



Awakened By the Cowboy

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Category: Romance, Western

Description: Georgia

My best friend thinks she's doing me a favor when she places a bid on a spend-a-day with a cowboy auction for my birthday. She knows it's for a good cause that's close to my heart and who doesn't want to spend the day with a hot cowboy? It's a great plan except for one tiny problem – the cowboy she bid on is my ex-boyfriend from high school. When my bid wins the auction I try to come up with an excuse to just give the money and skip my day with the sexy cowboy, but no one will accept that I'm suddenly moving to Portugal. So, for the sake of the horses, I guess I'm going to saddle up.

Boone

Working on a ranch is all I ever wanted to do and she deserved someone who wanted more. Our break-up was mutual and we're friendly in town, but seeing her name as the winner of the spend-a-day with a cowboy still surprises me. Then I hear she's telling some crazy story about moving to Portugal to try and get out of spending time with me. She always was a bit wild, it was one of the things that drew me to her. I'm going to get to the bottom of this and if I get to spend the day with the woman I've never gotten over...it's for the horses, right?

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Georgia

“Another round of drinks for the birthday girl.” The waitress, whose name I forgot three drinks ago even though we went to school together, says as she sets down her tray loaded with golden-colored shots, a bowl of limes, a couple of glasses of water, and one lone Dr. Pepper.

“Ugh, I don’t think I can drink anymore, guys,” I say to the table at large and my best friend, Shelby, in particular. “I have things to do tomorrow.”

“No, you don’t.” Shelby rats me out. The Dr. Pepper is hers, she offered to be my designated driver tonight and I’m starting to get the feeling she wants to give me alcohol poisoning for my thirtieth birthday.

Thirty. Damn. How did that happen? I thought I would be married and working horses with the cowboy of my dreams during the day and spending our nights doing some riding of a different sort. Ropes, optional.

Where am I instead? Working on my parents’ ranch, using the business degree they demanded I get to do the accounting for the ranch and sneaking out to work with the horses whenever they go out of town. Luckily my brothers don’t care that I would rather be mucking out stalls than working on P & L statements.

Shelby elbows me in the side and mouths “Are you ok?”

I nod and paste the smile back on my face. I am having a good time tonight. My friends are the best and we rarely all get together like this anymore. One or more of us always have to cancel for some reason, so no more pity party for one. It's time to turn this into a real Georgia Duncan night. One that will end with someone, probably me, regretting many decisions the next day.

“Shots! It's time for shots!” I yell above everyone's conversations. They all look at me and laugh.

“There she is.”

“About time.”

“Finally.”

“Sorry, for being a buzzkill guys. I think I was on a dirty thirty spiral, but I'm back. It's time to make some bad decisions.” I take the two shots that have been put in front of me in rapid succession. Ugh, they burn as they go down and the second one threatens to come back up.

This was probably not my smartest idea, but that's what I'm known for here in town. Bad ideas, being flakey, and just a touch crazy. No one would dare expect Georgia Duncan to be serious or rational. It's not the true me, but I like that most people underestimate me. With the ranch, I've been able to negotiate some amazing deals for feed and animals.

In relationships, if no one takes you seriously then you don't get your heart involved. I couldn't seriously date someone who didn't respect me and see beyond all the crazy. So far, no one has —except Boone. That was in high school though and everyone knows that high school boyfriends don't count. We see each other in town sometimes and I always smile and wave. He does that sexy cowboy hat-tipping thing,

but we never talk to each other. At this point, he probably thinks he dodged a major bullet by dumping me right after we graduated.

“Another round of shots, birthday girl!” Shelby announces.

“My liver isn’t going to survive this party if you keep making me drink, Shelby. Maybe you should cut me off, so you don’t have to become an organ donor,” I yell-whisper to my bestie.

“This is the last round. Macy and Taylor have to go home and relieve babysitters, and Clara has to be at work in a few hours, so she needs to get some sleep. It will just be you, me, and Sam left.”

So, maybe there will be no major shenanigans after all. Macy and Taylor are moms and Clara works at her family’s company, but the fact that they all made time to celebrate with me was making me a little bit weepy. Tears form in my eyes as I like the shot glass, “Let’s toast.”

“We’re supposed to toast to you, silly girl,” Clara says as she lifts her shot.

“I know, but I’m in my feels and it’s my birthday so I can do what I want.”

I hear Macy whisper, “She’s also very drunk.”

Everyone giggles.

“You are very, very right, I am very drunk and it’s your fault and I’m so grateful. Not for drunkenness. I’m going to have a really bad hangover in the morning and that isn’t fun. I hope that I don’t throw up.” I pause and look at my friends. We have been together since elementary school through thick and thin. Big loves and small. I was a bridesmaid at Macy and Taylor’s weddings and at the hospital hours after each of

their babies were born. These are my sisters and I love them so much.

“Um, Georgia, are you done?” Shelby asks. “Our arms are getting tired.”

They are all still standing there with their glasses held in the air and I can’t help but laugh. “I love you girls so much. Thank you for being my friends forever. To friendship”

We then all take our shots. There are quick goodbyes and hugs as Macy, Taylor, and Clara leave.

Then it’s just me, Shelby, and Sam, our one platonic guy friend. I think that Shelby and Sam belong together, but neither of them agrees with me and I’ve asked them, separately, multiple times. They just gravitate towards each other in a way I’ve only seen in couples, and I feel like they are just fighting the inevitable.

“Can we go home now? However many drinks I’ve had are starting to make me very sleepy. I could put my head down on this sticky table and fall asleep with no problem.” My speech sounds a little slurred and slowed down even to my own ears. I need to go home. If Shelby isn’t ready to call it a night, I could always call one of my brothers.

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“Well, there’s something I wanted to tell you about first. It has to do with your birthday present,” Shelby says nervously, wringing her fingers together.

“I thought tonight was my present. You all pitched in to pay for the drinks and dinner. That’s more than enough. You know I don’t expect actual gifts. In fact, I think I told everyone no gifts this year.”

“Yes, but...” she looks at Sam and he just shrugs his shoulders. She’s not going to get any help from there. “We also pitched in for something else.”

“What?” I’m starting to get that feeling in the bottom part of my stomach that comes before throwing up. I’m not sure if it’s because of the way Shelby is acting or because of all the alcohol sitting there. It’s probably somewhere in the middle.

“Well, you love horses, right?”

I nod and wait for her to continue.

“You know about the Iron H Ranch, they do an auction, and the proceeds go to helping the horses.”

“Yes, isn’t it that the win a Cowboy-for-a-Day auction all the women have been going crazy for? I’ve heard that a lot of the cowboys and auction winners have fallen in love.” As I finish the sentence and look into my best friend’s eyes, I realize what she’s done. She’s gone and bought me a cowboy for my thirtieth birthday.

“You didn’t.”

“Um, we did?” Shelby answers, very much in the form of a question.

“Why would you do that?” My voice has risen and several of the other bar patrons are looking over at our table. I’m not mad, but I’m also not happy. Why she thought I would want to spend the day with some pretty boy cowboy who thinks women should pay money to spend the day with him I’ll never know. Maybe if I match the donation I can just skip spending the actual time with the cowboy.

On the other hand, I’ve always wanted to see how things are run on a ranch like the Iron H and how rescue horses are handled. Maybe this is an opportunity to learn some things we can use at our ranch.

“Georgia, we wanted to do something special for your birthday. You love horses and this was for a good cause. Plus, you get to spend the day with a super-hot cowboy who also loves horses. It’s a win-win. And you know the cowboy, so there won’t even be an awkward getting to know each other period. You know each other pretty well already.”

Shelby immediately covers her mouth like she can put the words she just said back in or keep more from spilling out. Sam coughs to cover the laugh, but I can see in his eyes that whatever Shelby just spilled is hilarious to him.

“What do you mean I already know him? I don’t think I know anyone from Iron H.” I search my brain thinking about all the people that I talk to dealing with the ranch things. Iron H isn’t a ranch we do any work with, so I draw a blank.

I am feeling more sober now, so yay for that at least. “Who is it, Shelby?”

“You remember Boone Lowe, right.” Shelby ducks in her seat when she says his name like I’m going to throw something at her head.

We are in public and I'm a lady. I'll wait to get her for this when she least expects it. She and Sam are about to be matchmaker-ed the hell out of.

"Shelby, you know I know Boone Lowe. You were there when we dated and when he dumped me. Please tell me that I'm not supposed to spend a whole day with him."

"Yes."

"Yes, it's him?" I want her to spell this out for me.

"Yes, the cowboy that was being auctioned for a good cause, to help the horses, was Boone Lowe, and you won."

"Did you know that the man you were bidding on was Boone or did you just think you were bidding on a random cowboy?"

"Does it matter?" Sam, who's decided to join the conversation and stick up for Shelby a little, asks.

I don't even answer, I just hold both in my gaze. It might look ridiculous with how much I've drunk tonight, but I'd like to think that it looks like some death stare from a villainess in a movie. I don't blink, until Shelby cracks.

"I knew it was Boone," she sighs. "C'mon, you know that you still think he's hot."

"I have eyes that function, Shelby. Everyone can see that Boone is hot." Hot is an understatement. That man is a walking fantasy, my walking fantasy, but that's no one's business but mine. "That doesn't mean I want to spend a whole day with him. In fact, I don't want to spend any time with him. You do remember that he called me stuck-up and broke up with me."

“He didn’t call you stuck-up. He said that he wanted you to have everything you wanted in life and that was more than he could ever offer.”

“What does that mean other than he thought I was stuck-up and wanted some rich guy or something.” I never understood what Boone meant, but I moved on. We hadn’t dated long and although it could have been something amazing, we hadn’t gotten there yet. He stopped us before we could. My heart had been more bruised than broken, but I don’t want to risk that again. I have to find a way to get out of this Cowboy-for-a-Day nonsense and I will.

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Boone

“Stormy is put away for the day. She did much better than expected today and I have high hopes that she’s going to be okay.” I give my afternoon report to my boss and best friend, Cole.

“Sounds good.” Cole smacks me on the back and falls into step next to me. “I need to talk to you about something.”

“It doesn’t sound like I’m going to like whatever it is,” laughing I slow my stride. “Am I going to be mad at you or someone else?”

“Well, probably lots of people.” Cole rubs his hand over the back of his neck, a sure sign of being nervous and I’m kind of enjoying seeing him squirm.

“Then just tell me. It’s not going to get any easier if we stand her chatting about it like two old women.”

“You were put up in the auction and someone bid on you and won.” Cole takes a step back as he continues, “And the woman that you get to spend the day with is Georgia Duncan.”

“Georgia?” I ask. “Why would she bid to spend the day with me? She avoids me at all costs.”

Cole laughs and steps back toward me. “I wasn’t sure what your reaction was going to be. I don’t think that she bid on you, it was her girl squad. They did it as a birthday

gift.”

“Her birthday was two days ago.” I absently add to the conversation.

“Uh, I guess.” Cole continues, “So you are kind of her birthday gift. I will warn you though that she’s not thrilled about any of this and has tried to get out of it.”

“Get out of it? Like not paying the money? That doesn’t sound like Georgia,” I say, even though I don’t really know her anymore. We dated twelve years ago when we were kids. I’ve kept up with her and I know that through her family’s ranch she donates to a lot of animal causes. I can’t see her not wanting to help the horses which is the point of the auction.

“No, in fact, she offered to double her donation if she didn’t have to spend the day with you.”

Now, that sounds like Georgia and Cole’s wife, Elly, probably took her up on it. More money for the ranch and the horses is always the goal. “So that solves that problem. I’ve done my turn in the auction and raised a lot of money. Plus, I don’t have to give up time that could be spent doing my job.”

“Not so fast. I thought it was a great idea and if it was up to me, I would have let her double the donation and moved on. Elly said no.”

“Does your wife hate me?” I’ve always thought Cole’s wife liked me, but now I might have to rethink that.

“She doesn’t hate you,” Cole says. “Sometimes I think she likes you more than me. She might be trying her hand at a little matchmaking.”

“With me and Georgia?” That’s a disaster waiting to happen.

“She said that when the two of you are in the same place in town the temperature goes up and that you both watch each other. That you can’t keep your eyes off her and that when you’re not looking Georgia checks out your ass,” Cole shivers as he finishes repeating what his wife told him. “I didn’t repeat any of that to you and I will never talk about your ass again unless it’s about kicking it.”

“What do I need to do for this thing? Do I contact Georgia and arrange a day?” I might as well get this over with.

“Her contact information should be in your email by now. I would try and get it over with as soon as possible. You know Georgia, she’s just going to keep trying to get out of it. Of course, that could be fun too.”

Cole walks off with a wave. He’s right, Georgia can be a little impulsive and wild, but she’s not the flighty airhead most people think she is. I can’t remember how that reputation started, but people have always discounted her, and she lets them.

Why doesn’t she want to spend time with me? After all these years, you would think that we could spend time together and it wouldn’t be a big deal. Of course, every time I see her all I can think about is touching her and all the ways I could take her. Maybe that’s why she doesn’t want to be alone with me. She’s still attracted to me and doesn’t trust herself to be with me.

I pull out my phone and look for the email with her information. I copy her number and put it into my phone. Debating with myself whether to text or call her, I walk back to the bunkhouse.

I make it to my bunk and decide that I will text first and if she doesn’t respond then I’ll call. I save her number in my phone and send the first text.

ME: Hey, Georgia

WILD GIRL: Who is this?

ME: It's Boone. I got your number

off the auction paperwork

WILD GIRL: Oh, ok. Can I help you with something?

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ME: I thought maybe we could meet up for a
drink and set a date for you to come out to the Iron H?

WILD GIRL: Well, I already told them I was just
going to pay double and not do the cowboy thing.

You're off the hook.

ME: My boss said they told you no.

That I have to give you the whole cowboy experience.

I don't want to get in trouble.

We could meet for dinner instead of a drink.

WILD GIRL: Boone, I don't know why you would want to do this.

You don't like me. Why are you pushing this?

ME: Why the hell do you think I don't like you, wildflower?

WILD GIRL: Wildflower?

ME: Autocorrect

WILD GIRL: Sure.

ME: We can talk about this at dinner. I'm picking you up at 7

WILD GIRL: I DIDN'T SAY YES

WILD GIRL: BOONE

WILD GIRL: UGH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Wildflower? I can't believe I used that old name and then tried to pass it off as autocorrect. I'm such an idiot. I glance at my watch. It's five-thirty. That gives me an hour to shower, get ready, and get some flowers before picking her up at seven. This isn't a date or maybe it is. Hell, I don't know what I'm doing.

3

Georgia

What is that crazy man thinking? He hasn't responded again and it's getting dangerously close to seven. Is he really just gonna show up at my house and expect to go out to dinner?

Well, he's in for a surprise. I didn't agree to dinner, so I came home from work, put on sweatpants and an old T-shirt with no bra, and threw my hair up in a messy bun. Now, I'm rethinking my plan. What if he shows up and I look like this?

I start toward my bedroom, thinking about what's not dirty and could be considered date clothes when there's a knock at my front door.

"Shit. I hope that's a door-to-door salesman," I mutter to myself as I slowly make my

way to the door.

I peek through the peephole and wish for the world to swallow me whole. This. This is why people think I'm flighty and a little crazy. "Can you come back in about thirty minutes?" I yell through the door.

"No," he answers with a laugh.

I yank the door open, "why the hell not?"

"Because I'm here now," Boone steps into my doorway and I back up a step. "You look amazing, wildflower."

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“Urgh. I look like crap, and you know it.” At least I still have today’s make-up on so that my face isn’t ghost pale.

“No.” He walks the rest of the way into my house like he’s been here before.

“No, what?”

“No, you don’t look like crap. I like this relaxed version of you. I only ever see you in town when you’re out with your friends and all made up. I like this Georgia a lot more.”

I have nothing to say about his admission. He sees me when I’m out? It’s a small town, so I’m not surprised, but I didn’t think he paid attention.

“If you give me ten minutes I can change and we can go out,” I say, as he looks around my kitchen. “What are you looking for?”

“A vase for your flowers,” he answers like it’s obvious.

“You didn’t even give them to me.”

“I didn’t?” He walks toward me and stops when our bodies are a hairsbreadth away from each other. My heart skips a beat at his nearness. “These are for you. Wildflowers for my wildflower.”

I take the flowers and smile. “Thank you, Boone. They’re very pretty.” I step around him, being so close was causing my body to overload on his pheromones and nothing

good could come of that.

I quickly grab a vase from the cabinet and get my flowers situated. “You don’t need to change,” Boone says from the entryway to the kitchen. “We can stay here where you’re already comfortable. Order pizza, watch a movie, or something.”

“Something?” I can think of a few somethings I would like to do to this man and that makes staying in this house a very bad idea.

“C’mon, Georgia. If you can behave yourself, I promise to behave too.” His smile promises that if we misbehave it would so be worth it. This is why I wanted to avoid him completely. He’s dangerous—to my panties and my heart.

“I can behave,” I promise, hoping that I don’t make a liar out of myself before the night is over.

4

Boone

My dick has been hard since the moment she answered that door and I’m not sure it’s ever going to function properly again. Fuck me, she looks like she was rolling around in someone’s bed. Her hair is all messy and while her T-shirt is oversized, it does nothing to hide the fact that her magnificent breasts are free and so easily accessible.

My desire to stay in with her is purely selfish. I want to spend time with her alone where no one can interrupt us. It’s also a bit of self-preservation, I’m not sure I could hide this hard-on in public. I’m surprised that Georgia hasn’t noticed it yet or maybe she has, and she is trying to be good.

“What kind of pizza do you like, Boone?” she asks as she orders with her phone.

“Anything but anchovies.”

“So, two large pizzas with extra anchovies, the really slimy ones,” she laughs over her shoulder. “I’m kidding. I ordered a meat lover and one with less meat, but more veggies.”

“Sounds delicious,” I say as I watch her move from the kitchen back to the living room. She stops before sitting, looking between the loveseat and the sofa, and then takes a seat on the sofa. I sit on the other end of the sofa, close but not touching.

“What kind of movies do you like?”

“Um,” she bites at her lip, and I swallow my groan. This is going to be the longest night in history. “I like everything except science fiction. I just can’t get into those. Aliens creep me out.”

“You like horror movies?”

“Absolutely, they are my favorite. I usually see them alone in the theater. None of my friends are brave enough to watch them. Shelby won’t even let me tell her about them. It’s crazy. There was that movie with a haunted smile or something, the poster freaked her out and every time we saw it she would jump. I may have turned it into a pillow and gave it to her for Christmas as a gag.”

“That’s evil.”

“That’s what everyone else said. I thought it was funny. It’s in my guest room, which Shelby will not step into,” Georgia is laughing so hard that tears are falling down her face.

“You’re a pistol, aren’t you,” I say, leaning over to wipe her tears of laughter off her

pink cheeks.

She whispers, “That’s what they tell me.”

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Our faces are so close together, that a soft breeze could bring our lips together. Does she want this or not? I gaze into her eyes looking for an answer. I know that we both promised to behave, but I know that this happening between us is inevitable.

“Georgia.” My voice is barely audible. “I’m gonna kiss you, wildflower.”

She gives a small nod and that’s all I need. My mouth is on hers and I’m in heaven. I pull her body underneath mine on the sofa and she wraps her legs around my waist. I kiss her chin and down her neck, then back up to her mouth.

Georgia presses her body into mine, now I know she can feel my hard dick. I grab her juicy ass with one hand and place the other behind her so I can flip us around. Now, she’s straddling me on the sofa, and I can see more of her.

“Can I take this off?” I ask as I pull at the hem of her shirt. She nods and I pull it over her head.

“Fuck. I’m a lucky bastard.” My mouth is instantly drawn to the dusky pink peak of one nipple as my fingers pluck at the other. Her tits are round, high, and more than a handful. Just so fucking gorgeous.

“I’m older now,” she says.

“Me too.” I smile. “You are so fucking hot. I think you’ve gotten more beautiful. We were kids back then. You’re a gorgeous woman now. Let’s leave the past where it belongs.”

She nods and pulls my mouth to hers for a kiss, our tongues fighting for dominance. I want to fuck her right now and I'm about to tell her so when the doorbell rings.

"The pizza!" Georgia screams as she grabs her T-shirt and tries to pull it back over her head, failing miserably.

"Calm down, wildflower. I'll get the door."

Georgia grabs her shirt and runs out of the room. Rationally I know that we ordered this pizza, but irrationally I want to kill the kid who just interrupted what I'm sure was about to be the best sex I've ever had.

Making my way to the door, I adjust my still aching cock, and hope that it's not too obvious to whoever is on the other side that they just interrupted "adult time".

Quickly I grab the pizza and tip the kid an extra ten bucks on top of whatever Georgia tipped online when she used my card earlier.

"It's safe to come out now," I yell toward the back of the house where I saw Georgia scamper.

She slowly walks back out, now with her T-shirt on right, and sits down next to me on the sofa. She's close, but not touching.

"You okay?" I ask.

"Yeah, it's just. We said we would be good and then not even a few minutes later we were all over each other."

"I know," I sigh, "Honestly, I don't think I can be that kind of good around you, Georgia. I feel an irresistible pull to you, wildflower."

“Let’s just watch a movie and hang out,” she says.

“Okay, we can do that.”

She picks a newish horror movie that neither of us has seen. I have one piece of the pizza she ordered, but I’m not hungry for food. I’m hungry for her. I said that I would be good, but damn she smells good.

We started the movie on opposite ends of the sofa, but our bodies are almost touching now.

“Boone?”

“Yeah, wildflower?”

“I can’t do this,” she whispers and turns her body toward mine.

“Can’t do what exactly?” God, I hope it’s that she can’t resist the pull between us anymore.

“I can’t sit next to you, knowing you’re turned on and right there. So close.”

“Do you want me to go?” Please say no.

She shakes her head. “I want you to follow me to my bedroom, strip naked, and lay flat on my bed.” A gentle blush spreads across her cheeks, but I’m not sure if it’s from being turned on or embarrassed by her forwardness. I hope it’s the former.

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I stand and unbutton the dress shirt I'm wearing. She watches each button I undo like it's her favorite movie. I shrug off the shirt and start walking toward her room.

"Are you coming too?" I ask her.

"Oh, yes, of course."

She scrambles off the sofa and passes me in the hallway, getting to her bedroom before I do. I pull my boots off at her bedroom door and undo the button and zipper of my jeans.

"Are you gonna take anything off?" I ask, wondering what her plan is.

"Um, after you."

I shrug and strip the rest of my clothes off and lay across her bed.

"Holy shit," she says almost reverently. "You can't just have a stupid hot face. Why does your body have to look like a statue? How is that fair to the rest of the population?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Don't apologize. I'm sure you work hard to keep it like that and not like in the gym but like actual hard work. It's just there should be something wrong with you and besides the fact that you dumped me, I haven't found one. It's definitely not all of this." She waves her hand above my body accidentally hitting my cock that is

standing at full attention. “Oops.”

Then she wraps her hands around the shaft, and I lose all ability to think. Slowly she moves her hands up and down on my dick. I close my eyes to keep myself from blowing too fast like a teenage boy. Then I feel her wet mouth engulf the head of my cock and my eyes fly open.

“That’s the sexiest fucking thing I’ve ever seen.”

She moves her head up and down my cock. I’m not going to last long if she keeps going and I need to be inside of her. I sit up, as well as I can, and pull her body up mine.

“I wasn’t done,” she pouts.

“I know, but there’s more I want to do, and you were driving me crazy. Can we take these off?” I need her naked against me.

She nods and helps me strip her body. We are now both naked and running our hands over each other’s bodies. It’s the most amazing feeling. Her body is so beautiful.

I run my finger through her slit. “You’re so wet.”

“I know...I ache, Boone.”

“I know what can make that better.”

“Please,” she begs as she takes control and straddles my body. My cowgirl knows how to ride. She lines my cock up to the opening of her pussy and slides down.

We both moan as she gets my whole cock seated inside her tight pussy. I’ve never

felt anything so good.

“I’m on birth control, so we don’t need to worry.” She says as she starts to slide up and down my pole.

I grab onto her hips and help her maintain the speed she wants as I let her use me for her pleasure. Fuck, how did I get this lucky?

“I’m so close,” she hums out over and over.

I let go of one hip and touch her tight bundle of nerves, making little circles.

“I’m...there...now.”

Her pussy tightens around my cock, and I can’t stop the inevitable. I follow her right over the cliff. She leans over my body, the sweat from our exertion sealing us together.

“That was amazing.”

“So fucking good,” I agree and kiss her.

We lay there together for several minutes and then Georgia asks the question I’ve been dreading.

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“Why haven’t you talked to me in twelve years? Or at least in the eight years since I came back from college?”

I knew that she was going to ask me about this, but I had hoped that it wouldn’t be until we had spent more time together. I owe her the truth.

“At first, it was because I ended things and didn’t think you would want to talk to me. Then it just seemed like so much time had passed, and I had missed out on you. I’ve always wanted you. Even when we broke up, I did that for you.”

“What?”

“Yeah, I knew you were going to meet all these smart guys who wanted more out of life than being a cowboy. I thought that breaking up and not being tied to some guy back home would let you experience everything college had to offer. We hadn’t been dating long and I thought it was the right thing to do.”

“That is the stupidest, fucking thing I’ve ever heard,” Georgia stands and starts pacing around her bedroom looking for her clothes. “I come from a ranching family. My dad and brothers are cowboys. What on earth would make you think I want some smart, rich guy and not a cowboy.” She throws her hands up. “This was all a mistake. You don’t know me, and I don’t know you. We’re just attracted to each other, but that doesn’t mean anything does it.”

“Georgia.” I stand to try and do something other than sit naked and watch her meltdown. I feel helpless as our once amazing night takes a nosedive.

“No, you need to go. Take the pizza.” She walks toward her bathroom door. “I’m going to the bathroom. Please lock the door when you leave.”

How the hell did everything go so wrong so fast? I get dressed fast, grab the pizza, and lock up her house. My whole drive back to the ranch I try to think about how to fix this and if I’ll even be able to fix it.

5

Georgia

I am my own worst enemy. Boone did nothing wrong last night, he did everything right. He was sweet, attentive, and sexy, and only made a move after asking if it was okay. Then I turned chickenshit and kicked him out of my house with pizza in hand.

Surely, they are going to let me out of that Cowboy Day thing now, right?

“Elly, it’s Georgia.”

“Hi, Georgia. What can I do for you? Did you and Boone pick a day for you to come to the ranch? I can get it on the calendar.”

“Um, you haven’t talked to Boone?” I assumed he would have told Elly or Cole about my post-sex meltdown.

“No, I haven’t seen him today. Did you guys not pick a day yet?”

“No. This isn’t going to work. I will pay three times the auction amount, but I can’t do the day with a cowboy thing. It’s not just that it’s a conflict of people, um, I have a horse allergy?”

“Are you asking me if you’re allergic to horses?”

“Yes,” I sigh. “I mean, no, I don’t have a horse allergy. I just don’t like being around them. You can ask anyone, I’m a number and business person. Not a horse person.” It hurts my heart to utter these words. I’m a huge horse lover and everyone knows it.

“That’s strange because Boone told me the other day that he wasn’t surprised you tried to donate extra money because you love horses so much. Why don’t you tell me the truth and see how that works.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“You’re friends with Boone.”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean I’ll tell him your business. I promise whatever you tell me will stay between us.”

I take a deep breath. I’m not sure if I believe that she’ll keep it between us, but I need to get out of spending a whole day with Boone. My heart won’t survive it. I already feel bruised from one sort of date with him.

“Okay, I’m afraid I’ll fall in love with him, and he’ll break my heart.”

Elly doesn’t say a word on the other end of the phone.

“Um,” I try to come up with more to say. “We used to date when we were teenagers. He broke up with me for a stupid reason and I was hurt. We weren’t together long, and I’ve always said my heart wasn’t broken, it was just bruised. But it still hurts all these years later, so maybe it cracked more than I thought. We spent time together

last night and it was so easy with him. Then things got—well, you know, and it was amazing, but the pizza came, and we stopped. We watched a part of a movie, and things were amazing again, but this time we weren't interrupted. Then I realized that my self-preservation instincts were right. Boone could squash me, not physically, he would never hurt me that way, but my heart, he could eviscerate that." I take a deep breath and wait for Elly to say something.

"You have to do it," Elly says.

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“What?” I’m shocked.

“Sorry, it’s the way the auction works. If we let you just pay extra, we’ll have others try the same thing.”

“Are others being tricked into spending a day with a man who’s no good for them?” I ask, now angry.

“I can’t discuss the other auctions. Anything else you need, Georgia?” Elly asks.

I don’t answer, I just hang up the phone and flip it off for good measure. I bared my soul and got nothing in return. I hate it here. Maybe I’ll move. I’m sure they need accountants in Portugal. I start looking up how to move to Portugal and taking notes. Planning a pretend escape makes me feel a little better.

COWBOY: Are you okay?

ME: I’m fine. Planning a move.

COWBOY: Really, where to?

ME: Portugal. I’m applying for jobs and housing.

So, I can’t do the cowboy for a day thing. So sorry.

COWBOY: We can schedule it

for before you move.

ME: Super busy, sorry

COWBOY: Can I see you later?

ME: I don't know. What else is there to say?

COWBOY: So much, wildflower, so much.

I sit staring at his text for at least ten minutes. I do want to see him, but there isn't a point. Nothing good can come from it and I know that it's just his ego that makes him want to meet up and talk. Or maybe he wants a repeat of last night. There is a part of me that argues he might feel the same way I do. That what he did when we were eighteen was because he was afraid of getting hurt and that he's ready to be mine now. What if I'm the one running now when he's standing right there?

It's so frustrating not knowing what to do.

My phone rings and my heart jumps at the thought of it being Boone, but it's Shelby.

"Hello, Shelby," I answer quietly.

"You're moving to Portugal?" she asks, nearly hysterical.

"What? Where did you hear that?"

"I might have read it over Boone's shoulder. He was in front of me at the store. Also, you totally left him hanging and he calls you wildflower. It's so sweet. You're also in his phone as wild girl."

“You shouldn’t read other people’s texts. It’s rude. I’m not moving to Portugal. Don’t you think you would have been the first person I told? I’m trying to get out of the Cowboy Day thing.”

“Why are you trying to get out of it? You and Boone are obviously talking and stuff. So it wouldn’t be that bad, would it?” she asks, not knowing everything that’s happening and I’m not gonna tell her either.

“Boone and I are like oil and vinegar. We shouldn’t be paired together. It’s a mess. He told me he broke up with me back then for my own good.”

“Yeah, that’s what I’ve been telling you for twelve years. He didn’t do it because he didn’t like you. He was moping around town after you left for school and I don’t think that he’s ever had a serious relationship with anyone else. I know you guys weren’t serious, bruised heart, yada, yada, yada...” I hear her whisper to someone but can’t hear what she says. “Also, oil and vinegar go together. It’s literally salad dressing.”

“Whatever. I don’t know what to do, Shelby. I don’t want to get hurt and the only person that has that power is Boone. I don’t think I’m brave enough to let him get close. It’s easier this way.”

“I can do your Cowboy Day for you. Technically I’m the one that made the bid. I did it in your name, but the money came from my account.”

“You would do that?” Why does my stomach hurt at the idea of Shelby taking my place? Is it because she would be with Boone or because I wouldn’t be with him?

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“Of course, besides all that cowboy goodness to stare at all day.”

“He’s not an object,” I snap at her.

“I wasn’t even talking about Boone, girl. I wouldn’t look at him like that, he’s yours,” she laughs. “Although, objectively, the man is stupid hot.”

Now, I’m laughing. “It is unfair how hot he is, right?”

We talk for a few more minutes and I feel a little bit better. Shelby again offers to take my place on Cowboy Day, but not that I’m faced with someone else spending the day with Boone I don’t want to let her. I close the tabs for Portugal. It’s a nice dream that running away would solve all my problems, but they would follow me, and new ones would be sure to appear.

7

Boone

Portugal? She’s so funny. I’ll move to Mars before Georgia moves to Portugal. I’ll have to find out what made her think of that country as her destination.

She still hasn’t told me that she’ll meet me, but I haven’t given up hope. I worked with the horses today and just put up the last one, giving her a little extra love. She’s new and still very nervous in these surroundings. I quickly shower and walk toward my truck. I’m going to head into town. I’m too restless to sit at the ranch waiting for Georgia to text me back. If I happen to drive by her house and see that she’s safe and

at home that's just a bonus.

"Hey, Boone, wait." Elly comes out of the main house and waves me down.

"Hey, Elly, how are you?"

"I'm great, you on the other hand." She gives me a stern look. I run through everything I did today to try and figure out what I could have done to piss off Cole's wife. I come up with nothing.

"What'd I do?" I ask cautiously.

"I talked to a certain auction winner earlier today and she wasn't thrilled with you."

Fuck. "What did she say?"

"Well, most of it I promised not to repeat. It was the only way I could get her to tell me the truth. She did try to tell me that she was allergic to horses and then she hated horses. She doesn't want to spend a day with you."

"She told me she was moving to Portugal," I admit. "Maybe we should just let her pay double and let it go. Maybe I'm pushing my attention where it isn't wanted."

"Don't give up," Elly says grabbing my arm. "I can't tell you what else she said, but you shouldn't give up. Just go slow and easy, like you would with a skittish horse."

I smile. "Did you just compare Georgia to a horse?"

She nods. "If the horseshoe fits."

We both burst out laughing and Cole comes out of the house. "You making a move

on my woman because you can't get your own, Lowe?"

"Don't be absurd, love," Elly says, giving her husband a quick peck on the cheek. "I'm helping him get his woman."

Cole rolls his eyes and gets an elbow to the belly.

"I need to go think about what you've said, Elly. Thanks for the help." I sneak in a kiss on her cheek and Cole chases me away.

I hop into my truck and drive quickly to the edge of the property. It borders Georgia's family's ranch and we used to meet out here sometimes when we were in high school. This pond was the site of some of our teenage fumbling kisses and our first taste of romance.

What do I want from Georgia? That's what I need to know. Do I want to go on a few dates and let this run its course to a natural conclusion, parting as friends? A torrid love affair that ends in drama and hatred? Or that forever kind of love like Elly and Cole have?

I want forever with Georgia. I have always wanted to be with her. If I'm honest with myself, I wanted it at eighteen and it scared the shit out of me.

Now, I just have to convince Georgia that I'm a good bet. That she can count on me to always be there for her.

I'm watching the sunset from the tailgate of my truck when I hear someone approaching. I turn and find myself mesmerized by the sight in front of me.

"Hey, cowboy," Georgia says as she rides up on her horse, Sugar.

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“Hey, wildflower. I thought you were allergic to horses or was it that you hated them?” I say with a smile.

Georgia frowns and starts to turn her horse around. I jump off the tailgate and slowly walk toward her. “Shit, Georgia, I shouldn’t have said that. I promise that is all that Elly shared. I don’t know what else was said between the two of you.”

“It’s fine. I’ve just been cementing my reputation this week. There’s something about you that makes me act crazy. I don’t like the feeling but don’t want it to disappear. Now, isn’t that crazy?”

“Can we talk?” I ask, hoping she’ll give me a few minutes.

“Yes, but clothes stay on.”

I help her off her horse and we tie Sugar to the nearest tree. Georgia pulls a treat out of her pocket and sneaks it to her horse. “Good girl,” she whispers.

“How could anyone ever think you hate horses?”

“Horses are better than most people.”

“I agree.”

I pick her up and sit her on the tailgate before sitting next to her. “I have a blanket if you get chilly.”

“I’m okay.”

“We need to come to some sort of truce. I can’t keep coming up with plans to not go to Cowboy Day, it’s starting to interfere with my actual job. Plus, Shelby read over your shoulder at the store and freaked out thinking I was moving to Portugal.”

“You could just hang out with me for that one day, see how it goes, and then maybe hang out with me some more,” I suggest.

“I’m going to offer up this deal. I will do the Cowboy Day if we can do it on a Saturday, and if we just annoy each other all day we cut our losses and stay on opposite sides of the street when we see each other in town.” She looks pretty proud of the strong offer she’s presenting.

“Saturdays aren’t a full day. So, I’ll agree to a Saturday as long as it’s this upcoming Saturday and I get to take you to dinner that night.” I know I’m pressing my luck, but I have to at least try.

She looks out at the horizon and then back at me. “Okay, but you promise that this will be it. No more texts, calls, booty calls, anything.”

“If we don’t get along and decide together that we want nothing else from this then yes, I promise no more.” There’s no way I want nothing more from Georgia Duncan.

We shake hands and I use every bit of willpower I possess to not pull her toward me and kiss her stupid. Why she’s fighting what’s between us, I don’t know, but I have three days to make sure that Saturday is the best day she’s ever had in her whole life.

It's one day. I can make it through one day with Boone and some sweet horses. He said to wear clothes I can ride in, so I wore jeans that are good to ride in, but also make my ass look fantastic. A basic white T-shirt is probably not the smartest idea, but it looks so good that I said to hell with it and wore it anyway. I'm like cowgirl barbie. My signature blue hat is on top of my head and I'm ready for whatever Boone has planned.

I show up at the ranch at seven a.m. and find I'm not the first one there. There are several cars lined up and I see families walking around or eating at picnic tables.

As I get out of my car, Boone saunters over. "Good morning, wildflower. Are you ready for our day?"

"Yes, what's going on?"

"Oh, this?" he asks as if it's completely normal for these people to be walking around the ranch. "We are hosting some local families this morning for breakfast and a little bit of time with the horses. Of course, only with the horses that are good with children. I thought you and I could help with the kids."

He's playing dirty. I've always been interested in equine therapy for kids with developmental and physical delays. That's why he wanted to do it this Saturday. He knew this was planned. This is low, but also very sweet.

I walk away from Boone, then look over my shoulder to see him staring at my ass. He laughs at being caught but doesn't stop looking. I knew these jeans were a good idea. I make my way through the breakfast line to where Elly and Cole are standing. Time to eat some crow.

"Elly, I need to apologize. I've acted like an idiot for the last week or so. There was no reason for me to fight coming to Cowboy Day so much. I just...well, you know."

“You don’t need to apologize. I might have been the same way in your place. Men are...men. I’m glad you suggested this though. I’ve wanted to do something like this, but just hadn’t gotten around to it.”

“Oh, this wasn’t me.”

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“But, Boone, said this was your idea. That you were interested in equine therapy.”
Elly looks confused.

“I am, but I had nothing to do with this. This is all Boone.”

The man himself walks up and wraps an arm around my waist. Normally I would be obligated to say something snarky, but right now I’m just going to enjoy the way his fingers feel above my jeans and against my skin. “I did make some calls, but I only had the idea because Georgia used to tell me all about the different things horses could help with.”

“When we were in high school.”

“I remember,” he says without breaking eye contact. “There’s nothing I’ve forgotten.”

Cole coughs and breaks the moment. “Should we get this started before it becomes less family-friendly?”

The four of us head to where the families have gathered. Boone introduces everyone and explains the different stations and which horses are available for the activities.

I’ve been assigned Daisy, an older horse who is very docile. She’s been set up to walk with smaller kids with me walking beside them. The first two kids have no issues. We make it around the circle, the kids happy and laughing.

The next kid in line is a little boy who is very nervous about riding a horse. So

nervous, I explain to his parents that it might be a good idea to just skip it for today, but they assure me and the little boy that as soon as he's on the horse he'll be fine. He's done this before and it's always like this.

I don't want to second guess a parent and I can't seem to get the attention of Boone, Elly, or Cole. I just decide that since the parents seem so confident in their kid then I will too. Daisy picks up on this stuff, so being worried isn't helpful. I help him into the saddle, and he does seem to calm down.

"We okay up there, bud?" I ask.

He nods, still looking a little iffy, but a lot better than he did in line.

I give Daisy a treat and rub her face. "You are such a good girl. Let's go nice and slow for this little man, okay."

Daisy starts and we make it halfway around the circle when all hell breaks loose. The boy starts screaming and his dad rushes toward Daisy, who had an owner who mistreated her and is still distrustful of men she doesn't know. Daisy bucks the boy off and I catch him, but I also catch Daisy's foot to my leg. It takes me down and then everything goes black.

9

Boone

It's all a fucking blur and so vivid at the same time. I hear her scream every time I close my eyes.

It's been two days since Cowboy Day, as Georgia called it. Fucking disaster is what it was. Two days since Georgia was trampled by Daisy, the sweetest horse, and two

days since I've seen Georgia's beautiful blue eyes.

The doctors kept her in an induced coma for the first twenty-four hours to make sure that the swelling in her brain didn't get too bad or something. I tried to absorb it all, but I couldn't. The wailing from her mom made me throw up. I put her in that danger. It's my fault.

I thought I was bad for her when we were eighteen, she thought I was bad for her now and we've both been proven right. If Elly had just let her buy her way out of the auction, she would be okay.

"Stop beating yourself up. This isn't your fault." Georgia's dad had sat next to me and I hadn't even noticed.

"I'm sorry, sir. Does your family need this chair?" I start to get up, but he puts his hand on my arm and forces me back into my seat.

"The boys took their mom home to shower and take a nap. Plus, I have the feeling that Georgia would want you here."

I shake my head. "She wouldn't. She was trying to get away from me and I wouldn't let her. If I had just left her alone, she wouldn't be here."

"Bullshit. If my daughter didn't want to be anywhere near you, she wouldn't have been. Did you see her brothers? Those three big lugs would have taken you somewhere and beat the shit out of you until you left her alone. All she would have had to do would ask and they would do whatever she wanted. She's a handful, but it's worth it. Her mothers the same way."

"I'm the reason that she was there. I'm the reason this happened."

“Have you gotten hurt by a horse before?”

I nod.

“Me too, hurts like hell. So has Georgia, twice. It hasn’t kept her from loving those animals and I have a feeling this won’t stop her either. This is the risk of being around these animals and everyone who loves and takes care of horses knows it.” He pulls out his paper. “Oh, the horse that hurt Georgia was Sugar both times and you know how much she spoils that horse. It’s like her baby.”

“She’s gonna be okay, right?” I ask, my voice frail and childlike. I need this man who speaks with such authority to tell me she’s going to be okay.

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“Nothing is guaranteed in life, but I don’t think my Georgia is done living yet.”

We sit next to each other, not speaking again, for several hours. Then there is a commotion from Georgia’s room and several doctors go running past us. I’ve never been one to pray, but I say a few words asking for to live.

Fifteen minutes, that feel like the longest fifteen minutes of my life, pass before anyone comes out to talk to us. Then her doctor comes out with a big smile on his face. “She’s asking for that stupid cowboy.”

Her father and I both fall into our seats. “What just happened?”

“She woke up and her heart rate accelerated too fast because she didn’t know what was going on. She tried to pull out tubes and stuff on her own.”

“Damn stubborn girl,” her dad says.

“So, who’s the stupid cowboy?”

“I am,” I say with a huge grin.

Her dad turns to me, “I’m gonna call the rest of ‘em and tell ‘em to get their asses up here. You go see your girl.”

I don’t have to be told twice. I walk as fast as I can to her room. I slow as I walk through the door, my knees going a little weak at seeing her eyes open again.

“Cowboy, I messed up your Cowboy Day,” she says, her voice hoarse from the tubes.

I rush to her side and sit gently beside her on the bed, “Wildflower, you didn’t ruin anything.” I take a deep breath, trying to get my emotions under control. “God, I’m so happy to see your eyes open.” I place a kiss on her forehead. “Your dad is calling the rest of your family. The boys had finally convinced your mom to go home and rest.”

“Have you rested? These are the same clothes you were wearing on Saturday. What day is it?”

“It’s Monday.”

Her eyes widen. “I was out for two days? I just got kicked in the leg, why was I out for so long?”

“You didn’t just get kicked in the leg. You were swept under Daisy and were kicked multiple times including in your head. Luckily there wasn’t any swelling. You were in an induced coma for the first twenty-four hours and then we were just waiting for you to wake up.”

She doesn’t say anything for minutes and I sit with her while she processes. “You know this isn’t your fault right.”

“Sure,” I agree with her, even though I know I’m the one that put her in that position.

“Boone, I’m so fucking serious right now. Look at my face.” Her face is bruised, and it hurts to see her so beat up. “Stop it. I’m fine, right? There aren’t some major injuries that have done something bad to me.”

“No, everything should heal completely. It will take a while and will hurt, but you

will eventually be one hundred percent.”

“You didn’t put that kid on the horse, I did, even though I had some misgivings. This is not your fault. And if you try to give me that bullshit about if I hadn’t been made to do Cowboy Day it wouldn’t have happened. If the auction hadn’t happened, my friends hadn’t meddled, your friends hadn’t meddled, then I wouldn’t be admitting right now that I’m in love with you. Now, it could be the drugs, so you’ll have to wait until I’m sobered up to say it back and make sure I still feel the same way.” She winks at me and that’s the moment I know she’s going to be okay. She’s got a long recovery and I’ll be by her side every second.

10

Georgia

It’s been two weeks since the accident and I’m busting out of this hospital. Boone has been with me every day. We’ve had some fun discussions and some very serious ones. Being a captive audience has accelerated our relationship positively, at least I think so.

I’m worried though. Boone still blames himself for what happened, and I can’t convince him that it’s not his fault. No matter who talks to him and tries to get it through that thick skull of his, accidents happen, and I’m fine.

“I can’t wait to get home,” I say to the room full of people who’ve gathered to help me get out of the hospital. I don’t add that it’s because I could use a break from the constant family visits, but that’s a big part of wanting to go home. I also want my own bed and to get a full night’s sleep.

“Daddy and I were thinking that you should come and stay at the main house while you’re still recovering,” my mother says with a sweet smile. We’ve already had this

conversation without an audience and I said no. Now she's trying with my dad and brothers present hoping they will be on her side.

"Mother, we already talked about this. I want to go home to my house. I'm still on the property so if I need someone all I have to do is call and you guys can be there so fast."

I look over at Boone, waiting for him to tell everyone that it's going to be fine because he'll be with me, but he isn't. Instead he looks away when I look at him. A ball of dread starts to form in the pit of my stomach. This man has held my hand, helped me shower, and wiped my tears when the pain was too much, but now he won't look me in the eyes.

"I've gotta go to work," he says to my dad. "Let me know when you've got her home, so I know she's safe."

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“Will do, son.”

Boone turns to leave and that is not the way this is fucking going to go. “Boone Lowe, turn your ass around and look at me.”

The whole room, full of my noisy family, falls silent. Boone doesn’t turn his whole body, but his head turns enough for our eyes to meet. “You’re ok, wildflower.”

I nod, then he turns back around and leaves. The tears flow freely down my face. My heart hurts, along with everything else, and I want them to bring the morphine back so I can go to sleep and pretend he didn’t just do that.

My mother comes over and dries my tears, “He isn’t gone for good. I think that man will be back for you.”

Shaking my head, I lay back down on the bed and close my eyes. Mother gets everyone to carry all my stuff out to their cars and leaves just Dad to drive me back to the ranch. I’ve always been a daddy’s girl and if anyone is going to understand what I need right now, it’s going to be him.

“We’ll leave whenever you’re ready, Georgia,” he says calmly.

“Why would he leave like that? He’s been with me every minute for the last two weeks. I thought he wouldn’t leave me again.”

“He knows you’re okay now.”

“What does that mean? Do I look okay? Boone walking out that door without a promise of coming back makes me very not okay,” I say, the pitch of my voice rising with every word.

“I know, but you can’t force him to stay. We just have to hope that he sees he’s being a jackass and comes crawling back for forgiveness and that you aren’t too stubborn to give it to him.” Dad smiles and kisses my forehead. “Let’s get you home.”

11

Boone

I’ve been working from sunup to sundown for the last week, exhausting myself in the hopes that I won’t dream of her. It hasn’t done a damn bit of good. Georgia claims my thoughts when I’m awake and when I’m asleep. I will never stop wanting her.

Her dad has been giving me a daily report on her progress and I don’t like what he’s told me the last two days. She’s stopped eating much and yesterday didn’t get out of bed. When I asked him if one of the injuries could be worse than originally thought, he told me it was something that happened after the accident but wouldn’t explain. I know he meant me leaving her.

I want to rush to her side, but I can’t. Georgia called me dangerous before and she was right. I almost got her killed. I didn’t protect her like I should have. I’m not the man for her.

“What did that hay do to you?” Cole asks as he walks up to me where I’m moving hay for the horse stalls.

“Fuck you,” I answer back. No one has been spared from my pleasant personality since I left the hospital.

Cole laughs and says, “Nope, I’m not leaving just because you growl. I’m not some wet behind-the-ears teenager you can chase off. You need to tell me what the hell is going on so we can fix it and you can stop making everyone around you miserable.”

I knew this was coming and I kind of thought I would have to face Elly, not Cole. The last thing I want to talk about with him is my feelings and how much I miss just being in the same room as Georgia.

“So...”

“You know what my problem is and that there’s nothing to do about it. She was hurt because I didn’t protect her and now we aren’t together because it’s best for her.”

“You aren’t a stupid cowboy, but you’re sure doing a good job of pretending to be one,” Cole laughs. “Did you talk to Georgia about this?”

“She told me when she was in the hospital that this wasn’t my fault, but what else was she going to say.”

“If Georgia thought that you were to blame for this, she would let you know. Think about it. She was trying to keep you at arm’s length but didn’t use this as a reason.”

That’s true. Before the day of the accident, she was doing anything she could to not spend too much time with me. The day I left the hospital I could see the hurt in her face that I was leaving. I couldn’t even tell her goodbye.

“What do I do, Cole?”

“Man up. If you want to be part of her life then you need to tell her, but if you’re going to walk away again stay away.”

Elly yells for Cole from the porch of the big house. A huge smile transforms his face as he sees his wife. That's what I want. Georgia to come home to every day.

“Thanks, Cole.”

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“No problem, Boone. I just want you to be happy and to stop growling at people.”

We laugh and I realize it’s the first time I’ve laughed in over a week.

Now I just need to figure out what I’m going to say to Georgia when I beg for her forgiveness.

12

Georgia

One week. I’ve been home one week, and he hasn’t come back. I don’t know why I thought he would, but every day I’ve waited.

This is what I get for risking my heart. I vaguely remember telling him that I loved him when I woke up, but he never mentioned it again, so I didn’t either. I meant it, but he probably just thought it was the drugs talking.

Yesterday I gave myself a day of grieving. I laid in bed all day, crying and sleeping. I didn’t eat and I just grieved.

Today, I will try to move on. I am up and dressed in sweats by nine. I pick up my phone and call my oldest brother, Chris.

“Hey, Georgie.”

“Hey, can you come get me and take me to my office?” I ask.

“Um, is that a good idea?”

“Chris, I’m going a little stir-crazy, but I can’t drive myself. I thought I would go to work for a couple of hours and then have one of you bring me home. I can manage it, I promise.”

I can hear him doing something with his phone, probably sending a family-wide text message. I discovered they have a group chat about me last week when I snooped through my brother, Guy’s phone.

“Okay, I will come get you under one condition.”

“What is it?”

“You’ll stay at the big house tonight and have dinner with Mother and Dad.”

“Sure.” It might be nice to be spoiled by my mother for a night and being alone is overrated. Without Boone, my house is very quiet. I was excited to leave the hospital, but it was because I thought he would be here with me.

“I’ll be there in fifteen.”

We hang up and I quickly, or as quickly as I can with my leg in a cast and my body bruised and beat up, pack an overnight bag. I pack my comfiest pajamas, the stuffed horse I’ve slept with since childhood, and my Kindle.

I’m sitting on the porch waiting for Chris when he drives up exactly fifteen minutes later. He jumps out of his truck and grabs my bag.

“Don’t move, baby sister.”

Chris opens the door to his enormous farm truck and puts my bag in the back. “I’m gonna have to lift you into the truck and kind of turn you a little sideways to get your leg in. Is there a certain way that will hurt you less?”

Maybe I didn’t think this through all the way. “Just keep to my lower back or shoulders. My ribs are still bad.”

He picks me up and I hiss in pain. It’s been three weeks since the accident. You would think that I wouldn’t hurt like this anymore, but shattered bones don’t heal quickly. Chris gets me into the truck, with some colorful cussing from both of us.

“I don’t want to do that ever again. I don’t like hurting you, Georgie.”

“I’m fine, Chris. Stronger than everyone thinks.” I watch out the window as we drive to the other side of the ranch where my parents live. We all have homes on the land. Mine is the smallest, but also the furthest away. I claimed it when I was four and everyone humored me. When Dylan was ready to move out, he tried to move into my house. I threw an epic fit and the house became mine for real.

I can almost make out the Iron H across the plain if I squint and use my imagination. Is he out there riding his horse or is he at our spot by the pond? Ugh! Today is move-on day so it doesn’t matter what the asshole is doing.

“Are you okay?” Chris asks when I sigh for the fourth or fifth time.

“Yes, I’ve just got a lot on my mind.”

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“Can I give you some older brother advice?”

I look toward him in shock. My other two brothers are always butting in, but Chris isn't an advice giver or one to get into my business.

“Okay, what's your older brother's advice for me?”

“You need to listen to him when he comes back.”

I sit completely still for a few seconds, my heart racing. “What if he doesn't come back?”

“He will.”

My brother sounds so sure, but it's been a week and total silence. There's no indication that he's going to even contact me at all. Yesterday was despair and I guess instead of moving on, today is going to be anger.

“Why the fuck hasn't he already come back? Why hasn't he called or texted? Is this some mind game you stupid men play to make women act crazy, so then you can say we're crazy and you dodged a bullet?”

“Whoa,” my brother responds in the way he would calm one of the horses.

This just makes me even more angry. “Don't treat me like a damn horse. I'm angry and hurt. My heart fucking hurts, Chris.”

I burst into tears and giant sobs wrack my body, which makes my body hurt more. How has everything gone so wrong?

We park in front of my parents' house and Chris gets out of his truck, walks around to my side, and opens my door. "I'm sorry I upset you, Georgie. That wasn't what I was trying to do. I just know that nothing is black and white and it's hard as hell to get past feeling like you've hurt someone you love."

"It wasn't his fault," I say for what feels like the millionth time.

"I know that we all know that, but it won't matter until he knows that."

I nod and put my arms around Chris' neck so he can help me out of the truck. Instead of putting me down, he just carries me into the house. Normally I would fight and demand to do it on my own, but I'm tired and it feels good to let my big brother take care of me for a minute.

"Georgia, are you okay," my mother squeals as we walk into the house.

"Much better than I'm sure I look."

"She's okay, Mother." My brother winks my way as he goes to move his truck from the front door.

"You're staying tonight, right? I've been so worried about you by yourself on the other side of the ranch."

"Yes, I'm staying. I might stay for a couple of days if that's okay." Now that I'm here, I realize that I was being stubborn going to my house. I should have come here in the first place.

“You can stay here as long as you want, kiddo,” my dad says walking into the room, stopping to kiss my cheek.

I work for a couple of hours and then give up when the numbers keep blurring.

Soon the house is bustling with my brothers, sisters-in-law, my two nieces, and baby nephew. Everyone insists I stay on the couch and let them take care of me.

My nephew, who’s only six months old, snuggles up to me and sighs. He’s so close to falling asleep and it’s making me sleepy too. Maybe we should just take a nap together here on the couch.

My eyes close and I’m right on the brink of sleep when I feel someone watching me. I want to let sleep pull me under and rest with the angel in my arms. I don’t think I would be plagued by any unpleasant thoughts with such a sweet baby next to me. But something in the back of my brain won’t let me fall all the way asleep.

I slowly open my eyes and see something shocking across the room.

It’s him. He’s here.

“Where the hell have you been, cowboy?” I yell.

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“Where the hell have you been, cowboy?”

Georgia sits up as well as she can, a painful grimace crossing her face, still gently cradling the baby that’s been in her arm. The baby is still asleep, which is surprising given the volume of Georgia’s question.

Georgia’s brother, Guy, comes and rescues his son, giving me a “don’t fuck with my baby sister” look at the same time.

I walk toward Georgia, taking in every bit of her beauty. She’s dressed in sweatpants and a tank top, with no make-up and her hair a mess on top of her head. She looks beautiful. The bruises have started to fade, but every time she moves her face contorts with pain. She’s still hurting, and I haven’t been here to help her.

“Stop right there, mister.” She points her finger to emphasize every word.

I freeze, holding my breath.

“I want to know one thing before you take one more step.”

“Anything, wildflower, ask me anything.”

“Was the accident your fault?”

She sounds so tough, but her hands are shaking. My own heart is pounding. This is a big moment and we both know my answer here can change everything.

I look around and we are the only two people in the room. Her whole family had cleared out to give us privacy.

“Was the accident my fault? I’ve asked myself that question over and over for the last three weeks. You know that while you were in the hospital I blamed myself and that’s why I left when you were going home. You had told me that I was dangerous to you and that had been proven right. This last week though, I’ve realized that it wasn’t my fault that what happened with the horse happened. Breaking your heart afterward though, that’s on me. I’m so sorry.”

Georgia holds her hand out and I grab it like a lifeline. I sit on the sofa where her head was before, and she lays back in my lap. “I’ve missed you, Boone. So many times this last week I’ve wanted to tell you something and you weren’t there.”

“I know. I won’t ever leave you again.” I lean down a kiss her softly.

“Do you promise? My heart can’t take another break.” Tears form in her eyes.

I swallow the lump in my throat. “I promise you, Georgia, I will never leave you again. You’re gonna get so sick of me. You’ll be kicking me out of your house.”

She shakes her head, causing her to realize that my cock is rock hard.

“Seriously?”

“I’m in the same room as you, so....”

“I look like a gargoyle. I’m black, blue, yellow, and green all over. My leg is in a cast, and I’ve barely brushed my hair in a week.”

“And you still look irresistible.”

I kiss her again and this time it gets a little more passionate. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, we are interrupted by Chris.

“Is everything okay in here?” he asks.

“I think so,” Georgia answers looking up at me.

I nod.

“Mother wants to know if you’re staying for dinner.”

“He is,” she says to her brother. Once he’s left the room, she looks at me nervously.

“I’m sorry I answered for you. You don’t have to stay unless you want to.”

“Wildflower, I’m staying. I told you I’m not leaving again, and I meant it.”

Her smile is contagious, and I smile back at her. We sit and tell each other about our bad week apart until dinner is ready.

“Hey, cowboy, how did you know I was here?” Georgia asks as I help her off the sofa.

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“Your dad,” I answer, carefully picking her up to carry her to the dining room.

“I can walk by myself. Why would my dad tell you I’m here?”

“He’s been keeping me updated on you. I may have walked away from you at the hospital, but I still needed to know everything about you and what you are going through.”

As I sit her into a seat, she gives her dad the stink eye. “So the two of you are conspiring against me?”

“Not conspiring, wildflower. I just couldn’t have made it through the day without knowing you’re okay.”

“Could have just asked me,” she mumbles under her voice.

“And that’s what I’ll do from now on, I promise.”

Dinner is a loud, fun affair. Georgia and her brothers tease each other like crazy, and the sisters-in-law getting into the teasing too. Everyone takes shots at me, and I give it back. It’s like I’ve been part of this family for a long time, instead of this being the first time I was eating with the family.

Georgia yawns. “I hate how easily I still get tired.”

“Didn’t get enough rest when you were in a coma?” Dylan asks.

“Don’t joke about that. Your sister being injured isn’t funny,” their mom gets on to her brother.

“Want me to give you a ride home, Georgia?” I ask.

“I’m staying here tonight. I promised my parents and I was planning to do some more work.” She doesn’t look thrilled with her plan.

“It’s okay. I can come back and see you tomorrow, you need to get your rest,” I say even though the last thing I want to do is leave her.

“Why don’t you help Georgia get to her room,” her dad says.

“What?” her brothers all say at the same time.

“You never let us have girls in our rooms, but Georgia can have a man in her room?”

“I’m thirty years old and beat to hell. I think I can control myself with Boone in my bedroom,” Georgia deadpans at her brothers while sending me a saucy wink.

I turn to her dad, “Thank you, sir. I’ll make sure she’s comfortable.”

Her dad laughs and again there’s a round of complaints from the brothers, but this time the sisters-in-law want to know what girls the boys are upset they couldn’t have in their rooms. It’s the perfect time to escape with my girl.

I pick her up and carry her out of the dining room. Her arms wrap around my shoulders.

“My hero,” she sighs. Then the minx starts placing small kisses along my jaw.

“You better cut that out.”

“Or what?” she asks as she nips at my ear.

I don’t answer her, I need to concentrate on walking up the stairs with her in my arms and her love bites are mighty distracting.

“It’s the second door on the left,” she tells me when I pause at the top of the stairs unsure of where to go.

“Okay, wildflower, let’s get you in bed.”

A few more kisses along the nape of my neck, “Yes, let’s get into bed.”

I manage to get the door open, and Georgia gently laid on her bed. I turn around to shut her door and she says, “Lock it.”

I turn back to tell her that I don’t think that’s a good idea, but the words die before they’re formed. Georgia’s topless and her gorgeous tits are on full display. I’ve been hard since I picked her up in the dining room, but we are in her parents’ house, and she’s still hurt. I had planned to make her comfortable and then go home to a cold shower.

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Georgia starts to look unsure, and I can't have that. I reach back without breaking our eye contact and turn the lock on the door.

"Damn, wildflower, you are gorgeous." I stalk to the bed and put my knee up beside her body. I'm afraid I'm going to hurt her, and I've done too much of that already.

"Even with all the bruises? I like to think it adds a little bit of color to my otherwise translucent skin."

I lightly trace the bruises on her ribs. I know that those are the worst. "Why aren't your ribs still bandaged?"

"I couldn't easily do it myself, so the last couple of days I've gone without. It's hurting a lot less. I'm sure it's fine."

If I hadn't been an asshole I would have been there able to help her with that. I would give anything to go back and redo so many things with Georgia, go back and get things right the first time.

"Stop it. You're blaming yourself again and I won't stand for it. We all made the decisions that we made and there's nothing we can do to change anything. We can only do better in the future."

"You're right."

"I am?" Surprise crosses her face.

“You are and in the future, I promise to always put you first. In fact, how about I put you first right now?”

I help her lay down on the bed with the pillows under her head. Then I gently remove her sweatpants being as careful as I can with the leg in the cast. I toss the sweats away and sit back to behold the beauty in front of me. So fragile and yet so fucking strong.

“You are amazing, Georgia. I’m so grateful you’re giving me another chance to prove that I can be trusted with your body.”

“And my heart,” she says quietly.

“Oh, wildflower.” I move gently up her body so I can devour her mouth with mine. I’m like a man that’s been denied water. I can’t get enough.

Being as gentle as I possibly can I run my hands over her body. “Are you sure you want to do this? We can wait until you heal more. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Cowboy, I need this. I need you,” she pleads.

“Okay, but if it hurts or anything is too much you better tell me.”

She nods.

I slowly kiss down her body, lavishing attention on her shoulders, collarbone, and the tops of each breast. I can feel her wiggling against me, wanting me to move faster, but this will take time.

I take one tight nipple into my warm mouth and pull.

“Oh...” she moans.

I bite down a little in warning. She knows that she can't be too loud. While I'm sure her parents expect a little making out while I'm up here, this is much further than that.

I switch to her other rosy tip, swirling around it several times with my tongue, the same way I plan to move around her clit. Then when I feel her body relax just a bit, I pull as much of her tit into my mouth as I can.

“Damn! Boone...”

I let go of her breasts and kiss down the center of her body. Barely any pressure along the center of her ribs. I watch her face to make sure it isn't painful, but the smile on her face is serene. She runs her hand through my hair and a shiver runs through my body.

“Now, I need you to keep quiet, wildflower. I don't want your family comin' up here to make sure you're okay. Can you do that?”

“I think so,” she answers without any confidence. Then she looks around before grabbing a stuffed dog from her nightstand. “I'll stuff it in my mouth if I'm gonna scream.”

I can't help but laugh. “Whatever works.”

“Shouldn't you take your clothes off cowboy?” she asks.

“Tonight is just about you. When your ribs are one hundred percent you can have your way with my body.”

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She doesn't look happy about this, so I move my large frame down her bed and move her good leg out to one side. I didn't think through the logistics of how this would work with her leg in a cast, but I'm determined.

I run my tongue up and down her slit. God, I've missed her and that taste that is uniquely Georgia. I circle her clit with my tongue, and she lifts her hips off the bed. I move one arm to keep her hips down, then look at her to make sure that it's okay. A little nod tells me to continue.

I slowly inch one finger and then another into her tight channel. Oh, I can't wait to have my cock inside her wet heat again. She's so tight. Soon. Soon.

I suck her clit into my mouth and pump my fingers in and out of her pussy. Soon, I start to feel her walls squeeze me tight and I know she's about to come. I look up and see my sweet wildflower with a stuffed dog stuffed in her mouth and her eyes rolled back in her head. I gently bite down on her clit and at the same time, I curl my fingers to reach her G-spot. Her climax comes with a roar and that stuffed animal was no match for the scream of pleasure that comes from my woman.

Slowly she comes down from the high and I pull my fingers from her body. I lick them clean, wanting one more taste for tonight.

I move Georgia into a comfortable position on the bed and get her cleaned up. She's so gorgeous, her body slick with a sheen of sweat and relaxed from finding release.

"Can you stay?" she asks.

“Of course,” I answer. I’m not leaving her, it’s what I promised, and I intend to keep that promise. Even if I have to face the wrath of her brothers and her dad.

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Georgia

I wake up with a start, my heart racing and my breath shallow. This has been happening a lot since the accident.

“Are you okay?”

“What!”

“It’s me, Georgia,” Boone sits up, the sheet sliding down his naked chest.

“Boone.”

He wraps his arms around me, and I instantly feel better. How could I forget he was in bed with me? Since the night at my parents’ house, we’ve spent every night together. Sometimes I worry that the accident did something to my short-term memory, but everyone reassures me that I’m fine.

“Did you have the nightmare again?” he asks as he runs his fingers through my hair.

I nod, no need to explain. Boone is well acquainted with the nightmare.

“That’s every night this week, wildflower. Maybe you should wait to go back to Iron H.”

“No, my cast is off, and my bruises are nearly gone. I have to get back on the horse as

the saying goes. If I don't go back, it will just get built up in my mind as a bad place. You love the ranch and the work you guys do is so important. I can't be afraid to go there with you."

He nods and we lay back down, my head resting on his chest. We've had this argument several times in the past few days. Boone thinks it's too soon, but I know how my mind works. I have to go, need to go, and see Daisy. It's the final piece of moving on.

The next morning I wake up still lying on Boone's chest. He's awake and doesn't look like he slept much.

"Did you go back to sleep?"

"Maybe a little bit," he says, but I can tell he's lying.

"I need you to be okay with this or I need to go without you."

"You aren't going without me," he firmly states. "I'm fine."

"Fine, my ass. You are giving off weird vibes and the horses will be able to feel them," I say, frustration leaking into my words.

"I promise I'll be okay when we get to the ranch. I'm just worried about you, Georgia."

I wrap my arms around his body. "I know, but once I do this everything will be in the past. Then we can work on our future together. You, me, horses."

"Babies?" he asks.

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“Do you want to have kids? I guess we’ve never really talked about it.” I avoid answering the question.

“I don’t know. I guess if they happened, I would be happy.”

“I don’t want to have kids.” The words come out so fast that I’m not sure that he can understand them. “I love my brothers’ kids, but I don’t think I have that maternal gene. I just like being the fun aunt.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Georgia, if you haven’t figured it out yet, I’m crazy about you. I want to spend forever with you. If kids are something you don’t see in your future then that’s the way it will be. I don’t feel a burning need to be a dad. I like the idea of being a fun uncle.”

“I love you, Boone.”

“I love you, too.”

I climb up his body and show him just how much I love him, causing us to be late to the Iron H.

* * *

“I thought you were going to be here twenty minutes ago,” Cole calls out as we get out of Boone’s truck.

I can feel the blush spread across my face. “Um, we were delayed.”

Boone wraps his arm around my shoulders. “Leave her alone, Cole. We didn’t need to be here at any certain time. It’s my day off.”

“Sorry, Georgia.” Cole looks downright contrite, but I’m sure he’ll give Boone more shit later.

“It’s okay. Where’s Daisy?” I’m nervous and want to get this over with. I’m trying to put on a brave front, but being back here is scary as hell.

“Remember you don’t have to do this if you aren’t ready. We can go, wait a few more weeks,” Boone says looking into my eyes as if he’ll be able to tell exactly what I need.

“I can do this. It will be okay.” I take a deep breath and square my shoulders.

Daisy is brought out of the barn and over to where we are standing. I instantly feel calm. She’s such a beautiful horse and she didn’t mean to hurt me. I walk right up to her and rub her head.

“Hello, sweet lady,” I whisper for only her ears. “I’m sorry you were scared. Everyone is okay. We are okay.”

I can feel tears falling down my face, but I can’t back away from the horse. She lays her head against my chest. It feels like her version of an apology. This is the moment I needed. I’m fully healed now.

“I’ll be back to see you, Daisy. Maybe we can go for a ride next time.”

They lead Daisy away, but I can’t turn around yet. I feel Boone’s arms wrap around me.

“You did so good, wildflower,” Boone whispers as if he also feels the moment is too fragile for anything else. “Tell me what you need now and it’s yours.”

I turn in his arms and wrap my arms around his body. “I just need you.”

“You already have that, Georgia,” he promises. “I’m yours forever.”

Epilogue

Boone

1 year later

A whole year the crazy woman has made me wait. All I want to do is marry her and she’s made me wait a whole year. She thinks she’s funny, but she’s not. I mean she is, but she drives me crazy.

I want to give Georgia whatever she wants in life, but why couldn’t we just go to the courthouse and get married by the justice of the peace? It isn’t like she’s planned a grand wedding either. When I asked her why we had to wait, she said it was because she liked this date. The date.

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Today is the day. The wait is over and finally Georgia is going to become Mrs. Lowe. The ceremony is supposed to start in five minutes and everyone is getting into place.

We are standing under an arch full of wildflowers and daisies. It's an odd combination, but what Georgia wants, Georgia gets. The importance to us is all that matters.

Music swells and the bridesmaids and maid-of-honor walk down the aisle looking lovely. Then the music changes and everyone starts to laugh. My bride is walking down the aisle to "Save a Horse, Ride a Cowboy". She really is crazy.

But, fuck, she's also gorgeous. Her dress is beautiful, but the smile that's all for me is what I see. As her father hands her over he wishes me good luck. Her family has taken me on as one of them and I love all of them.

"Did you like the song, cowboy?" she asks as we get into our places.

"Sure did, wildflower. Can't wait for you to ride this cowboy tonight."

The preacher coughs, "Um, there's a mic right here."

I look out at all our friends and family who are laughing, red-faced, or somewhere in between.

"Did they think anything else was happening on our wedding night?" I ask Georgia.

Her only answer is a shrug of her shoulders. We both turn toward the preacher and

wait for him to start. It's the only thing that's going to get us out of this. Luckily he quickly does.

I try to pay attention during the ceremony, but I mostly just stare at my beautiful bride. She's radiant today and I hope no one expects us to be at the reception for very long.

"I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss your bride."

"Fucking finally," my very ladylike wife says.

I pull her to me and kiss Georgia for the first time as husband and wife. I work to keep the kiss PG-13, but it's difficult.

We break apart, breathing hard, and turn to face the crowd who start clapping. We walk down the aisle, again to Georgia's chosen song.

After we clear the crowd, I pull her back to me and go back to kissing her. I wonder if we can skip the whole reception. Maybe we can be late...

Epilogue 2

Georgia

Marriage is awesome. We're only fifteen hours in, but so far it's been champagne, cake, and sex. I highly recommend it.

I've packed my bags for our honeymoon, but Boone has kept it a secret where we are going. All I know is that I need a passport and to pack warm weather clothes.

We are headed to the airport now, so I should be able to figure out where we are

going when we get there. Surely he can't hide our destination once we are boarding an actual plane.

My dad is driving us to the airport, so I'm trying to get information out of him. "Do you know where we are going, Dad?"

"Sure do. You should always leave your itinerary for someone at home. Just in case," he answers.

"So...where are we going?" I'm too tired from the party last night and getting up early to be sneaky.

"Somewhere warm."

"I hate that you two like each other. Why can't you be a normal dad and hate the man who sleeps with your only daughter?"

They both just laugh. I don't really mean that, I love their relationship, just not when they are ganging up on me.

We pull up to the drop-off at the airport and the men unload the luggage. My dad and Boone shake hands and Boone promises to take care of me. Dad comes around and gives me a big hug.

"Have a good time kids," he says as he gets back in the car.

We wave as he drives off and then roll our suitcases into the airport. Just inside the door, Boone stops and turns to me.

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“Do you remember when you were trying to avoid me?”

“Um, yes.”

“You told me that you were moving to Portugal, and I wondered why there. It’s not a country you hear people talk about a lot. So, I asked your mother. She told me about your third-grade country project on Portugal and how you’ve been obsessed with the country since then. That it’s a bucket list item for you.”

I can feel the tears welling up in my eyes. That he cared enough to ask my mom about why I would use that country when trying to avoid him of all things.

“So, wildflower, we are going to Portugal for two weeks and I have a copy of your report with me to make sure we do everything you want to do.”

“Boone, I’m so glad you didn’t let me avoid you forever.” I hug him as tight as I can and kiss all over his beautiful face. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too, my wildflower.”