



Remember Me: A Rosewood Novel (The Rosewood Trilogy Book 1)

By Laura Moore

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CAN A LOVE BE LOST THAT WAS MEANT TO BE?

A rising star in the modeling world, Margot Radcliffe hasn't forgotten the hurt that sent her running from Rosewood, the beautiful Virginia horse farm where she was raised. Travis Maher, a ruggedly handsome rebel and gifted horse trainer with a hard-knock past, had once captured Margot's heart—only to break it.

But when tragedy strikes her family, Margot is forced to set aside her skyrocketing career and return to a place she never expected to see again, where the legs that everyone admires belong to Thoroughbreds, not supermodels. Now Rosewood Farm's success depends on Margot, and the only person she can count on for help is the very man who so ruthlessly rejected her love all those years ago.

As Margot and Travis enter an uneasy truce to save Rosewood from financial ruin, their wild natures clash and their unresolved passions for each other begin to surge. But can this hard-edged horseman find a way to express his desire for the one woman he's ever loved before she's lost to him forever?

From the Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Moore's first book of a projected trilogy tells the story of 18-year-old Margot Radcliffe, who runs away from her family's estate after a disastrous attempt to seduce stable-hand Travis. With astonishing ease, she finds success with an international modeling career, but it all turns to ashes when her father and stepmother are killed in a plane crash eight years later, leaving Margot to deal with a debt-riddled horse farm and a 16-year-old stepsister, Jade. Rejuvenating the farm hinges on Margot convincing Travis to work for her, but modeling pays the bills, and Travis' jealousy of Margot's career threatens their partnership—both professionally and emotionally. Taking place primarily in the horse country of Virginia, with excursions to New York and Milan, Moore's novel makes details of horse farming as interesting as the fashion world, but her vivid settings elbow out character development; when the lovers do get together, there's plenty of sizzle, but they get much more face-time with the horses than each other.

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About the Author

Laura Moore is the author of *Believe in Me*, *In Your Eyes*, *Night Swimming*, *Chance Meeting*, and *Ride a Dark Horse*. She currently lives in Rhode Island with her husband, two children, and one very old black Lab. One of her great thrills as a writer is to hear from readers.

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Chapter One

Eight Years Later . . .

Sounds reverberated all around. Horses whickered and kicked out at their wooden stalls, impatient for their morning flakes of hay and rations of grain. Wheelbarrows landed with a heavy thud as they were set down upon the concrete flooring. The voices of the grooms talking while they worked their way down the rows of spacious box stalls accompanied the rhythmical scrape and clatter of grain being scooped out of the barrows and poured into rubber feed buckets. The noises of the barn at this hour—or at any time—were as familiar to Travis as the sound of his own breathing. This morning, however, they might as well have been miles away, for inside the barn's office a tense silence reigned.

Travis stared in disbelief at the man sitting behind the scarred oak desk. For the past fourteen years, RJ Radcliffe had been mentor, friend, and father figure all rolled into one. Also his boss . . . only now his ex-boss if he'd heard correctly.

"What the hell are you saying, RJ? Have you lost your friggin' mind?"

RJ's tanned face grew mottled. "I think I made myself damned clear. And no, I haven't lost my mind—I've only been a damned fool. But no longer. I've wised up. Here." With short, angry tugs he ripped a check from the checkbook reserved for Rosewood Farm's payroll and thrust it at Travis with a shaking hand. "Here's this month's salary, plus two weeks' severance. I want you gone from Rosewood by five o'clock today."

Travis made no move to take the money. Instead he looked at RJ's hand gripping the check and thought of

how much this man had given him. Knowledge. The kind of knowledge a teenage punk growing up on the wrong side of town could never have gained on his own. A sense of belonging. Rosewood Farm meant more to Travis than any other place on earth. Hope. Learning to ride and train Rosewood's horses, some of the finest in Virginia, had allowed him to escape his sordid, sorry origins. RJ had offered him the chance to be known as something other than the good-for-nothing son of the town drunk.

In exchange, Travis had given RJ his unswerving loyalty and gratitude. Even when he'd hungered for the forbidden, he had forced himself to remember how much he owed RJ.

"Go on, take it." The rough command broke into his thoughts. "Take this and get the hell out of here." RJ was shaking with anger, and the paper check rattled in his grip.

Travis's jaw clamped tightly in frustration. "I don't want your damned money," he ground out. "What I want is to know why you're firing me."

"'Cause I know everything, you son of a bitch. You're lucky I haven't come after you with a shotgun."

For an awful second Travis wondered if RJ had somehow learned about that long ago night. But no, that was impossible. He'd never breathed a word of it to anyone, and she--hell, she was gone, caught up in her glitzy world of parties and millionaire playboys. He'd seen the glossy magazine photos of her with a different guy in every shot. She looked as maddeningly beautiful as ever. Beautiful and distant.

Ruthlessly pushing aside thoughts of her, he laid his palms flat on the desk. "What are you talking about, RJ?" he growled. "You could be speaking Chinese and making more sense."

"I'm talking about my wife, you shifty whoreson. I've had my suspicions for months. But I kept telling myself that I could trust you. That you wouldn't stoop so low. Instead you played me for a fool." He tossed the check so it landed by Travis's hand and then grabbed a bright pink leather journal and shook it accusingly. "See this? It's Nicole's diary. I found it last night. It's all here, all her secret meetings with TM. TM," he spat, "as in Travis Maher--took me three seconds to figure who the son of a bitch was who was cuckolding me."

Travis felt like he'd been sucker-punched. Outraged, he exploded, "Jesus, RJ, you don't really believe I'd--"

"Go on, deny it, damn you! Look me in the face and deny that you've been sleeping with her! Go on! It'll give me an excuse to tear you apart limb from limb." Surging to his feet, he stood, chest heaving, his blue eyes lit with fury and pain.

Damn Nicole. It didn't matter that there were probably a couple of dozen men in Loudon County besides him who had the initials TM, more than half of them happy to take whatever she offered. It didn't matter that the idea of making love to Nicole Radcliffe was about as appealing as making love to a snake--and probably comparable. The damage was done. RJ ruled Rosewood like a feudal lord, meting out justice as he saw fit and brooking no opposition.

Travis straightened to his full height. His voice was flat and hard when he spoke. "You're wrong, RJ. Maybe someday you'll find out just how wrong." Without another word he turned, strode to the door, and yanked it open.

The slamming of the door startled the hands that were mucking out the stalls. Felix, who was nearest to him,

hurriedly set his pitchfork against the stall door. "Everything okay with you and the boss?"

Travis's gaze swept up the row of stalls, where the horses he trained were munching their hay contentedly. He looked at the faces of the men who'd stopped their morning's work out of concern for him. Damn it, these were his friends. This was his life. . . .

"No kidding, man, what went down with RJ?" Tito asked.

Too choked with emotion to answer, Travis gave a quick shake of his head and made for the tack room. Bypassing the bridles and leather girths hanging neatly from their hooks, he grabbed his suede chaps off the wooden peg and slung them over his shoulder. Then he crossed the room that carried the unique scent of leather and saddle soap and the undimmed memory of a beautiful, reckless young girl standing nearly naked before him and grabbed his saddle off the rack with a vicious curse. From behind came the scratchy sound of footsteps. He glanced over his shoulder and shame churned in his gut. Would Ned believe RJ's accusation?

"Hey, Travis," he said by way of greeting. Pushing the brim of his battered straw fedora up his forehead, he fixed Travis with his canny eyes. Ned had practically grown up on Rosewood Farm. A horseman of the old school, he possessed the kind of deep knowledge that comes from a lifetime of looking at and listening to horses. He knew a thing or two about the man they both worked for, too. "So what was all that hollerin' about?" he asked. "I could hear RJ practically all the way from the south pasture."

"He found Nicole's diary," Travis answered. "Read it, too. According to him, I'm her lover."

Ned let loose a string of curses before lifting the paper cup in his hand and spitting a brown jet of tobacco juice into it. "That woman is pure, one-hundred-proof trouble. And RJ's a dang idiot where she's concerned. Did you set him straight?"

"No point." Travis flipped open the lid of his tack box and grabbed his saddlebag. With the saddle propped against his hip, he slipped the cover over the well-oiled leather and zipped it shut. Setting the saddle down beside the tack box, he straightened. "RJ's fired me. Looks like you got your old job back."

Ned's weathered face went slack with shock. For a second Travis thought the wad of chaw wedged against his lower lip might splat on the floor, but then his friend's mouth began working--double time.

"What the hell! I don't want my old job back! I'm so damned long in the tooth, I should be put out to pasture. Problem is, I ain't got no use for TV and I can't abide bingo. What in blue blazes is he thinking? Has he forgotten we're showing at Culpeper--tell me who's going to ride Harvest Moon if you're not around?"

"Afraid that's not my problem, Ned. I've got a few of my own--like finding a new job."

"Now, wait just a minute, son. I'm going to go in there and give RJ a piece of my mind--"

"Don't bother. You know RJ. No point in us both getting sacked." Dropping his folded chaps into the tack box, Travis shut the lid and glanced around the tack room. The ache in his gut intensified. Beside him Ned was shaking his head in disgust and muttering into his cup of tobacco spit about blind fools. Abruptly he raised his head. "You should call Hugh Hartmann."

"Hugh Hartmann? Down in Richmond?"

"Yeah. He's got a nice place with at least thirty boarders. A lot of money walks into his barn looking to buy hunter or jumper prospects."

Travis considered for a moment. Richmond. That was far enough away for him to forget the name Radcliffe. Perhaps even far enough away to stop thinking of her. Maybe.

He gave a short nod. "Thanks, Ned."

A half hour later, the back of Travis's SUV was loaded with all his worldly possessions: his tack box, saddle, two duffel bags of clothes, and a toaster oven. He slid behind the steering wheel and turned the key in the ignition. The SUV's engine roared to life. But his foot remained heavy on the brake while his gaze swept over the barns and the seemingly endless line of fenced pastures.

Rosewood's broodmares were already out and grazing in the late-summer sun. In an adjacent pasture, yearlings cavorted, racing one another, bucking, nipping, and squealing their high spirits. God, they were beautiful. He had helped foal a number of them, had worked with all of them.

Bitter regret added to the ache inside him.

Damn it all, just a few months back he and RJ had been talking about buying a new stud for Rosewood. There'd been so many things he'd wanted to do, so many plans for improving the stock, and now it was over. He slammed the heel of his hand against the steering wheel. Christ, hadn't he always known deep down that he would lose his job at Rosewood, that he would lose everything he'd worked for, because of a Radcliffe woman?

Only trouble was, RJ had guessed wrong.

The corner of Travis's mouth lifted as he imagined what RJ would have done if he'd leaned over the desk and told him just how far off the mark he was. It had never been RJ's wife that Travis lusted after, but his daughter.

Chapter Two

Margot's heart pounded in sync to the driving beat of techno music as she led the parade of models down the runway. Her skin, spray-painted a shimmery bronze, prickled beneath the hot glare of the lights and the weight of hundreds of eyes tracking her every step. She hid her discomfort and fatigue behind a haughty mask--her expression, the angle of her head, as remote as a goddess's.

It was the show's finale, and though the platform felt like a never-ending highway and her feet ached inside her stiletto heels, Margot's steps remained light and confident, her hips maintaining their I'm-too-sexy-for-you swing. As she neared the end of the catwalk, she lowered the feather-fringed silk wrap from her shoulders and revealed the dark gold applique of her vibrant pink evening gown. She paused, sent her smile into the dark sea of shadowed faces illuminated by brief flashes of camera strobes, and then twirled. The gauzy layers of the dress and wrap swirled about her in a cloud of color.

Over the music she heard the bursts of applause and her smile widened; the grueling past hour of frantic wardrobe changes and makeup adjustments, the near-manic frenzy of the assistants, forgotten. The knowledge that she'd helped win the critics over chased away her fatigue. The applause continued. Buoyed

by the audience's enthusiasm, she headed back up the runway toward the silver-threaded curtain that hid the barely controlled chaos reigning backstage.

Slipping behind the curtain she was swept into the ecstatic embrace of Carlo de Calvi, whose genius had inspired the collection. In the Italian designer's excitement, English abandoned him completely, and though Margot had been flying the golden triangle of the fashion world between New York, Milan, and Paris for seven years and had learned enough of both languages to order a cafe au lait on the Boulevard Saint-Germain or an espresso on the Via Montenapoleone like a pro, she caught only about one-tenth of Carlo's full throttle speech.

But she'd been on the runway; his words needed no translation. From the buzz in the air, it was obvious the critics loved the show, and the retailers were hungry to place their orders. In the past two weeks, the period during which Milan held its ready-to-wear fashion shows, Margot had modeled nearly twenty-five different collections. Of all of them, Carlo de Calvi's cunning use of fabrics and colors, the drama of his ensembles, combined with his fine, craftsmanlike attention to details, had generated the most red-hot response. The spring collection was a hit and Carlo's designs would be the must-haves for next season.

Carlo was still gushing and Margot still nodding and interjecting a laughing "Si, si," when the other models, having finished their trip down the runway, joined them. Each arrival upped the level of bubbly euphoria. Everyone was kissing and laughing, the whole motley crew that comprised the backstage world--models, makeup artists, hairstylists, assistants, VIPs, even security guards. Pumped on the adrenaline of the past madhouse hour, they shared the fleeting moment of sweet success.

Then Carlo clapped his hands. "Come, girls, we show them how beautiful I make women one more time," he said in heavily accented English.

His remark elicited groans of "Oh, God, Carlo!" and "Someone please explain why we're always surrounded by men only a mother could love?" "Or another guy," someone else chimed in.

"We mustn't mind Carlo," Margot said. "He hasn't finished all his Berlitz tapes yet." She gave his chin a playful chuck. "Carlo, sweetie, the thing to do is to thank us all for making your clothes look so darned good."

"Ahh, yes! Mille grazie, belle," he said, and his goateed face split into a wide boyish grin of apology. "You all were perfette." He brought his fingers to his mouth and kissed them.

The girls laughed, their good humor restored. With a flourish, Carlo held out his arm to Margot. As the show's featured model she had the privilege of walking down the runway beside him as he took his bows. Margot slipped her arm through his and as one they turned toward the curtain, only to come up short as Carlo's assistant, Paolo, called out, "Scusi, Carlo. C' per Margot--urgente!" He broke through the throng, waving a cell phone.

Users Review

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