



Hitch Me (Kingridge Ranch #6)

Author: *Elsie James*

Category: Romance

Description: Enemies to Lovers, Secret Identity, Unmasking the Podcaster

Geoffrey

Hosting a goat yoga retreat wasn't exactly part of the Kingridge Ranch facilities plan. Between Danner and my brother's new wives, here we are. It doesn't matter. I won't be distracted. There's an anonymous podcaster in town spreading rumors about my family, and I'm determined to unmask her. But when Brynn Rose walks onto the ranch, she pulls all my attention.

The sharp-tongued stylist from Mane Event stirs up trouble in more ways than one. She's all sass and secrets. She's curves and contradictions. Brynn is way too tempting for a man who's just trying to keep the ranch in one piece. I can tame a wild stallion. But Brynn Rose? She might be the one thing I can't control.

Brynn

Running a goat yoga retreat at Kingridge Ranch was supposed to be easy. Show up, smooth things over, and get some good press for all involved. Instead, I'm stuck working side by side with Geoffrey Kingridge, the charming cowboy who somehow got hotter and more aggravating since high school.

Now we're tangled up in hay bales, goat leashes, and tension that could snap at any second. He flirts like a man who's never done it before. He's awkward, honest, and so damn sincere it makes my knees weak. But I know who's behind the mic of that podcast. If the truth comes out, I might lose everything... including him.

The Kingridge brothers are ranching royalty. But even money, power, and influence can't buy you love.

Welcome to Sagebrush Creek, where the gossip is hot, and the sweet tea is ice cold. Join this pack of cowboys as they uncover family secrets, fight for the curvy women they love, and prove that the best guys come with big packages. This series promises to make you laugh, swoon, and grab your boots for life on the ranch.

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

BOOTS AND BITCHING PODCAST

What's shaking, Sagebrush Creek? Your favorite boots-on-the-ground bitch is back with another pour of piping-hot tea. Y'all trust me, this cup is steeped in scandal.

So grab your drink, slip off those dusty boots, and settle in, because the drama around here ages better than a barrel of bourbon.

First up, we're headed to my favorite destination.

I knew them Kingridge boys couldn't keep quiet for long.

But today we're talking about good old Geoffrey.

He might wear the calm, cool, collected crown, but honey, the man couldn't pick a woman if you handed him a lineup and a detailed instruction manual.

Remember when I mentioned that little cheating scandal a while back?

I'm not one to gossip. But sugar, this isn't just a whisper on the wind anymore.

It's been confirmed with a capital C. Geoffrey's ex didn't just wander off.

She packed up her dignity, her lipstick, and her morals, then walked right into someone else's bed. And stayed there. Oof.

Now I'm not saying the man doesn't deserve love, Lord knows we all do. But maybe

he needs to stop dating women who list "chaos" and "daddy issues" as their primary love languages.

He's the only one of two Kingridge brothers left unmarried.

Geoffrey and Holden's bachelor windows are slamming shut faster than the Methodist church doors during a tornado warning.

Tick-tock, cowboys. The cowgirls in this town are saddling up to compete for the final spots in the Kingridge dynasty.

Speaking of chaos, Patty June is out and about again.

She's swishing around town like she owns half of it and has a lease on the rest. But a little birdy told me that she's been banned from the library's book club for turning their Jane Austen discussions into her own personal matchmaking service. Girl, this ain't "Farmer Wants A Wife."

And let's not even start on what went down at Bingo Night. All I'll say is this... if you hear yelling, smell industrial-strength hairspray, and see someone wielding a dauber like a weapon, it's best to clear the premises immediately. Old large Marge ain't playing.

Now onto the biggest shocker of all... There's nothing but radio silence from Mayor Randolph Bellcourt. I know, I know. I gasped too. But it seems ever since his darling daughter and his ex-wife tangled themselves into the Kingridge family tree, our beloved mayor's been oddly... domesticated.

Y'all know I've got my ear to the ground. But I tell you, there ain't nothing to hear. No backdoor deals, no dramatic speeches at town hall meetings, not even a late-night "private consultation" with a questionable constituent.

Maybe it's just the calm before the storm, but I've lived in this town long enough to know one thing... When Randolph Bellcourt goes quiet, something big is brewing.

The rest of y'all can pretend everything's picture-perfect in our little slice of paradise. But let me remind you, I see the cracks in the fresh paint. Lord knows I see the lipstick stains on the starched collars.

You keep living your country life and I'll keep loving every minute of it. I promise you this, I don't miss a damn thing. Until next time, stay salty, stay shady, and stay tuned.

This is your favorite bitch with boots on the ground, signing off.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

brYNN ROSE

"Mother, I'm not here collecting content.

I'm setting up a relaxing retreat. With goats!

" I practically shriek into my phone. My voice ricochets as my boots crunch against the gravel path. Red clay dust kicks up with every step and it swirls around my ankles. It's like even the ground itself is overwhelmed by her ridiculousness.

But this isn't anything new. On the other end of the line is small-town celebrity, former pageant queen, full-time tornado, and my endlessly exhausting mother, Brandi Rose.

She rattles on about camera crews and the necessity of filming only during golden hour.

Apparently, baby goats don't have the right bone structure for harsh midday lighting.

She continues. "And none of them, not a single one, better faint. I'm not having a fainting goat throwing its body around in the back of the segment..."

I groan and rub my temple. "Right, Mom. Soft light, perfect filters, goats bathed in cinematic glow. Got it. I need to go."

Of course, she doesn't stop talking. But as I round the corner of the barn, her voice suddenly sounds a million miles away.

The view hits me like a surprise embrace from the past. The scent of sun-warmed cedar. The long stretches of fencing that frame the fields. The way the light pools between the trees. It's been a long time since I've been out at King Ridge Ranch. But the memories rush in like I never left.

Growing up in the country was messy and magical.

I can't help the soft smile tugging at my lips.

But you can't grow up in Sagebrush Creek with the Kingridge brothers without spending at least a few wild nights out here. Most of the time they end up barefoot, a little buzzed, and somehow in the bed of a rusted-out pickup. I'd bet half the county probably lost their virginity under these stars.

Not me though, my mother made sure I knew better.

"Are you listening?" Mom's sharp voice slices through my nostalgia.

"Yes," I say, tone clipped. "I have three days. It'll be perfect. I have it handled." I don't wait for her next critique. "Talk soon." I hang up.

This was supposed to be a small event for my team at Mane Event Hair Salon.

A few days of fresh air, cozy cabins, and the kind of snuggly goat photos that get shared to every PTA group chat in town.

But now it's morphing into another Brandi Rose Production.

There will be coordinated outfits and makeup touch-ups between yoga poses.

Everything will be coordinated and planned down to the minute.

The worst part is, it's not even real press.

It's just the Channel Seven lifestyle segment sandwiched between Patty June's farm stand bake sale feature and the week's weather report.

But Brandi doesn't care. A spotlight is a spotlight. It's what she lives for.

When she got pregnant with me, Mom's dreams of being the next Meryl Streep died right on the vine.

She gave up everything she ever wanted... Yep, I ruined them before I was even born.

But somewhere in the nine months it took her to return to Sagebrush Creek , a new dream was born.

If she couldn't be famous, then it would be up to me.

No matter that the stage was never my calling.

The torch wasn't so much passed as shoved into my hands.

Any other mother in this town would be thrilled to see her daughter owning a successful salon. Not Brandi Rose. To her, being a hairdresser is settling. It's small-town. It's small potatoes. And she doesn't do anything small.

It's always been just me, Mom, and all of her moods. I've tried to manage them the best I could over the years. It hasn't been easy protecting her image, and trying to make it all look effortless. There are definitely a few cracks in my foundation from the weight of her expectations.

But today I'm setting up a photoshoot on a ranch I've known my whole life. I've survived worse. And at least this time, I have goats.

Kingridge Ranch's marketing manager, Priya, warned me over the phone that the original goat pens weren't exactly the Pinterest-worthy backdrop I had in mind. I walk past the disheveled goat pen that was once home to the infamous Thrusty the Goat. He's apparently on the run right now. It's a scary thought for anyone bending over to tie a shoe. He's left behind an empty enclosure that looks like a crime scene.

Rustic is what Priya called it. That is ranch-speak for cobwebs and questionable smells. She offered up the newly cleared field behind the Bareback Haven Day Spa instead. She said it'd be a more suitable option.

The woman wasn't kidding.

As I round the bend, the view unfolds like something straight off a romance novel cover. The golden wheat fields in the distance sway and shimmer like they're dancing. The sky is that impossibly big Texas blue and the warm sun casts everything in a dreamy gold light.

The wind whips my blonde hair across my face as I take it all in... And then I promptly do a double take.

Because there, in the middle of the freshly fenced-in goat pen, are two of the infamous Kingridge brothers. Upside down. Handstands. They are doing actual handstands as grown men... Ranchers nonetheless. I bite back my laugh when I realize I'm witnessing a classic Kingridge pissing contest.

Side by side, two burly cowboys balance with their dusty boots pointed at the sky. Their thick arms are locked in place/ Their flannel shirts droop toward their shoulders to reveal chiseled torsos and the kind of abs that would make even a Hemsworth

brother jealous.

Even though I've known these guys all my life, I let my jaw drop open and gawk at the sight. Who wouldn't? Sweat glistens on exposed skin. I can see every defined muscle working to maintain the position. It's impossible to look away.

One of them shifts slightly, and the movement makes his abs ripple in a way that sends heat pooling low in my belly. My heart stalls in my chest. Like, literally skips a beat and then fumbles to restart itself.

The other adjusts his grip. His biceps flex and bulge. Suddenly I'm having very inappropriate thoughts about what those strong hands could do when they're not planted firmly on the ground. Sweet Jesus, it's hot out here.

I shamelessly take in the way their jeans are belted low on their hips.

Thank God that there isn't anyone out here to watch me unravel.

There's no mistaking that it isn't the Texas sun that's making me flush.

It's the sight of all that raw, masculine power on display. I blow out a breath and collect myself.

I fan myself with my free hand. I've spent too much time cooped up in that salon.

It's only taken five minutes here and all of a sudden I remember exactly why teenage Brynn Rose used to have very detailed fantasies about one of the Kingridge cowboys.

Now I'll be here for a week. I've got to get it together.

Then another, more terrifying thought strikes me. Please, Lord, don't let one of these

two be Geoffrey. Because if it is, I'm in serious trouble. The kind of trouble that involves forgetting why I've kept my distance for years.

"Y'all are gonna hurt yourselves," I call out as I take a step toward the pen.

At the sound of my voice, the guys topple into each other.

They tangle into each other. There's a storm of pushing and shoving as they find their footing. I hear a few muffled insults too. But when they get to their feet, there's no mistaking which of the brothers I'm looking at.

On one side is Bowen. He's harmless, an older brother type, always has been.

But beside him is Geoffrey and that makes it hard to breathe.

Shit.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

brYNN ROSE

"Dammit, Brynn Rose, I almost had him this time." Geoffrey's eyes flash and his smile turns up at the corners in that way that used to make my teenage heart stutter.

I remember in an instant why I spent so many years secretly obsessed with this man.

You can't buy good taste. As it turns out, I've always had it.

Well, maybe not in my Nick Carter phase.

That didn't age well. But my Geoffrey Kingridge era, that was spot on.

His charm. His muscles. The way he can't stop his eyes from raking up and down my body like he's got every right to look. It's intoxicating.

"He didn't have anything," Bowen adds with a laugh, dusting off his jeans. "He's been out here trying to get himself killed for the past hour."

"We're all out here trying to keep your wife happy," Geoffrey rolls his eyes, shooting his brother a look.

"Hey, what Priya wants, Priya gets." Bowen chuckles and tips his hat toward me. "I'll leave you to turn this place into whatever goat yoga is supposed to be. See ya, Brynn."

"See you Bowen." I turn back to Geoffrey just in time to see him peel his sweat

soaked shirt off his glistening body.

“Looks like you boys have been working up quite a sweat,” I say, trying to keep my voice casual even though my body is responding to his proximity like a live wire.

"All that... exertion. Trying to win the Kingridge Cup? "

“No, that’s already on my mantle. Won it off Alex over at Pa’s place the other night.

” Geoffrey's grin turns wicked. “Besides, what you saw wasn't exertion.

That was just a warm-up. When I really exert myself.

..” He steps closer, close enough that I can see the mischief dancing in his dark eyes.

"Well, let's just say it involves a lot more heavy breathing. And it lasts a whole lot longer."

I shake my head with a laugh and take a step back.

He's close... too close. Butterflies flap in my stomach just the way they did back in high school.

Geoffrey and I were friends for a long time.

If I'd let him, we would've been way more than friends, at least for one night.

But I kept my distance. It wasn't what Mom wanted for me.

She wanted something more. She wanted something bigger than a small-town romance with a cowboy who'd never leave Sagebrush Creek.

The ghost of a smile tugs at the corner of his mouth. “Should’ve known you’d be the reason we’re out here making fools of ourselves... with goats, no less.”

I tilt my head, feigning innocence. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

He smirks, slow and sexy as hell. “Just saying, you’ve got to be the only person in this world with a habit of dragging me into situations where I end up sweaty and slightly humiliated.

I haven’t forgotten you making me audition for that play or the matching denim dress and tux you had us wearing to prom. ”

“Please. You volunteered to wear that. You knew Justin and Brittany were setting trends.” I shake my head as the memories flood back to me. “And just so you know, I had no idea you’d be the one helping get this going. I didn’t exactly lure you here with promises of wine and foot rubs.”

He steps closer, the space between us crackling. “If you had, I might’ve shown up earlier. But there’s something in it for me too. So I ain’t mad.”

I swallow hard, my pulse tripping over itself. “What’s that?”

He leans in, voice dropping. “A chance to watch you bend in ways that are going to haunt me tonight.”

Heat flares in my cheeks and rushes lower into my stomach. “You’re ridiculous.”

“Maybe.” His gaze lingers on my mouth. “But I’m not wrong. Let’s do this then, girl.”

The way he says it has me backing up a step like I forgot what air tastes like. I have

to force myself to turn away.

"Right," I murmur. "Let me just grab a few things from my car... before I start agreeing to things I definitely shouldn't."

"What do you need?" His eyebrows furrow as he glances toward my SUV.

"Props, mats, signage, you know, just the essentials. Oh, and a speaker so we can listen to some music while we set up. Don't worry, I won't force you to listen to any pop. You can choose." I start toward the car and Geoffrey keeps pace with me.

"As long as it isn't that damned podcast, I'm fine with anything you want to hear."

I stop. My blood runs cold as I turn to look up at him. "What?"

"Oh, don't act like you haven't heard that damn thing. Some asshole coming after my family with a robot voice and insider knowledge that's way too accurate for comfort. I'm done with it. Before I was put on this goat yoga project all I was doing was finding the face behind the voice."

"Boots and Bitching?" The words taste like ash in my mouth. "Come on, it's just fun right. No one takes it seriously."

"I do. Thanks to whoever's behind that piece of trash, the whole world knows I got cheated on." His jaw tightens. For a split second, Geoffrey's easy charm drops away to reveal something raw and hurt underneath.

My stomach twists into knots. "I was sorry to hear that happened to you."

"Yeah, well, it's what I get for thinking I needed to settle down just because my brothers have." He shrugs off the conversation as he moves toward my car. "Pop the

trunk."

Guilt threatens to eat me alive. As Geoffrey starts unloading my supplies, I can't stop my heart from racing. But now it's for a totally different reason.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

GEOFFREY

It's been three days of working alongside Brynn Rose in this goat pen and I think I might be losing my damn mind. I can't take my eyes off her. Hell, I never could.

"Hand me that rope, would you?" She calls out, stretched up on her tiptoes trying to secure a banner to the top rail of the fence. Her shirt rides up just enough to show a sliver of smooth skin on her round curves. The sight has me forgetting what the hell I'm supposed to be doing with my hands.

"Got it." I move behind her. I'm close enough to catch the scent of her shampoo. It's something sweet and familiar that makes me want to bury my face in that cascade of long hair.

When I reach over her to tie off the rope, my chest brushes against her back. I swear I feel her shiver and I know that this electricity between us isn't just me. My hands work the knot while my mind wanders to other uses for rope.

I settle on an image of myself binding those delicate wrists above her head while I explore every inch of skin she's been hiding under her clothes. The thought sends blood rushing south and my manhood pulsates in response. I have to shift my stance to hide the evidence of exactly what direction my thoughts have taken. I might be desperate for her, but I'm not a fucking creep.

"You're good with knots," she breathes, her voice a little husky.

"I'm good with my hands in general," I murmur against her ear, letting the double

meaning hang between us. "Lots of practice working with... difficult things that need a gentle but firm touch."

She turns in my arms. We're face to face with barely an inch between us for what feels like the millionth time in our lives.

Her pupils dilate. Her lips part slightly.

When her tongue darts out to wet her bottom lip, I nearly groan out loud.

Brynn Rose has been torturing me since we were in high school.

"Geoffrey," she whispers. My name on her lips sounds like the sweetest kind of sin.

"Yeah?"

"We should probably..." She trails off.

But we aren't kids anymore and I'm not letting her off the hook that easily.

"Should probably what?" I ask, my hands settling on her hips, thumbs tracing small circles through the denim. "Because I can think of a lot of things we probably should do."

Her eyes flash up to mine. Then she steps back.

Brynn Rose creates that familiar distance between us and red flags go off somewhere deep inside of me.

I hate that practiced smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes.

It makes something sharp twist in my gut.

It's the same smile my ex used to give me when she was already planning her exit but didn't want me to know it yet.

She shakes her head and I watch her rebuild her walls in real time. "We should probably get to it."

"Yeah, probably."

I always thought I'd be one of the first of my brothers to get married.

I'm a wife-guy with no wife. But dammit if I'm not the worst picker of women in the whole family.

Well, Pa might be worse. I don't have any random secret kids running around.

But I've got to be at least second in line for the title.

I watch Brynn Rose smooth her hair and check her phone. She's doing anything to avoid eye contact. I realize that this is how it always starts for me. The careful distance. The polite deflection. The slow retreat. Waking up to the whole world knowing what an idiot you are on a podcast.

My connection with Brynn doesn't feel like anything I've ever experienced.

I want to believe that Brynn Rose is different and that the way her breath caught when I touched her was real...

But I've been wrong before. Dead wrong. And the cost of being wrong again might be more than I can afford. It's probably for the best that she keeps her distance.

"Geoffrey?" Brynn's voice cuts through my spiraling thoughts. "You okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Yeah girl, just thinking," I say, forcing a smile.

She studies my face for a long moment. I wonder whether she can tell that I'm already bracing for impact. I'm already preparing for the moment she decides I'm not enough.

"What are you thinking about?" she asks quietly.

You. Us. How history has a way of repeating itself, especially when you're stupid enough to hope it won't.

"What are you, my therapist? Have you been talking to Danner?" I let out a humorless chuckle. "Come on, these goats ain't gonna build this backdrop themselves."

Without another word, we get back to work.

I've never been more sure of the fact that having Brynn Rose here is a dream and a nightmare rolled into one. She's sexy as hell. Always has been. But she's kept herself at arm's length since I've known her. That hasn't changed one bit either.

Maybe that's for the best.

Letting someone in gives them a better shot at destroying you. I've had enough destruction to last a lifetime. It's better to keep my guard up. Love and lies can look identical from the outside. I can't trust myself to know the difference.

Brynn Rose knows me. But I sure as hell only know parts of her. I watch her drag a hay bale across the pen. I rush to help her even though she's too stubborn to ask for

help.

We keep at it until the sound of tires crunching on gravel catches my attention.

A pearl white Cadillac pulls across the gravel, onto the grass, and drives right up to the fence line. I don't need to see the driver to know exactly who it is. The car door slams with the kind of dramatic flair that could only belong to one person in this town.

Brynn Rose exhales with a huff. "Mom, hi."

She immediately runs a hand down the back of her head and smooths her hair.

Then Brynn Rose makes her way toward the Cadillac.

I watch her entire demeanor shift. The confident woman who was just flirting with me over rope knots transforms into someone smaller and even more careful, if that's possible.

"Brynn Rose, what is this background?" Brandi Rose emerges from the car like she's stepping onto a red carpet instead of a dusty ranch.

She gestures wildly at the goat pen. Her collection of gold bangles catch the sunlight.

"This isn't going to work at all. I thought you were on top of this situation. "

"She's done an excellent job." I take a step forward instinctively. I'm ready to put myself between Brynn Rose and whatever verbal assault is coming her way.

"It's okay." Brynn Rose nods as she brushes past me with a subtle shake of her head.

"Thank you."

Every protective instinct I have is screaming at me to intervene. But I get the message loud and clear. This isn't my fight. So I do the only thing left for me to do. I back off and let them handle their family drama.

Watching the careful dance between Brynn Rose and her mother's moods is a painful sight. I figure it's another reason I probably shouldn't be pursuing Brynn Rose.

Imagine having Brandi Rose as a mother-in-law. The woman treats her daughter like a personal assistant. I don't think I could take it watching someone treat my girl this way on the regular. It's killing me now.

To take my mind off the shit show unraveling in front of me, I pull out my phone.

I turn my attention back to the other task at hand and scroll through our local Facebook group.

Nothing stays a secret in this town. There have to be clues about the identity of that damned Boots and Bitching podcast host.

I flip open my notes app and review what I have so far.

The voice is definitely disguised. Some kind of filter or modulator that makes it impossible to tell if it's male or female.

The insider knowledge is too detailed to be from an outsider.

This person lives here, works on the ranch, or at the very least grew up here.

They know about family dynamics that aren't exactly public knowledge.

They know about business dealings that happen behind closed doors.

They seem to have a particular fascination with my family's personal lives.

None of it amounts to much of anything concrete. But in Sagebrush Creek, it seems impossible that this monster of a podcaster could be hiding in plain sight. Yet here we are.

"Geoffrey!" Brynn Rose's voice cuts through my thoughts. When I look up, I see Brandi Rose has retreated to her Cadillac.

"Everything okay?" I ask, though the tight expression on Brynn's face tells me it's anything but.

She forces a smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes. "Just peachy. If you have a minute, we are ready to put some muscle behind these goat-proofing modifications."

"Anything for you." I flash her a cheesy smile.

And just like that, we're back to pretending that the tension between us is only about livestock management and yoga props. We work from a checklist while Brandi Rose sits in her air conditioned car.

She emerges when the sunsets... And that's when Choke makes his move.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

brYNN ROSE

I should have warned her about Choke the Chicken.

The thought crosses my mind just as Mom steps out of her air-conditioned sanctuary. Her gold bangles jingle as she surveys our work with the kind of critical eye she usually reserves for hotel housekeeping.

She's wearing white linen pants and a silk blouse that probably cost more than most people's car payments. It's completely impractical for a ranch, but that's Mom. She's always dressed like she's expecting photographers to materialize out of thin air.

"Hmm... This is better, bless your hearts. I can still see quite a few areas of opportunity?—"

And that's when Choke makes his entrance.

The rooster comes around the corner of the Bareback Haven Spa like a feathered missile.

His red comb stands at full attention. His wings are spread wide in full attack mode.

He's got his beady black eyes locked on Mom like she's personally offended his entire bloodline. The ironic part is, she probably has.

"What is this free range—" Mom starts to say, but Choke doesn't give her time to finish.

He launches himself at her with extended talons and a battle cry. My eyebrows shoot up in surprise. It's clear he views her designer outfit as a direct challenge to his authority over this ranch.

"This is absurd. Y'all get control of your damn animals." Mom shrieks and stumbles backward as Choke lands on her shoulder.

Her pristine outfit is stained red in an instant and bits of clay cling to the fabric.

But Choke is relentless. He pecks at her perfectly styled hair.

She flails and flings her arms wildly in response.

It occurs to me that Choke might be the only one in this town with enough bravado to take on my mother.

It's a horror show and I can't look away. I know I should help. I should rush over there and rescue my mother from the wrath of an overly protective rooster. I will my feet to move, but something in me keeps them cemented to the red clay.

Mom's eyes lock on me. They're laced with pure panic. I watch the scene unfold and feel something bubble up from deep in my chest... Don't laugh Brynn. Please, don't laugh. I turn away from her and lock eyes with Geoffrey.

"Dammit, Choke." His smile makes the corner of his eyes crinkle.

He has no such problem with being frozen. In a wildly athletic feat, Geoffrey leaps over a haybale. It's not human. It's like Colton's fence jump from the Bachelor. Smooth, controlled, and such an overreaction.

"Wow," I murmur. When Geoffrey passes me on his way to save the day, I lean in

toward him and whisper, "Don't be too upset with him. I think Choke can sense evil."

"Hey, you said it," he winks at me.

He hesitates for a moment and we take in the sight together. Geoffrey folds his arms across his chest. "She's pretty agile, isn't she? I mean for being a woman of a certain age."

That does it. I completely lose it, doubling over with laughter as Mom flails around the car, her pristine outfit getting more disheveled by the second. Choke seems to be having the time of his life. It looks something like a rooster riding a muddy, wildly overdressed, mechanical bull.

"Don't you dare laugh. This is from Talbots!" Mom wails and does some kind of interpretive dance as Choke chases her around the pen. "Do something!"

Mom screams, and that's when Geoffrey and I both spring into action. Unfortunately, we spring in the same direction.

I dart left just as Geoffrey lunges right. It's instant karma when we collide in the middle like a couple of amateur football players. The impact sends us both stumbling. I find myself falling backward with Geoffrey trying to catch me.

His hands grab for whatever they can reach to steady me. And what they reach is... more than a handful.

"Oh!" I gasp as Geoffrey's hands land squarely on my chest.

His eyes go wide as he realizes exactly what he's grabbed onto. "I'm sorry." He pulls his hand away then adds, "kind of."

Before he can finish his non-apology we lose our balance completely.

Geoffrey tries to spin us around so he'll take the brunt of the fall. It's sweet in theory, but disastrous in execution.

We go down in a tangle of limbs. I land on top of him and his hands somehow manage to migrate from my chest to my ass in the process.

"brYNN ROSE!" Mom's voice cuts through our chaotic tumble like a fire alarm.

I look up from where I'm sprawled across Geoffrey's chest to see her standing there with Choke still flapping at her side like the world's most aggressive handbag.

"What in the Lord's name is going on here?" Mom demands a response and gestures wildly at our compromising position.

Choke doesn't love her talking to me like that.

Or maybe he's triggered by the flailing.

Whatever the case, he digs his talons into her calf.

Mom's chaos starts all over again. With Mom occupied, I turn my attention to the fact that Geoffrey's hands are still firmly planted on my backside. All of a sudden I can feel every finger like we've been hitched together.

He's looking up at me with an expression that's equal parts mortified and something else entirely.

"We were trying to help," I say weakly.

“Yes, by dry humping right here out in the open,” Geoffrey adds and his hand cups the curve of my cheek.

“What? No.” Laughter bubbles through me.

“Yes,” he raises his eyebrow with a flirty laugh.

"By groping each other?" Mom shrieks. "In broad daylight? On the ground like a couple of... of..."

"Animals?" Geoffrey suggests helpfully, which makes me snort with laughter despite the fact that I'm probably about to be disowned.

"This is exactly what I was afraid of!" Mom continues, her voice reaching pitches that are probably making bats uncomfortable. "I knew this whole ranch idea was a mistake! The influences here are clearly... OH GOD, IT'S IN MY HAIR!"

Choke has apparently decided that Mom's perfectly coiffed bob is the ideal place to build a nest, and he's going to town with the kind of enthusiasm usually reserved for home renovation shows.

"Okay, okay," Geoffrey says, his hand leaving my ass as he helps me sit up. "Let me handle this."

I get to my feet and he follows. Geoffrey approaches Mom and her feathered tormentor with the kind of calm I definitely don't possess right now. My entire body is still tingling from where his hands were.

"Choke," Geoffrey says in that low, authoritative voice that makes my knees wobble. "Come here, buddy. Leave the fancy lady alone."

The rooster immediately perks up. It's like he's been waiting for Geoffrey to join the chat. He hops down from Mom's head and struts over like he's done absolutely nothing wrong.

In one swift movement, Geoffrey scoops the rooster up and scratches under his chin. "You're done here man, the party is over."

Mom lets out the world's longest exhale. Even though I'm officially entering my twenty-eighth year of life, it still fills me with fear.

She smooths down her destroyed hair with shaking hands.

Her makeup is smudged. Her white outfit is now decorated with dirt, feathers, and what I really hope is just mud.

"That creature is a menace. And this whole situation is completely inappropriate. Brynn Rose, I cannot believe you would allow yourself to be... to be..."

"Tackled by a helpful cowboy?" I don't know what comes over me when I blurt it out.

"Manhandled in public!" She finishes with a scandalized gasp.

Geoffrey clears his throat. "Ma'am, I apologize for the, uh, inappropriate contact. We were just trying to help, and things got a little tangled up."

"Tangled up," Mom repeats flatly. "Is that what we're calling it?"

"Mom, it was an accident," I say, though I'm pretty sure the heat in my cheeks is telling a different story. "We were trying to help and bumped into each other."

“Yes, dry humping happens.” Geoffrey adds, and I choke on a laugh.

"It happens," she echoes, looking between Geoffrey and me like we're exhibits in a museum of moral decay. "Well, let me tell you what's going to happen. I'm going home to shower the poultry... off myself. When I'm done, we're having a serious discussion about boundaries and professional behavior."

I can't help but roll my eyes. "Sure, if you want to."

She stalks toward her Cadillac. I can't believe she let me off that easily. But before she gets in the car, she turns back to us. "And Brynn Rose? We're also going to discuss why you thought it was appropriate to laugh while your mother was being attacked."

The car door slams with enough force to rattle windows three counties over. She goes full on Cruella with a sack of puppies in tow. Mom peels out of the driveway like she's fleeing a crime scene.

Geoffrey and I stand there in the settling dust. We watch her taillights in silence as they disappear down the road. Even Choke seems exhausted. He tucks his head under his shoulder as Geoffrey cradles him like a football.

"Well," Geoffrey says finally. "That was..."

"A nightmare."

"I was going to say entertaining, but a nightmare works too." He grins at me, and despite everything that just happened, I feel that familiar flutter in my stomach. "Your mom's got quite the dramatic flair."

"She's had years of practice," I say, then immediately feel guilty for talking about her

like that. Even if it's true.

The way he's looking at me makes my pulse skip, and I realize we're alone now. Really alone. No angry roosters, no horrified mothers, just us and the golden light of the setting sun.

""For what it's worth," Geoffrey says, his voice going softer, "Choke really does have excellent instincts about people. I hope she doesn't always talk to you like that. You don't deserve?—"

I put my hand on the center of his chest to stop him. "Who's the therapist now?"

He lets out a chuckle. "Okay, got it."

"I should probably go. You want to get on with your night and decompress. Thank you for being so patient today." And kind and sexy and charming.

"Should you go?" Geoffrey asks, taking a step closer. "Because I was thinking you should come up to the barn with me instead. I've got top shelf liquor up there that's just begging to be pulled down."

Despite everything. My better judgment. My mother's warnings. My own carefully constructed walls. I find myself nodding... And so we go.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

GEOFFREY

The more we talk, the more that careful control she's always maintained starts to slip. Her laugh becomes genuine, unguarded. She leans closer when she talks, her hand occasionally brushing mine. And every innocent touch sends electricity racing through my system.

"This place really has gotten a glow up since the last time I was here." Brynn Rose takes another sip of the drink I poured for her.

"I can't believe you even remember the last time you were here," I chuckle. "From what I recall you were face first in the hayloft when we finally found you."

"Shut it." She laughs and it reaches the corners of her eyes.

She launches into a story about the salon and I could stay here all night. I don't know if it's the drinks or the fact that she's grinning up at me from beneath her long lashes, but I want to throw caution to the wind. Hell, I'm in love with this girl and I've got half a mind to tell her.

Before I can make a stupid decision, Brynn's phone starts buzzing on the bar top. The caller ID flashes Mom and I watch her face fall. Anger courses through me.

"I should probably..." she starts, reaching for the phone.

"Don't," I say, but she's already answering.

"Hi, Mom. No, we're not working anymore tonight. The lighting was—" Brynn pinches the bridge of her nose as her mother's voice carries through the speaker, loud enough that I can hear every dramatic inflection.

I signal for her to hang up.

She nods. "Mom, I really can't talk right now." But a minute later she's still holding up one finger and mouthing one minute .

There's more muffled talking from Brandi. Then Brynn Rose's shoulders tense and my girl all but disappears in front of me. I decide I've had enough.

Without giving it another thought, I reach across the bartop. I grab her phone.

"Geoffrey, what are you doing?" Her eyes widen.

I slide it face down across the bar top. The call stays connected. There's something satisfying about Brandi's muffled voice still going. But my gesture works. I have Brandi Rose's full attention.

"She's still on there," Brynn Rose covers her mouth in shock.

"So she is," I growl.

Then I kiss her. Right there at the barn bar, I cut off her protest with my mouth on hers.

The moment our lips touch, everything else ceases to exist. The distant lowing of cattle, the rustle of wind through the rafters, even the hammering of my own heart.

It all fades into nothing. There's only Brynn Rose. She's curvy, warm and finally in

my arms.

She tastes like the drink I made. Her lips are softer than I imagined and I've imagined this moment more times than I care to admit. But somehow the reality is so much better.

Our kiss deepens when she parts my lips with her tongue.

My hands find the small of her back, pulling her closer until there's no space left between us. She fits against me like she was made for this moment. It's like all the years of dancing around each other were just preparation.

Heat spreads through my veins like wildfire, pooling low in my belly and making my head spin.

When we finally break apart, we're both breathing hard. Her eyes are wide and dark, her lips slightly swollen from our kiss. She looks as stunned as I feel, like she's been hit by the same lightning bolt that just rearranged my entire understanding of what a kiss could be.

The kiss feels right in a way I can't explain, in a way that terrifies and thrills me in equal measure. Like every kiss before this was just practice, preparation for the real thing. For her.

A muffled shriek comes from the phone and it breaks the spell. I pull back and stare at the phone across the bartop with flared eyes. But Brynn Rose is only staring at me. Her cheeks are flushed and her eyes are glassy.

"You know what I love about being out here?" she says, gesturing around the bar with her beer bottle. "No one expects me to be perfect. No cameras, no performance, just..."

I lean closer, close enough to catch her chin in my hand all over again. She lets out a soft, breathy little moan that goes straight to my cock. I lean even closer, until my lips are almost brushing her ear. "Just you. Come here."

She slides off her barstool and I pull her to her feet.

Brynn Rose places her hand in mine. The contact sends electricity straight through my entire body.

I lead her to the small open space near the jukebox.

Pulling her close, I sway to whatever slow song is playing.

She fits against me perfectly. It's like she was made for my arms.

When I spin her out and back in, she laughs.

She throws her head back with pure joy and it cracks something wide open inside of me.

This is the Brynn I've been waiting years to see again.

Ten minutes pass and our bodies are pressed together.

My heart is beating hard enough that I can feel hers against my chest. Her lips are parted slightly, and when she looks up at me with those eyes that have haunted my dreams for years, I'm done fighting this.

"Brynn," I say her name like a prayer.

"Yeah?"

"I'm going to kiss you now."

She rises up on her tiptoes and meets me halfway.

Her mouth is soft and sweet. It's everything I remember, but deeper now, hungrier.

She tastes like promises. My hands tangle in her hair.

She makes this little sound in the back of her throat that nearly brings me to my knees.

Our tongues dance and a bulge grows between my legs.

It's a frenzy of push and pull. It's like all the chances we never took and all the time we wasted pretending we didn't want this rolled into one fiery kiss.

"Damn," I breathe against her mouth.

"I know," she whispers back.

My hands roam her curves. I pull her body into mine.

Then she's kissing me again. It's harder this time.

It's like she's trying to make up for fifteen years in fifteen seconds.

I back her up against the jukebox and cage her in with my body.

She doesn't protest. Hell, my girl doesn't miss a beat.

Her hands fist in my shirt. She pulls me closer.

When I trail kisses down her neck, she arches against me.

Slipping my hand down the front of her jeans, I find she's already drenched for me. I trace the length of her slit and rub circles on her swollen nub. The way she comes undone in my arms is breathtaking.

"Geoffrey," she gasps when I find that spot just below her ear that makes her shiver.

"Tell me what you want," I murmur against her skin.

"I want..." She trails off, breathing hard. "I want you to take me home."

Those six words hit me like a lightning strike. I pull back to look at her. I search her face to make sure I heard her right.

"Brynn, are you?—"

"I'm sure." Her hands slide up my chest to cup my face. "I've been sure about you since I was seventeen years old. I was just too scared to do anything about it. I'm done being scared."

Every part of my body ignites and I inch her shirt up over her bra. Then the damn door blows open. Holden and Bowen burst inside. Brynn Rose goes rigid in my arms. I cover her mouth and tug her shirt down with a quiet laugh. I wonder if we can slip out without being seen.

"Talked to Danner about it again today," Holden is saying in a low voice. "She's definitely coming out to the ranch for Christmas."

Brynn Rose looks up at me. I shrug. They haven't seen us. I take her hand and pull her toward the back door.

"This is insane. I can hardly believe it. A fucking sister," Bowen shakes his head.
"After all these years."

I reach the doorknob, but hesitate. Suddenly interested in what my brothers have to say.

Bowen continues, "I'm just putting it together.

It was obvious all along I guess. I just didn't know to look for it.

Her name starts with an E. She's got to be the missing letter in the Kingridge family alphabet.

But I guess we'll find out at Christmas time.

We are about to meet our long lost sister, apparently.

Wait until Sagebrush Creek gets ahold of that news.

Thank god we've got time before anyone finds out.

It might put Pa right over the edge. What would a Kingridge brother even look like if he was a chic... "

My jaw drops open. I've only just recovered from the shock of our half-brother Danner's existence. This can't be happening.

Brynn Rose tugs my hand. Her voice is a whisper, "Come on. Let's get out of here."

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

brYNN ROSE

We step out into the night air and the door closes softly behind us.

The cool breeze is a sharp contrast to the heat still burning through my veins.

Geoffrey laces his fingers through mine and my heart thuds in my chest. I've wanted this man all my life and even still, I never imagined it'd feel like this.

We make it a few feet down the road before I plant my mouth on his all over again. He makes a surprised sound against my lips before his arms come around me. He pulls me flush against his body. This kiss is desperate. It's like we're both done pretending this isn't exactly where we want to be.

"Brynn," he breathes against my mouth and his hands sliding down to grip my hips. "We're in the parking lot."

"I don't care," I whisper back, and I mean it. For once in my life, I don't care who might see or what anyone might think. All I care about is the way he feels pressed against me, solid, warm, and real.

"My truck," he says, his voice rough with want. "It's right there."

I follow his gaze to the white pickup parked under the shadow of an old oak tree. We practically run towards it. Geoffrey opens the passenger door. But instead of helping me in, he backs me up against the side of the cab. His hands brace on either side of my head.

"Tell me to stop," he says, his forehead resting against mine. "Tell me this is crazy and we should go slow."

"It is crazy. But don't you dare stop."

That's all the permission he needs. His mouth crashes into mine again. He kisses me like he's been starving for it. It's like he's been thinking about this moment for as long as I have and the thought makes me ache for him.

When his lips trail down my neck, I let my head fall back against the truck. My breath comes in short gasps. The combination of his mouth and the cool night air on my heated skin is intoxicating.

"Get in the truck," he murmurs against my throat.

I slide into the passenger seat. He's right behind me. When he pulls the door shut, he plunges us into intimate darkness. The cab of his truck smells like leather and his cologne. It feels like I've been transported to another world I never want to leave.

"Come here," he says, reaching for me.

I don't hesitate. I climb over the center console and into his lap, straddling him in the driver's seat. His hands immediately find my waist, steadying me. When I look down at him in the dim light filtering through the windshield, the expression on his face takes my breath away.

His mouth becomes urgent, hungrier, as he works his way back up to capture my lips again.

The kiss is deep and consuming, stealing my breath and replacing it with pure need.

When his hand slides beneath the hem of my shirt, his palm warm against my bare skin, I arch into his touch with a soft moan that seems to echo in the confined space of the truck cab.

My fingers thread through his hair. He cups my face in his hands. His mouth blazes a trail down my throat. I arch into him, gasping as his lips brush that sensitive spot where my pulse hammers against my skin. Geoffrey's firm length springs up beneath me, rock hard. I feel myself melting into him.

His hands slide down my sides with a patience that's both tender and torturous.

He wants to worship every inch of me before claiming what we both know is already his.

His mouth trails lower, and when he places a gentle bite where my neck meets my shoulder, I cry out softly.

The sound seems to unleash something in him, because suddenly his hands are everywhere.

They slide up my ribs and his thumbs brushing over sensitive peaks through lace.

It makes me squirm with need. Then he slips a finger back inside of me.

Every touch leaves me trembling and desperate for more of him.

"Geoffrey," I breathe his name like a prayer, and the sound seems to break whatever restraint he's been clinging to.

"Tell me what you want," he whispers against my ear, his breath hot and making me shiver.

"You," I gasp, my hands fumbling with the buttons of his shirt. "All of you. I've wanted you for so long."

The confession tumbles out before I can stop it. It's raw, honest, and everything I've kept locked away for far too long. Geoffrey pulls back to look at me, his eyes dark with desire and something deeper. It looks like love.

"I'm going to take you home," he says simply, and the words send electricity straight through my core.

I climb off his lap and slide back into the passenger seat.

But my fingers make quick work of unzipping his pants.

His tip is glistening and he's throbbing with anticipation when I take him all the way to the back of my throat.

His muscles clench and he lets out a groan.

I make the five minute drive down a gravel road across the ranch with his dick in my mouth.

We arrive at Geoffrey's tiny cottage on the backside of the ranch and burst through the front door. What follows is a tangle of desperate hands and whispered endearments. Our clothes disappear with an urgency that speaks to years of suppressed longing.

When Geoffrey's fingers trace patterns on my bare skin, I feel like I might combust from the inside out. He takes his time exploring me. His touch is both gentle and possessive. It's like he's mapping territory that's always belonged to him.

Every caress builds the fire higher until I'm trembling beneath him. I'm desperate for more friction, more pressure... more of everything he's willing to give.

"Please," I whisper, not even sure what I'm begging for, only knowing I need him closer, deeper, filling the ache that's been living inside me since I was seventeen.

When he finally presses inside of me, the sensation steals my breath. He fills me completely in a single thrust. My walls stretch around his girth. Every nerve ending I have sings as he begins to move inside of me.

I rock up to meet him. The rhythm we find is slow at first, savoring, but it builds into something more primal as the tension coils tighter between us. I lose myself in the feeling of him and in the way he whispers my name like it's sacred.

He trails kisses down my throat. He licks and suckles at the spots that make me gasp and arch beneath him.

I lose myself completely in the sensation.

His mouth is magic as he hammers into me.

Geoffrey draws sounds from me I didn't know I could make.

The fire ignited inside me that threatens to consume everything in its path.

He keeps me there. Claiming me. Making me his over and over again until I think I might shatter from the intensity. Then my body racks with tremors. Everything around us fades into nothingness.

"Let go," Geoffrey murmurs against my throat, his voice strained with his own need.
"I've got you."

And I do.

Geoffrey thrusts and pushes me into a tidal wave of release.

My body shudders and I let go of fifteen years of careful control.

I let go of every reason I've ever had for keeping him at arm's length.

White hot bliss whips through my body and my voice breaking the silence of the night as pleasure overwhelms every sense. Geoffrey follows me over the edge.

My name falls from his lips as he buries his face in my neck and shoots hot streams into me.

For long moments afterward, we stay tangled together, hearts hammering, skin damp with exertion and satisfaction.

"Damn," he breathes eventually, pressing a soft kiss to my temple.

"Yeah," I agree, still trying to catch my breath. "Damn."

When I finally meet his eyes, the tenderness there takes my breath away all over again. This wasn't just sex. This was everything I never knew I was missing, everything I was too scared to reach for.

I lay in his arms until the sun comes up. And now that I've had a taste, I never want to let it go.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

GEOFFREY

Peeling myself out of bed and away from Brynn Rose is the hardest thing I've had to do in a long time. Last night solidified everything I believed to be true about her. She's it for me. Always has been.

The sun hasn't even kissed the horizon yet, but I'm already out in the field. I'm adjusting fence posts and double-checking every detail of the goat pen setup. Tomorrow's Brynn's big day. I never thought I'd care so much about goats or yoga. But I want everything to be perfect for her.

After last night, I'd move mountains to see that smile on her face. Hell, I'd wrangle every escaped rooster in Texas if it means making her happy. The memory of her in my arms, the way she whispers my name, the trust in her eyes when she finally let those walls down. It was everything.

My phone buzzes in my pocket and I hope it's her. But when I open my phone I find a message from Holden.

Holden: You might want to listen to this... Episode 276: Boots and Bitching Podcast

Me: Nah, I think I'm good

Holden: Listen to it. We have a problem.

My stomach immediately sours at the thought. I've been trying to avoid that poisonous garbage. Being with Brynn Rose makes me care a whole hell of a lot less.

But if Holden's sending it to me, it must be bad.

“Damn, come on man. I can’t even have today. Just today after the best sex of my life.” I grumble to myself and disrupt the morning peace on the ranch. “This better be worth it.

I tap play and lean against the fence post, already dreading what I'm about to hear.

Well, well, well, Sagebrush Creek. Your girl is back with another steaming cup of chaos.

And honey, this batch is extra spicy. Pour yourself something strong because we've got roosters on the rampage, missing goats, and family secrets that'll make your head spin faster than a tornado in a trailer park. Buckle up, darlings.

First up, let's talk about the absolute circus that went down at Kingridge Ranch this week. Picture this, cameras rolling, perfect lighting, and Brandi Rose offering all the glamour to the small town setting.

But some people can’t have nice things. Here's where it gets delicious, sugar. Our big name in a small town screen queen got herself a little surprise visit from Choke the Chicken and it wasn’t the welcome she deserved.

That ornery rooster thinks he runs the place.

And let me tell you, there ain’t a Kingridge in the house that can keep him in line.

Them boys are lucky she’s the forgiving type.

Speaking of missing in action, has anyone seen Thrusty the Goat lately?

That escape artist has been MIA for days now.

Honestly y'all, I don't blame him. If I had to deal with yoga poses and camera crews invading my personal space, I'd probably make a run for it too.

Word is he's been spotted terrorizing folks all over the county, living his best outlaw life. You go, Thrusty. Live free or die hard.

Now, for the tea that's got everyone's tongues wagging... and trust me, this one's piping hot. Y'all remember our newest King Ridge brother, Danner. Well he's officially official. But here's the kicker. I have it on good authority that Danner isn't flying solo in the sibling department.

That's right, darlings. There's a sister.

Her name starts with an E. As in Alexander, Bowen, Callum, Danner...

E-liza. According to my very reliable sources, she's planning a little holiday visit to the ranch come Christmas time. My only question is, what does she want? Here to claim her stake in the Kingridge lineage? Is she settled down? Or maybe she's looking for a cowboy to help sow some wild oats.

Can you imagine? Another Kingridge family member we didn't know existed appearing just in time for the most dramatic season of the year. It's like a soap opera wrapped in a Hallmark movie with a dash of Jerry Springer thrown in for good measure.

Mark my words, Christmas at King Ridge Ranch is going to be more explosive than fireworks at the upcoming Fourth of July party. Speaking of... I hope I'll see y'all there. The annual Kingridge summer bash is just around the corner. I'd bet my biscuits that this year will be the most eventful yet.

Until next time, stay thirsty for the truth or come get you some of this sweet tea. Because in Sagebrush Creek everybody's business is my business. This is your favorite bitch with boots on the ground, signing off.

The detailed account of yesterday's events with the rooster make my blood run cold. There were only a few people who witnessed it. There weren't any ranch hands hanging around... were there? I almost talk myself out of my paranoia.

But it's when the podcaster starts talking about Danner and Eliza that my world tilts sideways.

The phone nearly slips from my hands. Those exact words.

That exact conversation. The people who know about the half sister scandal set to rock Sagebrush Creek to its core are me, Bowen, Holden and... Brynn Rose. I feel sick.

My chest feels like it's caving in. It's her. It's been her all along.

The betrayal hits me like a physical blow. It steals my breath and makes me grab the fence post for support. I trust her. Last night, I gave her everything I have. My entire heart, my faith that she's different from every other woman I've ever known, and my family's secrets.

And she was simply playing the long game. There hasn't been any change of heart. The only reason I got past arm's length is to fuel a fucking podcast. One that she knows I hate. How the fuck can I keep being so very wrong about every woman I choose.

I can hardly breathe. I replay the episode and search my mind for another explanation. But there isn't one. The truth is playing out in front of me whether I like

it or not. I rewind a third time, but I can't hear anything over the roaring in my ears.

I should have known better. I should have remembered that people don't change. Trust is just another word for stupidity. I am apparently the easiest mark in Sagebrush Creek. I lean into the fencepost deflated. My mind whips between fury and deflation until there's nothing left in me at all.

The sound of the gate creaking open makes me look up and honestly I'm not sure how much time has passed. But the sun is above me in the sky now, and there she is backlit in silhouette. It could have been a sight from my dreams, but this has been a fucking nightmare all along, I just didn't see it.

Brynn Rose walks toward me with that same soft smile that fools me completely. She's carrying two coffee cups and it looks like she doesn't have a care in the world.

"Morning, cowboy," she calls out, her voice warm with the intimacy we share just hours ago. "Thought you might need some caffeine."

I can't hide the devastation on my face. I know she can see it the moment our eyes meet because her smile falters and her steps slow.

"Geoffrey? What's wrong?"

I hold up my phone, the podcast still playing in the background. "This sound familiar to you?"

She freezes. But I don't miss the way the coffee cups tremble in her hands. "What?"

"The latest episode. Boots and Bitching Podcast. Funny thing... they knew all about the rooster and your mom. So I thought maybe a ranch hand walked by. Hell, maybe they hid in the bushes paparazzi style. But as it turns out, they seem to know an awful

lot about a private conversation that happens last night. A conversation where only four people are present. Eliza. They know her by name. They know that she's coming here for Christmas.

" My voice sounds hollow, even to my own ears.

"My brothers aren't ready to tell a soul.

Want to guess how that information gets out? "

The color drains from her face. A long beat of silence passes between us and it feels like there isn't air out here.

Son of a bitch. She's not even going to try to deny it.

Wow. I'm such an idiot. Then her eyes welled up with tears.

It breaks my heart and I hate that my first instinct is to wrap my arms around her.

"Geoffrey, I can explain?—"

"Can you?" I step closer, and she instinctively steps back. "Because I'm having a real hard time coming up with any explanation that doesn't involve you being exactly what I thought you weren't."

"It's not what you think?—"

"I hope it isn't." The laugh that escapes me is bitter and broken. "Brynn Rose, I trust you. Don't lie. Don't look me in the face and tell me you have nothing to do with that damned podcast unless it's true. Can you promise me? Can you make this make sense in any way that doesn't involve you?"

The silence stretches between us. It's broken only by the distant sound of cattle and I have to avert my eyes.

The longer it takes to come, the more sure I am that her reply is about to destroy me.

When I finally find the strength to look at her again, she's standing there with tears streaming down her face.

Then she topples me over with three small words. "No, I can't."

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

brYNN ROSE

“Turn it off. That podcast is poison.” I snap at our receptionist when I hear the sound of my mother’s robot-altered voice come through the speakers at Mane Event Salon.

Normally work is a safe place for me to decompress, but even the hustle and bustle of this place isn’t helping today. After my fight with Geoffrey this morning, nothing feels right.

I’ve listened to the podcast episode that shattered my world so many times today. I can’t take it for another minute. The thing I can’t figure out is how she knew. I haven’t breathed a word of it and I never would. Especially not to her. It wasn’t my secret to tell.

“Girl, you okay? You’ve been sitting there going on two hours. I gotta go get the kids from MeMaw. But I can see if my baby’s daddy can grab him.” Our receptionist stands with car keys in hand.

“You head on out. I’m doing just fine. Thinking is all.” I try to force a smile.

“Okay you let me know if you change your mind. I’m gonna put everything up for now, but I can come back around if you need something.”

“Thanks, I’m good. Enjoy your night.”

It’s early evening and my client cancelled. Normally I’d head home or get a few things done around the salon. Instead, I’ve been sitting in my salon chair for the past

two hours staring at myself in the mirror.

In my reflection, I see nothing but the devastation in Geoffrey's eyes. The look on his face when he held up that phone is carved into my memory like a scar that'll never heal. Geoffrey is everything I thought he'd be and more. He's charming and confident. He has a way of making everything fun.

Most of all, he sees me as the best version of myself. Or at least he did. I wonder if all of that is gone now? The trust he put in me shattered. He crumbled in real time. His voice broke. His heart broke.

I'm desperate to fix things with Geoffrey. I need to make this right. All of it.

But then I hear that deep inner voice that has never left me. It's become my mantra. If I don't protect her secrets, she'll cut me off. She's all I've got. The thought has been my constant companion for years now. It's only heightened since I first discovered Mom's little side project.

The anonymous podcast has given her the spotlight she craves. But it's built on the bones of other people's private lives. I've been carrying that secret like a stone in my chest.

I've watched her tear apart my neighbors, my friends, and my community.

I've chosen to stay silent because that's what good daughters do. I've always known that if the truth comes out, it'll ruin her. And somehow, that will be my fault. She's never said it directly.

But that's how it works with Brandi Rose.

When things go wrong, she's the victim. That leaves me to be the selfish daughter

who didn't protect her.

When her dreams crumble, it's because I didn't try hard enough to help her achieve them.

When her reputation suffers, it's because I wasn't careful enough with her image.

If anyone ever connected her to the Boots and Bitching Podcast, the fallout would destroy her.

Somehow, she'd make sure it destroyed me too.

I don't want to destroy Mom. She's not perfect, but she did try.

Being my mom simply isn't enough for a woman with dreams far too big for this small town.

She's built something that can be enough.

As flawed as the podcast might be, it belongs to her.

That's why I'm sad that I'm going to have to destroy it.

Ding.

The silver bell above the salon door chimes and I look up to see my mother. Speak of the devil. She glides in like she owns the place. Considering the fact that she helped me get the loan for it, it isn't entirely inaccurate.

"Darling, there you are." She settles into the styling chair next to mine with her usual dramatic flair, practically glowing with satisfaction. "I was hoping to catch you."

"Hi, Mom." My voice comes out flat. I'm already drained of the energy it usually takes to manage her moods.

"I wanted to thank you for the content from last night," she says, examining her nails with studied casualness. "Leaving the phone line open was genius. That family secret was absolutely delicious. My best episode yet."

The forgotten phone. I never thought about it again because by the time I woke up Geoffrey had retrieved it and put it in my folded pile of clothing.

"You stayed on the line." My stomach drops even though I knew this was coming. "Mom, this is a nightmare. You stayed on the line and listened in. Why would you do that? It was none of your business and I didn't know you were still on the line. I wouldn't have done that. Ever."

She meets my eyes in the mirror, her smile sharp with triumph. "The Kingridge family's little sister-secret is out there for everyone to enjoy. You should hear the engagement numbers. People are eating it up. I may run a Meta Ad to it. It's time for the podcast to expand on a national level."

The salon starts spinning around me. Hearing her gloat about using information that came from my night with Geoffrey makes me physically ill.

"You heard the entire, private conversation between brothers and then you broadcast it." My throat threatens to close.

"Every delicious second." Her smile widens. "From your little romantic interlude to those brothers spilling family secrets like they were discussing the weather. It was better than Christmas morning."

She continues, but all I can hear is the casual cruelty in her voice. The way she's

savoring the destruction she's caused. Finally breaks something inside me. For years, I've told myself she was just lost, just hurt, just trying to find her place in the world.

But listening to her gloat about ruining Geoffrey's trust in me is too far. She's exploiting the most intimate moment of my life for content. I finally see her clearly. She's not a wounded dreamer. She's a predator who feeds on other people's pain.

"Geoffrey thinks I betrayed him," I say, my voice barely above a whisper.

"Well, you did provide the information, darling.

Just not intentionally." She waves a dismissive hand. "Besides, men get over these things. Give him a few weeks to cool off. Or consider the fact that I did you a favor. I know you've been pining over him since high school. That's fine.

Sugar, you could do so much better than Geoffrey Kingridge. Always could."

I stand so abruptly that my chair spins. "Mom, I have never met another man who can hold a candle to him. He treats me better than anyone I've ever met. I love him whether you like it or not. And now he'll never trust me again. You've destroyed everything I care about."

She rolls her eyes. "Consider it a blessing and let's find you someone outside of Sagebrush Creek. Come on, I'll take you to dinner and get you a contact."

The casual dismissal of my pain and of Geoffrey's pain. The ignoring of everything I've sacrificed to protect her secret is the final straw. For the first time in my life, I'm done being the good daughter who enables her mother's destruction.

"No," I say quietly.

She pauses, mid-examination of her cuticles. "Excuse me?"

"I said no." My voice gets stronger with each word. "This ends now."

"Brynn Rose, you're being dramatic?—"

"You're going to stop the podcast." I take a step toward her, surprising us both with my resolve. "You're going to find a way to fix this, or I'm going to tell the entire town exactly who's been spreading their secrets."

Her face goes pale, then flushes red with fury. "You wouldn't dare. After everything I've done for you, everything I've sacrificed?—"

"Sacrificed?" The laugh that escapes me is bitter. "The only thing you've sacrificed is other people's privacy for your own entertainment."

"I made you who you are, Brynn Rose. This salon, your reputation, your entire life. I built that for you."

"You helped, yes. But you didn't build my life so you could use it as cover for destroying other people's." I pull out my phone, my hands steady now. "I'm cancelling the yoga event at the farm. You have until tomorrow to figure out how to end this, or I will."

We stare at each other for a long moment, and I see the exact second she realizes I'm not the compliant daughter she's always counted on. Not anymore.

"You'll regret this," she says finally, gathering her purse with sharp, angry movements.

"Maybe. But I'll regret losing Geoffrey more."

After she leaves, I sink back into my chair and scroll to Geoffrey's number. My heart is pounding, but for the first time in years, I know exactly what I need to do.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

GEOFFREY

Word came through Priya late last night that the Goat Yoga Event has officially been postponed until next week. The pressure is off and yet I'm up at the new goat pen with the sun and I haven't slept a damn minute all night.

Every time I closed my eyes, I saw her face. By three in the morning, I was pacing my living room like a caged animal. By four, I questioned everything I thought I knew about what happened. By five, I sent her a text message asking her to meet me here. By six, she tells me she'll be here.

Now I'm staring at the road, ready to talk to my girl. The weight of this conversation sits heavy on my chest. After I hear the whole truth, it's either forever or never again.

I want to make it forever with Brynn Rose.

For all the things I'm uncertain about, one thing has become undeniably clear.

What Brynn Rose and I have is undeniably worth fighting for.

The way Brynn looks at me, touches me, whispers my name like a prayer.

I've never experienced anything like it.

The trust between us has taken a massive blow. But what we have is special.

The connection between us is real. I might get hurt again, but even if I do, it's worth

taking a chance on true love. Our connection is once in a lifetime and I owe it to both of us to hear her out.

Brynn Rose climbs out of her car slowly. It's like she's walking to her own execution, and the sight of her makes my chest tight. She's wearing yesterday's clothes, her hair is a mess, and there are dark circles under her eyes that tell me she doesn't sleep any better than I do.

"Geoffrey, I—" she starts, then stops as a particularly bold baby goat launches itself at her legs, demanding attention. She wraps her arms around herself, and I can see her trying to hold it together. "Geoffrey, there's something you need to know about the podcast."

"I'm listening." I take a step closer. I brace myself for the words I know are coming, but I dread them. "I want you to know that even if I don't agree with you, I want to understand you."

Her words come out in a rush of exhalation. "It's my mother. She's the podcaster. She has been for years. I've known the whole time. I've been keeping her secret because I don't know how to stop her without destroying what little relationship we have left."

The admission hits me like a punch to the gut, but not for the reasons I expect. Instead of anger, I feel this overwhelming wave of sympathy for the impossible position she's been in.

"Jesus, Brynn."

"I've never given her information intentionally and I never would."

The phone call at the bar. We never hang up.

She heard everything. Your brothers talking about Eliza, us.

.. everything." Her voice breaks on the last word.

"I never mean for any of this to happen.

I've been trying to protect everyone, but I just keep making everything worse. .."

The more she talks, the more relief floods my veins. My heart rate slows and I'm overwhelmed with the need to wrap her in my arms. A baby goat chooses that moment to bleat loudly, as if commenting on the drama, and despite everything, I almost smile. Almost.

I shake my head. "Why didn't you just tell me?"

"Because she's all I have." The raw honesty in her voice guts me. "And because I am terrified that if you know, you'll hate me for keeping it secret. Just like you hate me now for the secret getting out."

"I don't hate you." The words come out rougher than I intend. "I could never hate you, Brynn Rose. This makes me love you even more than I already did. You're in an impossible situation."

She looks up at me then, hope and fear warring in her green eyes. "You don't?"

I close the distance between us, careful to step around the goats that seem determined to trip us both. "What I felt yesterday isn't hate. It is heartbreak. Because I thought I'd lost you before I ever really had you."

"Geoffrey—"

"Let me finish." I reach up to cup her face, and she leans into my touch like she's been starving for it. "Maybe love is messy. Maybe it's complicated and hard and sometimes people get hurt. But I'm not afraid of being messy, Brynn. I'm afraid of losing you."

Tears spill over and run down her cheeks. "I love you too. I know it's fast, I know it's crazy?—"

"It's not crazy." I lean my forehead against hers while a baby goat investigates our feet. "I've been in love with you since I was seventeen years old. The only crazy thing is that it took us this long to figure it out."

"I told her to stop," she whispers. "The podcast. I told her to end it or I'll tell everyone the truth."

"What did she say?"

"That I'll regret it. That she makes me who I am." Brynn's jaw sets with a determination I've never seen before. "But I don't care anymore. I'm done protecting her at everyone else's expense. Including ours."

Pride swells in my chest. This is the woman I fell in love with... not the careful, controlled version she shows the world, but the fierce, brave woman who's willing to fight for what matters.

"I'm proud of you," I tell her, and mean every word. "When you decide to take action, I'll be there by your side. I'll protect you from whatever fresh hell Brandi Rose decides to throw at us."

Brynn chuckles as she pulls out her phone with shaking hands. "It's already done. This episode went live ten minutes ago."

“What did you do?”

She lets out a breathy exhale. “I hijacked the pod.”

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

BOOTS AND BITCHING PODCAST

Hello, Sagebrush Creek. My name is Brynn Rose, and I'm not your usual host.

I'm here to tell you the truth about something that's been eating me alive for far too long.

I want to talk about the rumors you've been hearing for years about the Kingridge family. Specifically I want to talk about the ones you've been hearing about Geoffrey's personal life.

Their family secrets and private conversations should have stayed private.

The rumors were manipulative, cruel, and designed to drive attention, not truth.

So today I'm going to share some truths.

I'm not the voice behind this podcast. I never knowingly helped. I didn't collect information.

I even went out of my way to hide things I've heard in my salon for years.

But that doesn't make me innocent. I knew what was happening all along and I didn't stop it. That makes me complicit.

I didn't stay quiet because I agreed with it. I was afraid of losing my mother. She's all I've got and I was afraid of being completely alone. I was too afraid to stand up for

what I knew was right when it meant risking the only family connection I had left and that isn't a good excuse.

I've spent my whole life trying to earn love I should never have had to beg for. Walking on eggshells. Managing someone else's emotions. Sacrificing my own happiness to keep the peace. I told myself I was being loyal, being a good daughter. But really, I was just scared.

Not anymore.

Today I want to tell you about the amazing things I've learned behind the scenes with the Kingridge family who I've known all my life. Their real story, not the twisted version you've been fed, is one of pure love.

These are good people. They're not perfect, but they're honest. They work hard and they love deeply. They deserve every good thing that comes their way. They can be messy, but who isn't?

The Kingridge men, and women, have done more for this community than any politician or small town celebrity ever could.

I'm so deeply sorry for the part I played in turning their most private moments into entertainment for strangers.

From here on out, I'm asking you to listen to future episodes of this podcast with skepticism.

Ask yourself who benefits from these stories?

Who gets hurt? Is someone's private pain really worth your entertainment?

We deserve better than gossip disguised as truth. We deserve compassion, privacy, and the chance to make our mistakes without having them broadcast to the world. Everyone doesn't have to die famous in this small town.

I know some of you will be angry with me for speaking up.

I know some of you will think I'm just trying to protect my own reputation or my relationship. Maybe you're right about some of that. I'm in love with Goeffrey Kingridge. He's the most incredible man I've ever known.

It's my hope that he and I can work through the damage I've done because he's always been it for me.

Even at times I've been too afraid to say it.

He's given me the courage to choose love over fear.

If we don't end up together, he's always going to have my heart.

And to everyone listening, be kind to each other. We're all just trying to figure this life out. We all deserve the grace to do it without an audience keeping score of our failures.

This is Brynn Rose, and this is the last time I'll be hijacking someone else's platform to speak my truth. From now on, if you want to know what I'm thinking, you can just ask me. I'll be the one not hiding anymore.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

HOLDEN

I've seen my brothers fall in love before. Hell, these dudes can't stop having weddings, babies, and bringing chics into our lives that want to clean up this place .

But watching Geoffrey and Brynn Rose together is different. He and I were the hold outs. It was the two of us, never growing up together. Now he's walking around staring at her all the time with the kind of heat that could burn down half of Texas.

Even worse, they can't keep their hands off each other. I've run into them in the barn, naked. Hayloft, naked. Out in the damn wheat field, naked. Now I feel like I've got to knock on the door of every room before I enter. I'm not trying to see this dude's balls, again.

Right now, Geoffrey's supposed to be participating in lining up yoga mats for the Mane Event Hair Salon team retreat. This is a monthly event now. Monthly. How much fucking yoga can one possibly need. As the employees file in and find their places, it looks like chaos to me.

Geoffrey doesn't seem to notice. He has Brynn Rose pressed up against the fence post. He's whispering something in her ear that's making her giggle like a teenager. A baby goat is literally chewing on his boot, and he doesn't even notice because he's too busy being completely gone over this woman.

"Get a room!" I call out, grinning when they both flip me off without breaking apart.

"Ignore him," Priya says as she appears at my elbow with her phone out. She's

capturing candid footage of the chaos around us. "This is perfect content for the ranch's social media. Look at them. They're like a walking advertisement for romance at the ranch."

"All y'all are at this point." I bite back a chuckle. "I'm happy for them, but it's also like, keep it in your pants dude."

Priya laughs when a little black goat goes flopping off a platform and squeals. It sends the others into pure chaos. Baby goats bounce off yoga mats, salon employees try to find their zen while livestock treats them like jungle gyms.

Geoffrey spins Brynn Rose around and both of them laugh as baby goats scatter around their feet. When he sets her down, he doesn't let go. He keeps her close. It's like he needs the contact to breathe properly.

"This is going to get so many views," Priya pans her camera across the mayhem. "Oh, and Holden? My sister Zara is flying in for the Fourth of July party next week. She has like two million followers on Instagram. This kind of authentic ranch content is exactly what she specializes in. I'm hoping you'll be around to help. "

"Great," I mutter, dodging a particularly ambitious goat that seems to think my hat is edible. "Another social media person."

"She's not just social media. She's an influencer." Priya says it like there's a difference. "She does lifestyle and travel content. Very aspirational stuff."

"Sounds riveting."

Priya laughs and elbows me. "You know, with Geoffrey officially off the market, you're the only single Kingridge brother left."

"I'm in no hurry," I say, and mean it.

"Famous last words," Priya sings, then turns back to her filming. "Oh, this is perfect. Brynn Rose, can you try that pose again? The goats are being so photogenic."

Brynn Rose glances over and I think she's just realized that we're standing here.

She obliges, attempting some kind of yoga position while three baby goats immediately use her as a climbing structure.

She dissolves into laughter as Priya snaps away.

Geoffrey catches Brynn when she tips over, goats still attached.

Instead of helping her up right away, he holds her there and kisses her forehead.

"They're going to be insufferable, aren't they?" I ask Priya.

"Completely," she agrees cheerfully. "And we're going to love every minute of it."

Somewhere deep inside of me, a slight ache pings within me. It'd be nice to have someone light me up like that. I just don't see it happening. All the women who come to the ranch are the same... Hell, all the women in Sagebrush Creek feel more like sisters than lovers.

I wonder if I am really going to be the only Kingridge brother without a partner. Hell, Pa's had so many loves he's lost count. They're out here preparing for wild nights in the hay. Meanwhile I'm getting ready to entertain Priya's sister... apparently.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

BOOTS AND BITCHING PODCAST

Hello, Sagebrush Creek. This is Brandi Rose, and for the first time in many years, I'm speaking to you in my own voice. This is the Boots and Bitching Podcast, final episode.

Today I have no filters and no disguises. I'm not hiding behind technology or clever pseudonyms. It's just me, a local celebrity and media sweetheart, sitting in my living room at two in the morning.

I'm trying to figure out how to say goodbye to something that gave me purpose, but cost me everything that actually mattered.

I know most of you may have never figured out by now that I'm the voice behind Boots and Bitching. My daughter Brynn Rose made the decision for me just a week ago. When she hijacked this platform to tell you the truth I wasn't ready to share myself.

Here's my truth. She did what I should have done years ago. Brynn Rose chose love over fear, honesty over convenience, other people's wellbeing over her own comfort. I raised her to be better than me, and thank God, it worked.

I want to tell you how this started, because I think you deserve to understand how someone becomes the kind of person who feeds off other people's pain. A cautionary tale if you will. Let's start with the fact that it doesn't happen overnight.

This personality happened one small compromise at a time. It came in one

rationalization after another. Until I was so far from who I used to be that I didn't recognize myself anymore. It could happen to any of you. So I'd get off your high horse and keep listening.

More than twenty-five years ago, I came back to this town pregnant and humiliated.

I had nothing left of the dreams that had carried me through my childhood.

I was supposed to be somebody special. I was supposed to matter.

Instead, I was just another cautionary tale about small-town girls who reach too high and fall too hard.

For years, I told myself I was invisible.

That people looked right through me because I wasn't worth seeing anymore. Here's some tea for you sugar, them girls in the south are real mean.

Nothing scarier than a Sarah or Hannah in their Sunday best. I convinced myself that being forgotten was worse than being hated.

They drove me to understand that any attention was better than being nobody at all.

When I started the podcast, I told myself I was just sharing harmless gossip. Just giving people the entertainment they were already hungry for. I wasn't hurting anyone. I was just... observing. Reporting. Surely that wasn't so wrong.

But deep down I knew even back then that I was taking my power back. Harm doesn't require malicious intent. Pain doesn't care about your motivations. Power corrupts in ways you don't see until it's already changed you into someone you never meant to become.

I became addicted to being important. To having information others wanted.

To the rush of knowing secrets and of being the one who decided what stayed private and what became public entertainment.

I told myself I was giving this town what it wanted, No one was going to dim my light. Not even a baby.

I'd like to think we had some good times too. That I gave you a front porch to come sit and chat on when you felt alone. But in that, I was taking your right to make mistakes without an audience.

My dear friend Patty June had no idea she was the informant. I coaxed information out of her she would never have shared if only she'd known. I'm sorry for that. And worst of all, I made my daughter complicit in my choices.

I put Brynn Rose in an impossible position where loving me meant enabling my cruelty. Protecting me meant sacrificing her own integrity... It's unforgivable. But even as I say the words, I hope there will be a way for us to come back together. Eventually.

I know it starts with an apology to the entire Kingridge family. Y'all have given this community so much, jobs, support, opportunities, friendship, and yes, entertainment. You deserved better from me and from everyone who listened to my poison and asked for more.

To everyone whose secrets I shared, whose pain I profited from, whose private moments I turned into public spectacle: I'm sorry. I know that's not enough, but it's what I have to offer.

Some of you are wondering what happens to me now. Whether I'll disappear, leave

town, or fade into the background I spent so long trying to escape. The truth is, I don't know. But for the first time in a long time, I'm going to sit back and take my time. I'm going to see where I can help.

What I do know is this... Boots and Bitching Podcast as you know it ends today.

I'm deleting the podcast and removing all episodes. I'm shutting down every account associated with it.

I want to try being a better mother. A better neighbor.

A better person. I don't know if change is possible for me.

But I want to try. Not for attention, not for redemption points, not to rehabilitate my image.

Just because I know trust is earned. This is my first step in the right direction.

Sagebrush Creek, you gave me a home when I needed one. I know you can't see it, but I love this community. This is Brandi Rose, signing off for the last time. Thank you for listening, thank you for your patience, and thank you for the chance to finally tell you the truth.

Enjoy your fourth of July bash out at the ranch. Lord knows there will be drama, but this time, mums the word. This is Brandi Rose, your favorite bitch with boots on the ground, signing off for the last time.

End of Boots and Bitching podcast. All episodes deleted. Account deactivated.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 8:22 am

Three Years Later

I'm bubbling with so much anticipation, I can hardly keep my mind on anything else.

Today is the day we find out if we're having a boy or a girl.

My sister-in-law Priya was entrusted with the sealed envelope from our doctor.

She coordinated with Patty June. Now I've got a single, stunning cupcake sitting on the kitchen counter.

Somehow I've got to wait to cut into it.

I sit out in the rocker on our front porch. The sun sets over the ranch that's become our home, listening to the distant bleating of goats and the gentle evening sounds of the life we've built together.

The baby kicks hard against my ribs as I settle into the porch swing. I watch Geoffrey work with the horses in the evening light. At seven months pregnant, I'm all belly and swollen ankles. But my face is all smiles. I've never been happier in my entire life.

"Easy, sweetheart," I murmur, rubbing the spot where tiny feet are apparently practicing for the World Cup. "Daddy will be done soon."

As if he heard me, Geoffrey looks up from the fence line and grins.

It's that same smile that's been making my heart skip for the past three years of

marriage. He waves, and flashes me a wink that still sends butterflies flapping in my stomach. He is still the sexiest cowboy I've ever met.

These pregnancy hormones have me counting the minutes until he steps into the shower. I'm more than ready to join him.

Buzz. Buzz.

My phone vibrates on the glass top table with a text from my mom.

Just posted the new episode. I think you'll like this one.

I smile and open my podcast app. It's been two and a half years since Mom and I rebuilt our relationship from the ground up. It hasn't been easy, but it's been worth it.

Her fire for podcasting hasn't dimmed, but it's different now. Her new show is, Sagebrush Creek, Y'all Come By. Every now and then it's still a little gossipy, but it's got a heart. Mom is using her powers for good.

She talks about community achievements. She celebrates local businesses. Mom drives tourism to our town and is helping build our local economy. I've never been so proud to be her daughter.

Almost an hour passes before Geoffrey and I are standing together in our kitchen. I'm vibrating with excitement. A new little Kingridge is entering the world and nothing can ever be the same.

"Are you ready?" He holds up the cupcake and my heart skips a beat.

"Yes! Are you freaking kidding me? Yes!"

"It's all yours." He slides a knife toward me and comes to stand behind me. Geoffrey

plants a kiss on my neck and I feel the sensation whip all the way down my body.

“Okay.” I count down in my mind and slice the cupcake open. When pink sprinkles cascade onto the table, my eyes well with tears. “ A girl.” My voice is shaky and my eyes well with tears. “Geoffrey, it's a girl. You're going to be a girl dad.”

He wraps his arms around me as tears spill from his eyes. Then he places a sweet kiss on my bump. “I'm so grateful for this life with you. You are my favorite person and that has never changed.”

I'm overwhelmed with every emotion, joy, excitement, and fear that I'll somehow mess it all up. But I know one thing for certain, this little cowgirl is loved unconditionally and without limits.

There's one Kingridge Cowboy left! I have a feeling the fireworks are going to spark at the Fourth of July Party... Read Holden's story and find out how this ends!