



# WRAPPED UP IN CHRISTMAS

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LEARNING HER THROAT TO SILENCE the older women—surprisingly successfully—the mid-twenties woman stuck out her hand. “Hi. I’m Sarah. I’m the one who placed the help-wanted ad.”

Bodie prided himself on rarely being caught off guard, and on not showing it when he was, but he was sure his face displayed his shock. She was Sarah Smith? This smiling young woman had been the one who made his quilt?

“Thank you for responding in person,” she continued.

Her wholesome aura hit him deep in the gut with sugary goodness that couldn’t be for real in this day and time. Warning bells clanged in his head to get out of Dodge—er, Pine Hill—but they were silenced in an instant when he looked into her warm brown eyes.

The intensity of his reaction blared through his whole jaded being.

“Though a phone call would have been fine.”

His gaze dropped to her outstretched hand. Those fingers had stitched his quilt? Had lovingly held the material as she created a work of art?

All this time, he'd pictured an elderly woman whiling away time making his quilt. The only person he'd ever known to quilt had been his great-grandmother, and he'd thought hand-quilting a dying art. Never had he considered that a woman younger than him had placed the intricate stitches.

Why would she have spent the hours and hours making his quilt? Did the older women keep her locked in a tower or something? That would certainly explain her wholesome persona and why she'd spend so much time on such a time-consuming task for a complete stranger.

Her smile deepened, lighting her pretty face. “You are here about the ad, aren't you?”

“We hope so. Sarah really does need a man,” Blue-hair managed to get out before Red elbowed her.

“Yeah, she's never going to get that big old house fixed up by Christmas if you guys keep quitting on her,” Gray-bun said, finally clueing him into what Sarah needed a man for.

“Do her a favor and stick around to finish the job.”

Sarah blushed.

It had been a long time since Bodie had seen a woman blush, and he stared at her in continued wonder, questioning again if she was from another day and age.

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The world was harsh, cruel—not filled with kind, smiling women who blushed.

Realizing that he should've already acted on Sarah's outstretched hand, Bodie caught her hand just as, her smile fading, she was lowering it.

Opening his mouth, he started to introduce himself by giving his rank, then paused. Whether he liked it or not, he was a civilian now.

Heart heavy, he said, "Bodie Lewis."

Her hand felt small in his, almost fragile. Feminine. He'd worked beside some amazing women in the military, had dated a few. None of them had hands like Sarah's—soft, but capable of creating beautiful things.

"Nice to meet you," she assured, pulling her hand free and looking a little disconcerted. "So you're here about the ad. And since you came in person, I'm guessing you can start right away?"

The desperation as she asked the question pleaded with him to say yes.

She'd spent a lot of time making his quilt, had given without expecting anything in return. Now that he'd met her in person, his first impression was that she was a genuinely kind and generous person.

From what the women had said, she needed house repairs. Having grown up with a stepfather who made his living as a handyman, there wasn't much around the house Bodie couldn't do.

Indecision tore at him. He didn't have to be anywhere for a few weeks.

If the woman who'd made his quilt needed his help, he should help her. He couldn't walk away and leave her hanging after what she'd unknowingly done for

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him. Not if he wanted to maintain any sense of pride in himself as a man.

Without knowing what he was getting himself into, Bodie nodded. “Tell me exactly what it is you need me to do.”

