



One Sizzling Summer

Author: *Wynter Ryan*

Category: Romance

Description: Ben

This summer, working on the sequel to my best-selling thriller will be more challenging than I expected. It has been difficult enough watching Emma grow from a bright-eyed, shy college freshman into the stunning, confident graduate in the English classes I've taught over the past four years. However, having her just a few feet away in the lake house next to mine will be torturous.

I had hoped my attraction to her would lessen over the years as I maintained a strict teacher-student relationship, making sure that I never gave her the special attention my body craved to offer. But now, with her just a few feet away from me as she relaxes on the dock in a tiny bikini, my professional resolve is weakening.

Emma

My life feels like a disaster. I graduated from college last month only to find myself at a crossroads. When I first started college, I wanted to earn a degree in business and follow my siblings into the family business. However, after spending the last four years enrolling in every English class taught by Professor Ben Simpson, I've realized that I want to teach English instead of attending boring board meetings.

It doesn't help that I'm hopelessly in love with Professor Simpson. Not that he returns my feelings. He has been nothing but professional with me all these years. However, now that fate has brought us to the same secluded area, I want to make sure he doesn't have feelings for me before I decide my future. Because if there's a chance for a future with Ben, I want it.

Under the sizzling Texas summer sun, Emma plans to fight for the man she loves, willing to brave the heat for his love or get burned by his rejection.

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Chapter one

Ben

The breeze from the lake drifts through her chocolate-brown hair as the sun lights it up with a kaleidoscope of colors, from golden brown to deep caramel, matching her golden tan skin. Her normally pale skin is now sun-kissed from the hours she has spent on our shared dock, tempting and teasing me into madness in that tiny string bikini.

It was challenging enough to have her as a student in all my classes at Mountain State University over the past four years. I maintained a professional relationship with her, even though I was tempted to pull her into my arms and kiss her, especially when she called Mr. Darcy a fool for his behavior in the book *Pride and Prejudice*. While all the other girls in class swooned over him, Emma swore she could never fall for someone like the fictional Mr. Darcy.

What about me?

I wanted to ask her that question a million times, but each time I held back, knowing she wasn't meant for me. I might only be six years older than her, but with her still in college, it felt like a world between us.

Graduation was less than a month ago. Once I saw her walk across the stage and receive her diploma, I thought I would be able to spend the summer at the rented lake house and bury myself in my murder mystery thriller and forget about her and how much I want her.

Not only am I a college English professor, but I am also a world-renowned author. Under my pen name, I excel in the literary world. At Mountain State University, I'm just another professor shaping the minds of young people.

I pull my eyes away from the front window facing the lake and focus on the scene I'm writing. But each day, it becomes harder to concentrate, until today, when the words for the thriller won't come to me. Instead, my mind is filled with images of a Siren of the lake with sun-kissed hair and skin, wearing a tiny bikini, beckoning me to follow her into the depths of the lake to be claimed by her forever.

My phone rings, luckily breaking the hold of the Siren over me before I do something stupid, like claim the young woman who's innocently tanning herself on the dock.

"Hello, Mrs. McCaffrey," I say after checking the caller ID on my cell phone.

Mr. and Mrs. McCaffrey own the larger lake house, where Emma is currently staying, and the slightly smaller one I have stayed in over the past three summers. Usually, they spend their summers in the larger house, but Mrs. McCaffrey has been dealing with some health issues, so she decided to rent it out this year. Little did I know Emma would be the renter.

"Hello, Ben. How's everything at the lake? Have you met my granddaughter Emma yet?"

Granddaughter?

I haven't been this shocked since I caught Mr. and Mrs. McCaffrey skinning dipping at midnight the first summer I was here.

"Yes, I met her a few days ago." I'm not sure whether to tell Mrs. McCaffrey the truth about knowing her granddaughter for four years or act like I don't know her. I

wish I knew if Emma had told her grandmother about me.

“She’s such a sweet girl. She attended college to earn her degree in business, like her parents and siblings. However, something changed along the way, and now she wants to pursue a career in teaching. English, I think she said.”

My heart races. Could it really be true? Does Emma want to teach English like I do? I wonder how her parents feel about that, since it would go against family tradition.

“She’s lucky to have understanding parents who support all their children in chasing their dreams. The poor girl is still upset about the decision. That’s why I let her have the lake house all to herself this summer so that she can reflect on her life. You’ll look after her, won’t you, dear?”

Emma is not the only one who needs to reflect on life choices. I’m not sure why I felt Emma was out of reach when I thought she was going into business. But now that I know we share something as valuable as the love of teaching English, I need to reconsider my feelings for her.

“I’ll definitely watch out for her. We are actually having dinner together at my house tonight.” I could kick myself. Why did I tell Mrs. McCaffrey that? I don’t want her to get the wrong or right idea about my intentions for her granddaughter.

“Good, good. I’ll let you go so you can get ready for your date.” She ends the call before I can tell her it’s not a date.

Setting my phone next to my laptop, I glance out the window just in time to see Emma walk in front of the window in that tiny scrap of material she calls a bikini.

With a smile and a wave in my direction, she continues to pass by my house to hers. I can’t help but watch her hips wiggle with each step she takes. That’s the moment I

realize I'm head over heels in love with this young woman.

Chapter two

Emma

The past few days have been terrible. Being so close to Mr. Simpson, I mean Ben, and not being able to tell him how I feel has been rough. But all that changes tonight.

After tonight, I'll either find out if Ben feels the same way about me that I feel about him, or I'll realize it's time to let go of my crush and move on. Even though I know it's more than just a schoolgirl crush.

I couldn't believe my luck when I arrived at my grandparents' lake house and saw Ben sitting on the dock. I knew my grandparents had rented out the small lake house, but they said it was to a famous writer who mostly kept to himself. I had no idea it would be my college professor and that he had a secret identity.

The string bikini was a gift my grandmother left at the lake house, along with a bunch of other sexy dresses and lingerie I wasn't expecting. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad she bought it for me. I just didn't expect my grandmother to play matchmaker.

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After our awkward hellos on the first day, Ben and I realized we would be neighbors for the summer. It took three days of me lying on the dock, pretending to want to sunbathe, before he finally approached me to have dinner with him.

Speaking of having dinner with him.

I lean up, push myself to a standing position, grab my towel, and make my way back to my house. It's time to get ready for either the best or the worst night of my life.

Aware of the eyes watching me from Ben's house like they do every day, I consciously slow my pace and sway my hips from side to side, hoping to entice Ben enough that he'll realize we are made for each other.

I lift my hand, smile, and wave to Ben, letting him know I see him watching me. A thrill runs down my spine knowing he sees me in something other than a t-shirt and jeans.

As soon as I step inside my house, I don't have time to shower before my phone starts ringing.

"Hey, Grandma." I cradle the phone between my ear and neck while I wash the sunscreen off my hands in the kitchen sink. Luckily, I have both the spray and lotion versions of sunprotection because I haven't convinced Ben to rub the lotion onto the spots I can't reach. "What do I have the pleasure of your call?"

"Oh, you're such a cheeky girl." Grandma's voice sounds much healthier than when she convinced me she was too ill for her and Grandpa to stay at the lake house this

summer. “How are you getting along with your neighbor, Ben?”

“We’re getting along just fine. We’re actually going to have dinner tonight at his place.” I debate whether to tell Grandma that I’ve known Ben for four years, so he’s not new to me. But for once, I want to be one step ahead of her.

“Good to hear. Now I think you should wear that white lacy dress I bought you, the one that looks like a wedding dress for a beach ceremony.” And there it is. I knew the matchmaker in my grandma would show up sooner or later.

“It’s super casual. I’ll probably wear a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.” I hold back a giggle as she blusters about how a lady should always wear a dress to dinner. “I’ve got to go get ready, Grandma. I love you.”

“I love you, too, dear. Call me tomorrow and let me know how your date went. But I won’t expect a call too early in case you and Ben are sleeping in.”

“Grandma!” I’m too stunned by her innuendo, I can’t say anything else.

“What? I was your age once, you know. Your grandfather and I used to sneak around whenever we could before we got married. In fact, it’s been a while since I held a baby in my arms.” And now it’s time to end this conversation, because I definitely don’t want to think about Grandma and Grandpa doing it.

“I’m hanging up now.”

“Maybe you should go commando.”

I hang up the phone before she gives me any more advice on how to snag a boyfriend or baby daddy.

Now, I need to shower and get ready for my date, but all I can think about is Grandma's advice to go to Ben's without wearing underwear.

Am I really that brave?

Chapter three

Ben

The knock on my front door startles me. I take one last look around the room to make sure everything is perfect, especially if I'm going to let Emma know how I feel about her and see if she feels the same way.

"Emma, come in." I open the door for Emma, inhaling deeply as she brushes past me, her hair tickling my nose. The scent of rainwater and orchards filling my nostrils. The scent I've come to know as uniquely Emma.

She steps into the room, leaving me speechless as I take in her dress. It's short, white, lacy, and fits her body like a second skin. Upon closer inspection, I don't see a panty line. And judging by how her nipples are poking through the front of the dress, she's probably not wearing a bra either.

"Come this way." I finally find my voice and lead her into the small dining room off the kitchen. It offers a romantic view of the east side of the lake as I place my hand on her lower back and guide her into the other room. "Have a seat." I hold the chair out, waiting for her to be seated before scooting it closer to the table. "I hope you like catfish and American fries." I take a seat across from her at the small table.

A smile lights up her already beautiful face, "I love catfish and fries. Did you catch the catfish from the lake?"

“Ah, I wish I could tell you I’m a great fisherman, but unfortunately, I’m not. I bought this at the grocery store earlier today. But I’m sure it came from the lake.”

Her laughter fills the room, “Grandma said you’ve been renting this place for the last three summers, and you don’t even fish?”

“Nope, not one bit.” I don’t react to her revealing that her grandmother rented me the house. I’ll let her continue that conversation if she wants to.

“We’re both here all summer. I’ll teach you.”

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“You’ve got a deal. But you have to promise not to wear that bikini, or we’ll be doing more than just fishing.” Her laughter fades as her eyes lock onto mine, casting a spell around us. We both lean forward, our mouths inches apart, but when the timer sounds, announcing dinner is ready, we jump apart. “That’s our food. I’d better grab it before it burns.”

She opens her mouth as if she wants to say something, but then closes it again with a nod.

I rush to the kitchen, cursing the timing of the fish. Twenty more seconds is all I needed to finally kiss the girl of my dreams.

Plating our food in record time, I dash back into the dining room and place her plate on the table in front of her before setting mine down. “Can I do one thing before we begin to eat?”

“Anything.” She whispers, licking her lips, causing my cock to harden.

I growl at her total surrender. Leaning down, I capture her mouth with mine, teasing the seam of her lips with my tongue until she opens her mouth with a sigh. “That’s it. You’re such a good girl.” I deepen the kiss, taking it from PG-13 to rated R.

It takes all my self-control to stop kissing her. Ravaging her at the dinner table wasn't part of my plan. “Sorry about that.” I quickly kiss her swollen, well-kissed lips before sitting down at the table. “We should probably talk about whatever this is before we go further.”

She nods and picks up her fork and knife, then starts to cut into the catfish. When she lifts a piece to her mouth and begins to chew, I can't help but wonder if she's going through the motions, still lost in that kiss like I am, or if she is genuinely able to enjoy the meal, unlike me. The catfish tastes bitter next to the flavor of her mouth still clinging to my lips.

Chapter 4

Emma

I can hardly taste the catfish. My thoughts are still on the fact that Ben wants me as much as I want him. That kiss was incredible.

In high school, I kissed a few boys, but we never went beyond that, and they definitely never made me feel so hot and needy after just one kiss. I press my thighs together, cursing myself for following grandma's advice and not wearing underwear.

The inside of my thighs feels slippery, begging me to rub them together to ease the ache between them. I give in, shifting my hips from side to side. "Oh." I catch my breath at the contact, not expecting it to feel so good.

"Are you okay?" The genuine concern in Ben's voice makes me feel like a fool for trying to soothe the throbbing need between my legs while attempting to enjoy a nice dinner with him. But based on the hungry look in his eyes, I'd say he's struggling too.

"I'm fine." I sip the red wine Ben must have poured before I arrived. "So one other thing grandma told me about you is you're a world-famous writer." I set the wine glass back on the table. "Why didn't you ever tell the class?"

He sips his wine before placing it back on the table. "There's only one person in the class I've ever wanted to tell, but I've always thought—" he pauses. I hold my breath,

praying he will say what I want him to say—what I need him to say. “That you were unattainable since you were my student and I was your professor.”

The breath I was holding comes out in a rush, “How long have you felt that way?”

“From the first day you walked into my class and sat in the front row, even though you were one of the first students to arrive, you had your pick of seats. Yet, you chose to sit smack dab in the middle of the classroom, right in my line of vision. From that day forward, I always considered that your spot.”

“It was the only place that felt right. It was as if my body guided me to that desk, urging me to claim it before someone else could.”

Four years. I can’t believe he has liked me for four years.

I work up the courage to ask him the question I’m dying to know. “Why didn’t you act on your feelings?”

“I think you already know the answer to that. You were just out of high school, barely even eighteen. You had your whole college future ahead of you. What would you want with a stuffy professor six years older? Plus, it was my first teaching job. I couldn’t risk losing it.”

I nod. I understand. I truly do. We were both young and reckless, not realizing it was okay to take a chance on the love of a lifetime. I’m just grateful we were given a second chance to act on that love.

“Do you know why I’m staying at the lake house alone this summer?” He shakes his head, so I continue. “I felt lost after graduation—like a piece of me was missing. I didn’t know what that piece was until I saw you sitting on the dock that first day as if fate threw you in my path, showing me, without words, what I was missing.”

“I feel the same way. My writing has suffered even having you close by. But knowing you were so close and unable to touch you gutted me. Do you know I spend most of my days staring out the window, watching you lie out on the dock, sunning yourself, and wishing every minute that I was out there with you, rubbing lotion into your beautiful skin.”

My breath catches in my throat. “I want you to be the one rubbing lotion on my back and anywhere else you want to rub.”

He stands, walks over to my side of the table, then drops to one knee on the carpet and takes my hand. “Emma, I wanted to make this night special, but you being here is what truly makes it so. I know it’s only been four years, but I feel like I’ve waited for you my whole life.” He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a velvet box. “This was my grandmother’s. I’ve been carrying it around with me for four years, waiting for the perfect time to ask the woman I love if she’ll marry me.” He lets go of my hand to open the box, revealing a beautiful princess-cut diamond with two sapphires on either side.

“Yes!” I throw my arms around his neck, pulling him close, covering him everywhere I can reach with a kiss.

He pulls back just enough to slide the ring onto my finger. “Perfect.” He brings my left hand to his lips and kisses my finger just above the engagement ring. “I think it’s time we make this official.” He stands, sweeping me into his arms bridal style, and carries me to his bedroom, making this the best night of my life.

Chapter four

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Chapter five

Ben

“Are you sure you’re ready for this?” I let her body slide down mine as I set her feet on the floor and take a step back to look into her eyes.

She nods, grabbing the hem of her short dress and pulling it over her head, leaving herself exposed to my hungry eyes. “Is this okay?” She bites her lip making my cock

throb wanting those lips wrapped around it. “I’ve never done this before.” My sexy Siren is replaced by the shy freshman I first fell in love with.

“I’ve never done this before either,” I tell her honestly. “I’ve never wanted to until I met you.”

“You’re teasing me. There’s no way a sexy professor like you hasn’t made love to one of his students over his desk in his office.”

Now there is a visual I won’t be getting out of my head anytime soon of Emma bent over my office desk, her firm ass sticking in the air begging from my cock, with her little panties hanging around her ankles.

“I’m not teasing. You’re the only woman I’ve ever wanted to do this with, will ever want to do this with. If I couldn’t have you, I didn’t want anyone else.”

Her eyes glaze over in lust, “Make love to me, Ben.”

Our lips meet in a passionate kiss filled with promises, our tongues tangling as we crave to be nearer to one another.

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“Bed.” I manage to say in between kisses as I back her up until her legs hit the mattress and she falls back onto the bed. I quickly strip out of my clothes before joining her on the bed. “I’m going to taste you all over,” I vow, starting with her lips, I work my way across her cheek, to her jaw, and down her neck, moving lower and lower until I reach her hard nipples.

Cover one of her breasts with my hand, and I knead her sensitive flesh before rolling her rock-hard nipple between my fingers. My mouth was devouring her other breast, licking and sucking until she was squirming beneath me. “That’s it. Show me what you like.” I blow a stream of hot air across the tight skin, causing it to tighten even more.

“I-I need you down there.” She pants, her moans music to my ears.

“Down where, love? Tell me where you need my tongue.”

“On my pussy. I need to feel you there.” Her hips thrust up as if searching for relief.

“As you wish.”

Her hips freeze. “You’re quoting the Princess Bride at a time like this?”

“Evidently, I’m not doing a good job of pleasuring you, if you’re still coherent enough to get my references. I’ll need to remedy that.” I dive between her thighs. My hands pinning her hips to the bed as my tongue licks her from hole to clit.

I might be an English professor, but I know my anatomy, and right now I’m going to

make my girl scream in pleasure before finally claiming her like I've wanted to for so many years.

"Oh, yes." I glance from between her legs to watch her arching her back as she rolls her nipples through her fingers.

"Come for me." I gently thrust a finger into her soaked hole. Her slick walls tightly clamping onto the digit as she explodes on my hand.

"That was amazing." Her body relaxes against the soft pillows, and I almost hate to disturb her, but I know we both need the big release that only the joining of our bodies can give.

I kiss my way back up her body to claim her lips. Her eyes widen when she tastes herself on mine. "Do you like how you taste?" I tease her bottom lip with my teeth, gently biting the plump skin.

"It's definitely not what I expected." She licks her lower lip, running it along my lips in the process.

"Are you ready for me?" I place a soft kiss on her nose as she nods her head. Lining up my shaft at her wet entrance and pushing forward until I'm filling her full of my hard length. With a sharp hiss, her body tenses, causing me to freeze. "Are you okay?" I gaze into her eyes, waiting for her reply.

"It just caught me off guard. But I'm more than ready now." She lifts her hips to prove her point.

"As you wish," I repeat, causing her to roll her eyes.

I flex my hips, rotating them in and out of her wet heat, causing her to roll her eyes

back in pleasure this time. “Yes, just like that.” Her moans grow louder as her hips thrust faster, matching my rhythm.

Frantic with need, we both move faster and faster. It’s only the thought of making sure she enjoys our first time together that snaps me back to reality. I slip my hand between our bodies, rubbing the little nub hiding in her slick folds with two fingers until she crying out my name and coming around my cock.

“Yes! Ben!” She shouts into the darkness of the room as I release stream after stream of my seed into her body. “That wasamazing.” She holds me tight as I roll over, changing places with her as I keep her tucked to my chest and my cock buried deep inside her.

“Rest now. We have a lifetime to make love,” I say, kissing the top of her head. “I love you, Emma.”

“I love you, too, Ben.” she says with a yawn, snuggling deeper into my embrace, making me curse the last four years we missed out on this.

My eyes flutter shut as sleep takes over me, but while most people dream of happiness and good things at night, mine are filled with the perfect murder mystery storyline for the first time in a long while. All thanks to the beauty in my arms that broke through my writer’s block and my stubborn heart.

Chapter six

Emma

“Ben?” I reach behindme, searching for the man I spent the last few hours making love to, only to find the sheets cold and Ben nowhere to be found.

Deciding to search the house for him, I leave the bed and grab one of his shirts from the closet. The soft cotton of his T-shirt slides across my body, and even though the shirt is clean, it still carries a faint scent of leather and cloves that reminds me of a classic novel and Ben.

I walk barefoot through the dark house with ease since I spent most of my summers going between this house and the main house. I find Ben feverishly typing on his laptop like a madman possessed.

He's so focused on his work that he doesn't notice me approaching. I smile to myself, imagining a future where I sit and read while he writes the next best-selling thriller in our cozy home office, with our kids napping in the nursery.

Curious about what he's writing, I move closer to his desk, sneak a quick glance over his shoulder at his laptop, and read along as he types. I'm impressed by the details and storyline of his book, so much so that I stay rooted behind him, just as engrossed in his writing as he is, until the story unfolds and I realize he just described me as the serial killer.

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The scene I just finished reading vividly described the night we spent together, including the diamond and sapphire engagement ring. I glance at my left hand, staring at the ring, wondering if it is his grandmother's ring or just some prop he uses on women when he has writer's block.

I shake my head to clear my thoughts and quietly step back from Ben, leaving him to his writing, realizing I don't really know him at all. Sure, he was my teacher for four years, and we talked during class and sometimes after class. But never about anything important. I didn't even know he was a famous author.

My head is spinning with so many thoughts that I forget where I'm stepping, and I trip over the coffee table, ending up on the hardwood floor after stubbing my big toe. "Shit!" I curse, grabbing my foot in pain as I scramble to stand.

"Emma, what are you doing awake? I thought you'd still be in bed at this hour." His tone is full of love, and I curse myself for ever doubting him, but I have to know the truth.

"I-I couldn't sleep. I noticed you weren't in bed, so I decided to look for you."

"Sorry for leaving you alone in bed. But when inspiration hits, I have to write." His smile is sweet, a stark contrast to the man who only moments ago typed a story about me being a serial killer.

"So, is that what you think of me, or did you use me for inspiration for your book?" I nod at his laptop. "That I'm serial killer material."

A look of understanding replaces the confusion on his face as he walks to the bookshelf and pulls out three books. “You’ve been the inspiration for all of my books. In this one, you were the detective who fell in love with the serial killer—you held his heart and his fate in your hands.” He sets the book on the coffee table. “In this book, you were the wife of the serial killer who helped cover his tracks.” He sets that book down on top of the first book. “And in this one, you were the spunky sidekick who was the one who actually solved the murders.” He sets the last book on top of the other two.

“What about that one?” I point to his laptop, stunned at learning I’ve been his muse all these years.

“In my latest thriller, you're a college student madly in love with her professor. But he harbors darkness inside him, and you are his bright spot until he discovers you're just as dark as he is.”

“Wait, so in the book we’re both serial killers? Cool. Not that I would ever kill anyone,” I add quickly, because I can’t even kill anything, let alone a person. I might talk a good game about fishing, but I’m more of a catch-and-release kind of fisherman.

“Well, yes. Are you okay with that? And for the record, I’ve never killed anyone or even wanted to, for that matter.”

“That’s good.” I giggle, realizing this whole conversation is off the wall. “I’m sorry I doubted you. I’m just not good with relationships.”

“We’ll figure it out together.” He kisses my ring finger, then swoops me into his arms again and carries me back to bed with the promise of a future full of love and happiness.

Epilogue - Emma

Five Years Later

“Are you sure your grandma will be okay with all the kids staying over?” My husband of four years worries over our three children and grandma.

I glance out the window at the main lake house, filled with light and laughter. “Her and grandpa will be just fine. Besides, the twins have passed the terrible twos, and Darcy will put them in their place if they act up.”

We named our daughter Darcy after the fictional character who brought Ben and me together. But our Darcy is stronger than any fictional character. At four years old, she protects her little brothers, mainly from themselves. But she loves harder and with all her heart.

“If you say so.” Ben keeps his eyes fixed on the window, watching for any sign of distress from his children or grandparents.

“Besides, we have another number one best-selling book to celebrate.”

Ben retired from teaching to focus entirely on his writing career, which has definitely paid off. He is now the best-selling author of all time across all genres.

I teach part-time English Literature at the local high school while raising our kids and still finding time to act out scenes for Ben’s novels—not the killing parts, but the sex scenes, since he’s become just as well known for the thriller aspects of his books as he is for the smut.

“And just how do you plan to celebrate Mrs. Simpson?” Ben shifts his gaze from the window to the tiny string bikini I’m wearing.

It's not the same one from our first summer together, since I'm a size larger than I was before, after having three kids. But it still lights up Ben's eyes like a Christmas tree.

"I was thinking we could play mermaid and sea creature."

"Is that a hint that you want me to write monster smut now, wife?" His hands wrap around my bare waist as he pulls me in close for a kiss.

"Maybe." I shrug before giving in to the kiss and thanking my lucky stars for that one sizzling summer when Ben and I claimed each other for a lifetime in this very lake house.

-The End-

My Recluse Valentine

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Blossom

It's Valentine's Day. Love is in the air, and so are snowflakes—not the light, fluffy ones that were falling earlier when I first started my trek up the mountain in my trusty pink van to deliver Valentine's flowers to people lucky enough to have a loved one willing to pay the outrageous prices charged on a day meant for love.

No matter how hard I try to keep my prices down, the high demand for flowers on Valentine's Day drives up the amount I have to pay my distributor, which trickles down to my customers. The least I can do is drive through a little snow to make sure their flowers arrive for this special day.

If only it was a little snow.

My windshield wipers can barely keep up with the heavy, wet snow. Don't even get me started on where the road ends and the shoulder begins. I'll be lucky to make it back to town without getting stuck in a ditch. It's good that my cat Milo joined me on this journey instead of staying back at the flower shop like he normally does. Not that I want him to be stranded with me, but at least I'm not alone on Valentine's Day.

I left my flower shop, Where Hope Blossoms, in the more than capable hands of my assistant, Sienna. Usually, I would have one of the two teenage boys I hired to deliver the flowers, but with the snow and winding mountain roads, I thought it best to make these deliveries myself.

Besides, I'm not sure how much longer I could stand watching Sienna's self-proclaimed bodyguard, Wyatt, hover around her all day, growling at every man from

ages fifteen to ninety-five that she was his every time they got too close to her.

What would it be like to have a man so in love with you he would be that possessive?

Sienna is a fool for not agreeing to date Wyatt, but that's her story to tell, not mine.

This town is filled with handsome, possessive mountain men. Why does the one I want, have to be such a recluse? Chance only comes into town every few weeks for supplies. I'm almost positive he has a wife or a girlfriend living with him—he stops by my shop every time he's in town for a bouquet. He was in only a few days ago, so I won't see him for a while.

My heart races at the thought of his big, muscular body with the tattoo sleeve on his left arm. He pushed up his sleeves the last time he was in my shop, and I almost melted on the spot when I got a glimpse of the corded veins running through his ink and how I wanted to trace them with my tongue.

A slight moan escapes my lips, earning me a grumpy meow from Milo. He glares at me from his spot on the passenger seat, riding shotgun in his new cat car seat. "Sorry, buddy." I take my right hand off the wheel, only long enough to run my hand over his head and down his back. "I'll make this quick. And we'll be back home in no time." I promise my cat before my thoughts wander back to Chance.

Needing a break from those dangerous thoughts, since there's no point in lusting after someone I can't have, I pop an old CD from one of my favorite classic groups, ABBA, into my van's CD player, another perk of my trusty old van. As luck would have it, the first song that plays is "Take a Chance on Me."

Perfect. Now, all I can think about is Chance taking a chance on me if he ever leaves his wife or girlfriend because, of course, I'd be the first in line. "Yeah, right." I snort, disturbing Milo again.

If his glare shows his disapproval of my snorting, I might as well plan on being utterly alone tonight. "You know what, Milo? It's Valentine's Day today, and we are both single. I, for one, am going to embrace my status." Ignoring Milo, I crank up the music and belt out the lyrics as loud as I can, wiggling my hips in my seat as I bob my head to the beat.

Feeling light and carefree, I glance at Milo's still disapproving stare as I sing along to the ba ba ba's. I take my eyes off the road for a split second to tickle my finicky partner under his chin, hoping to coax him out of his grumpy mood when the van slidessideways. I snap my gaze back to the road, grabbing the steering wheel with my right hand to correct the slide of the van, but I'm too late as the van slides headfirst into a snowbank.

"Holy crap, Milo. Are you okay?" I check on Milo first. A giggle escapes my mouth at the "WTF" look he is giving me. "Sorry about that, Milo." I apologize, hoping to soothe his anger at the sudden crash into a small but still dangerous snowbank. "It's good I bought you that cat car seat." At first, it seemed like a silly purchase, but now that I know Milo is safe and sound, I'm glad I spent the hundred and fifty bucks on it.

After a few strokes of my hand down his head and back, Milo relaxes back into his car seat, dismissing me with a flick of his tail.

"Let's see if I can get us out of this mess." I put the van in reverse, gently stepping on the gas pedal, only to have my wheels spin helplessly from side to side, digging the van further into the snowy ditch. "Well, shoot. That didn't work." I take my foot off the gas pedal and put the van back into park.

My next option is to call Bernie, the local tow truck driver, to see if he can pull me out of the ditch so I can make my final flower delivery for the day to Mrs. Nelson. She and her husband are in their late eighties. Mr. Nelson called into my shop to order the flowers since they don't get into town often anymore. With their age and the fact that they live high in the mountains, it's hard for them to make the drive into

town. Most folks help deliver their groceries and other supplies, so they don't have to make the journey. Chance is the only person who lives higher in the mountains than they do.

The flowers!

My thoughts are interrupted by Mrs. Nelson's bouquet of a dozen red roses in the back of my van. The classic Valentine's gift for their classic love story—high school sweethearts, married seventy years and counting.

After a quick glance in the back of my van, I breathe a sigh of relief at the still-secured vase of roses tied to the bolted-down racks I had installed into the van for deliveries. Now, I need to figure a way out of the snowy ditch to deliver the flowers and get home for my own Valentine's romantic comedy movie night with Milo.

I take my phone from the cup holder, only to find no signal. "Just great." I push the driver's side door open and step out, only to sink into knee-deep snow. "Even better." I huff as I stomp my way out of the ditch onto the road where the snow is only ankle deep, I hold my phone out at arm's length, and spin around in a circle, searching for that elusive cell tower signal.

"Find what you're looking for, Blossom?" A deep, sexy voice says from somewhere behind me, causing me to jerk in surprise. Where did he come from? My feet fly out from under me as they tangle in my haste to turn around to see if it truly is the face of the person whose voice keeps me up at night fantasizing about things no virgin should fantasize about.

I tumble to the ground, the soft blanket of snow cushioning my fall as my legs with white leggings covered in tiny red hearts that I thought were perfect for the holiday and the cute red tulle tutus skirt, which I also thought would be fun for the holiday, part in an invitation I've never given anyone before.

I prop myself up on my elbows to get a better look at my savior. "Chance," I say in a husky voice I barely recognize. "Can you help me get off...I mean, out? Can you help me get my van out of the ditch?" I scramble to my feet, my cheeks hot with embarrassment over my slip of the tongue.

Chance reaches his large hands out to help steady me. "I can help you do both."