

**Tiger Lily**  
**The Gilded Flower Series**  
**By Vivian Winslow**

Lily notices a smug look on Dahlia's face. "What did you do, Dahlia?"

Dahlia shrugs. "I didn't *do* anything, Lil. Lighten up. Rodrigo and I . . ."

"Rodrigo is here?"

Her sister nods and grins.

"So that means . . ." Lily swallows.

"It's nice to see you again, Lily," she hears *him* say.

Lily's heart drops to the pit of her stomach. She turns around slowly and forces a casual smile. This time she won't run away from rejection. Instead, she'll deal with it gracefully. If she's learned anything about herself in the past four months, it's that she can survive anything, including a long weekend in a house full of Cubans—even if the one in particular she wants, doesn't want her back.

"Hello, Alejandro," she says in a friendly tone, greeting him with two kisses. She notices how handsome and rugged he looks in his gray sweater, slim black Rag & Bone jeans and dark brown snow boots. *Doesn't seem to be a season he can't wear,* Lily thinks to herself.

"Let me show you the place." Dahlia pulls on Lily's arm. "It belongs to a friend of their family's. The details are exquisite. Every room has a fireplace and en-suite bathrooms you could live in."

Lily glances back at Alejandro as she follows Dahlia, Vi, and Rosa out of the great room and up a flight of stairs. Dahlia's description doesn't do the home justice.

The floor-to-ceiling windows afford every room a spectacular view of the snowcapped mountains.

“Since there are eight bedrooms, everyone can have their own room,” Rosa says.

“I’ll take the room farthest from Dahlia and Rodrigo,” Lily says wryly.

“Funny, that’s what Alejandro said,” Rosa replies. “So you get the room next to his in that wing of the house,” she says pointing down a long hallway with a high, vaulted ceiling and exposed beams, “And Vi and I will take the rooms here. D and my brother will have the master suite all the way at the other end.”

Lily nods, wishing she hadn’t said anything. She wonders briefly if Alejandro’s girlfriend is here, but doesn’t bother asking. She wouldn’t want to appear interested.

“Think we’ll still hear them?” Vi asks, winking at Dahlia.

“Jealous, Vi?” She smirks.

Rosa laughs. “Lunch will be ready soon. I’ll let you guys unpack.”

Dahlia throws herself onto Lily’s bed. “I think your bed is more comfortable than mine,” she says.

“Sounds like you won’t get much sleep, so it doesn’t matter,” Lily says, chuckling. She walks into the bathroom to unpack a few items. “These bathrooms are absolutely stunning. The steam shower with the two benches and three shower heads is a nice detail.”

“Totally,” Dahlia agrees. “I can’t wait to get into it later with Rodrigo.”

Lily lies next to Dahlia and props her head with her elbow. "You really like him, D?"

"I thought I was the one with the gift for pointing out the obvious, Lil."

Lily pulls down a pillow and hits her sister over the head. "I'm being serious, D."

"So am I. I really like him. I mean really, really like him."

"Are you in love with him?"

Dahlia shrugs. "I think so, but I won't say it. Neither one of us has said it yet. I just know it's real because I can't imagine not being with him. We just need some time. I don't want to rush things like I did the last time."

Lily nods. "Sounds fair. I've been thinking I'm not sure if I know what love really is. Before, I couldn't imagine my life without Jack, but I was so young that it was easy to make my life fit his. Now, I can't believe I thought he would be a good guy for me."

"You're welcome, Lil," Dahlia smirks.

Lily hits her with the pillow again.

"I've made some poor decisions when it comes to men. I wonder if I'll recognize love when it comes into my life." A tear trickles down Lily's face as she rolls onto her back and stares up at the ceiling.

"Oh, Lil, of course you will." Dahlia wipes the tear away. "You're still a bit jaded by what happened with Jack and Gustavo. But your heart wasn't into those guys. That was your brain and, with Gustavo anyway, the hot sex."

"Maybe. But at least you've been in love before, D."

“Yeah, but that was a mistake I had to learn from. We all have those lapses in judgment that remind us of who the good ones are.”

A knock on the door interrupts their conversation.

“Come in,” Lily calls out.

Rosa walks in, holding a glass of white wine. “Lunch is served, ladies. And I suggest you hurry. Alejandro did the cooking, and he hates when his food is served cold.” She rolls her eyes. “Maybe, just once, you’ll see his friendly side.”