the plot beautiful but the writing was as well.”—*Love’s a State of Mind*

“One of my favorite things about [Molly O’Keefe’s] books is the way they refuse to shy away from messy, complicated characters and relationships. *Wild Child* is no different in that regard. . . . It is a testament to O’Keefe’s skill as a writer and a storyteller that she imbues Jackson and Monica’s stories (as a fledgling couple and as individuals) with a tremendous amount of emotional depth and sensitivity. . . . O’Keefe can bring characters . . . into vivid and compelling life as they stumble, sometimes joyously, often painfully, always passionately, toward love and mutual happiness.”—*Dear Author*

“I fell in love with this book from the very beginning. . . . It has the right amount of romance . . . and the sex scenes were hot too.”—*Night Owl Reviews*

“As I have come to expect from Molly O’Keefe, *Wild Child* is a deliciously steamy romance that has plenty of substance. . . . Another fabulous book by a very gifted author who I highly recommend to anyone who enjoys contemporary romances.”—*Book Reviews & More by Kathy*

“Molly O’Keefe is one of my favorite writers. You can count on her to create characters that will test you and take your emotions for a spin, one moment loving them, the next wanting to give them a good shake. Well, she didn’t let me down with this story! . . . The writing is spectacular and meaningful, the story has depth and the characters *extremely* interesting and true to their designed nature. I make no bones about O’Keefe being one of my favorite writers and, even though I was prepared for a good book, I was blown away by this one.”—*The Book Nympho*

“Super hot scenes, laughable moments and some of the most romantic gestures I have read . . . Happy reading!”—*The Reading Cafe*

“It’s no secret that Molly O’Keefe’s novels are my favorites in the very crowded contemporary romance genre. Her books . . . are brilliantly subversive. All of the novels I’ve read by this author riff on romance archetypes and conventions in a deliciously satisfying manner. . . . When it comes down to it, if you’re looking for an authentically complex romance narrative . . . read *Wild Child*.”—*Clear Eyes, Full Shelves*
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