



Infatuated

Author: *Cara Wade*

Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult

Description: It was only supposed to be an infatuation.

Lana Robinson is not happy. Dragged on an unexpected family vacation, she's far from friends and her plans for a perfect summer. Despite Black Stallion Ranch being breathtaking, she's set on passing her time by escaping in books. That is, until Tristan Ellis, the owner's son—a walking, talking, real life book boyfriend—puts himself in her way. Fictional stories are now the last thing on her mind. She wants new experiences, and he's willing to give them to her. With one condition—no strings attached. Can she keep her growing feelings out of their steamy lessons, or will she leave with a broken heart?

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Chapter 1

Lana

Summer. It's finally here! The school year ends tomorrow, and I couldn't be happier. Junior year seemed like it would never end.

Who would have thought the average looking, book loving, blonde-haired girl would end up hanging out with the popular kids at school? This sounds like one of those cheesy chick-lit books I love to read. Popular boy likes nerdy girl, and his friends make fun of him for it, but he prevails and they live happily ever after.

Okay, so that's not exactly how this year went. To be honest, it didn't start off so great. It started off like any other year. I'm the girl who works hard for my grades. Greenwich Preparatory (go Spartans!) is known for producing some of the smartest minds in all of Connecticut, and I have my eyes set on going to Cornell to study architecture.

In order to make that dream a reality, I spend my nights forgoing football games and parties to study. I had a few close friends, but if I had to choose between them and books, books would win every time. Mind you, it didn't used to be like that. When I was little, I hated school and was held back in first grade. Then I discovered chapter books, and everything changed for me.

So, me being the oldest girl in my grade didn't make being uncool any easier. That is, until Bethany James, the most popular girl at school, started flunking math. Mr. Cross pulled me aside one day and asked if I wanted some extra credit in his class. Any

chance to turn my A minus into an A plus is a win, so I accepted.

I became Bethany's pet project, even after my futile attempts to stop her. She was determined to give me a full makeover like in the movie *She's All That*. She added highlights to my hair, taught me some make-up techniques, and made me get a new wardrobe. When she was done with me, I didn't even recognize myself. I went from peasant to princess in two point five seconds.

Suddenly, I'm being asked to sit at the cool kid's table, and the cutest boys are actually giving me a second glance.

Holy shit, I'm hot!

For once in my life, I feel like people see me, and I have Bethany to thank for it. It also helps that she's kept me practically glued to her hip, helping her stay on top of her studies.

Her parents want her to go to Yale, and the two of us decide to stick together and help each other. I help her study to get better grades, and she gives me the social life I didn't know I needed. It's been beneficial for both parties.

I sit at the lunch table, poking at my spaghetti, my nose buried deep in a book as I wait for everyone to join me. Bethany arrives with her boyfriend Dave in tow, and he places both their trays down on the table across from me. She flips her thick blonde hair behind her shoulder and pulls Dave toward her for a kiss.

Next are Joe and Jim, the twins, and each takes a spot on either side of me. These boys can make panties drop with a smile. Short brown hair, brown eyes, and tall. Joe has about twenty pounds of muscle on his twin brother, but no one would complain that Jim is small.

I'm squished between the two hottest guys at school, and a blush covers my body from head to toe until I feel like a tomato.

"You're cute when you blush," Joe says quietly as he knocks into my shoulder. I glance up at him through my lashes and smile shyly. He tries to glance at the cover of my book. "Reading something naughty, Lana?"

I slap the book closed and pull it against my chest, shaking my head, a sly smile playing on my lips.

When he laughs, I feel it deep in my bones. He tries to take the book away from me, so I grasp it tighter. He rubs his finger up and down my forearm, trying to coax it from me, and the tingles that form in the wake of his touch make me want to give him anything he wants.

He pushes his bottom lip out and opens his eyes wide, giving me the best puppy dog eyes he can muster, and I melt into a pile of goo.

I've had a crush on Joe DiMatto since second grade. I've fantasized about him since freshman year when we were in sex education together when we had to learn about everything. I'm not just talking about the reproduction system; I'm talking about safe sex, condoms, birth control type of everything.

I sat on the other side of the classroom from him and let my imagination run wild. Now, let me make one thing perfectly clear. I read—a lot. I read all types of genres, but romance has always been my favorite. The thing with romance is there is a lot of sex and a lot of power exchange situations. Even a few popular jock and nerdy girl situations. Those are the easiest to picture myself in. Shocking, I know.

Imagine sitting in sex ed with the hottest guy in the school as he asks questions about blow jobs and anal. Yes, he really did ask questions about both. It was his way of

messing with the teacher, but all it did was make me clench my thighs throughout class and stifle moans of desire.

That was the first night I went home and touched myself with Joe on my mind.

“Oh, Joe, leave her alone. She doesn’t have to show you anything.” Bethany comes to my aid.

He gives up and takes a bite of his pizza and talks with the other guys. Bethany knows how much I like him, and I offer a quiet thank you to her. She smiles and goes back to eating.

“Ladies, we’re throwing a small party this weekend at the lake house. Wanna come?” Jim asks.

I glance over at Bethany, who raises her eyebrow at me in question then nods her head. “Sure. We’ll be there. Lana’s eighteenth birthday is next week so we can use this as an excuse to celebrate. She was just telling me about the cutest little bikini she bought the other day, weren’t you, Lana?”

My hazel eyes bug out of my head, and my eyebrows shoot up to my hairline. She bites the corner of her lip and smirks. She knows Joe will be thinking about seeing me in a bikini now, and I’m not sure I can muster up the courage to make that happen.

I’m going to puke. The small amount I had to eat today is trying to work its way out of my stomach. This is uncharted territory. “Y-yeah. I wouldn’t wear it to something like that, though. I figured it would be good for tanning at home.”

“I didn’t know it was your birthday. I’d love to see it on you. Maybe I can find an interesting pattern of freckles to trace,” Joe whispers in my ear, the heat of his breath

doing nothing to tame my racing heart.

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Heat rushes to my cheeks at his remark. "Excuse me." I jump out of my seat, leaving my untouched spaghetti and belongings behind, and scurry to the girl's bathroom.

I lean over the sink, splashing cold water on my face. The door opens, and Bethany walks in. She leans against the wall with the paper towels, watching me, her arms crossed over her chest.

I lock eyes with her in the mirror, keeping my hands planted on the edge of the counter. "I wish you hadn't said that to him. You know I don't like wearing things like that."

She shrugs and flips her hair. "I don't know why. It's not like you're fat. You've got killer curves. If I had hips like yours, I'd rock it. Joe likes you; it's pretty obvious."

My heart gallops at the thought of him liking me, but there's no way he does. I'm still just a nerdy girl. I shrug it off. "He's a flirt. He does it to everyone." I pull a few paper towels out and blot the water from my face before tossing them in the bin next to the door.

She shakes her head. "No. Not like that, Lana. I've only seen him do that with you." She pulls me in for a hug, and when we pull back, she searches my face like it holds the answers she needs. "You really don't see what he sees, do you?" I shake my head. "Joe really likes you. I think Jim likes you, too, but Joe's staked claim. Come to the party, wear the sexy bikini you bought last week, and get the guy."

She walks out, leaving me to get myself under control. Not paying attention, I walk right into Joe's hard body on the other side of the door. My cheek smashes against his

muscular chest, and I put my hands up to steady myself, feeling his pectorals. How does someone in high school get this ripped?

“Sorry. I, ah—wasn’t looking.”

“Come for a walk with me?” He holds my backpack and book out for me and extends his hand out, waiting for me to make my move. I look at it and up at him. “I promise I won’t bite.” He offers a sly smile, and there’s a glint of something dark in his eyes. “Unless you like biting. Then I’d be happy to make your dreams come true.”

Oh hell! Another image to add to the rub club bank. That one will be playing around in my head for a while. I take a deep breath, ignore the growing need forming in my lower belly, and take his hand.

He leads me to the soccer field, where we stand by the bleachers. I risk a sideways glance at him. Most boys look like preppy assholes in the school uniform—navy blue polo and chinos. His polo must be a medium because the way his arms bulge and his pecs are on display makes me want to run my fingers over him. I reach my hand toward him and pull back at the last second. That’s a slippery slope I don’t need to go down.

“Don’t make me beg, Lana. Come to the party this weekend. Let me show you off.”

I pinch my eyebrows and tilt my head to the side. “Show me off? Why? We’re not dating.”

“Maybe it’s because you haven’t taken any of my hints, and I can’t ever get you alone.” He runs his knuckles along my cheek and hooks his thumb and forefinger around my chin. He lowers his voice and drops his head, his lips inches from mine. “Anytime I try, you run away.”

Kiss him! Grow some balls and kiss him, Lana!

“That’s because I didn’t think you were serious,” I almost whisper. “You flirt with all the girls. How was I supposed to know I was special?”

“Because you see the real me. Come. I’ll give you the best birthday present.”

He leans in, his eyes close, and his mouth parts. Oh my God, it’s happening! Joe is going to kiss me! He hovers over my lips, and I press up into him, feeling his soft lips against mine. He deepens the kiss. I moan into his mouth and grab the front of his shirt, holding on to him. I never want this kiss to end. His hand slides down my side and lands on my hip, pulling me flush against him.

Hold on. Is that...him? I pull back, putting a few inches between us, and glance down. Sure enough, I can see the shape of him through his pants, and let me tell you... wow. I may have fantasies of him, but I’m not ready to go down that road. I’m not ready to give him that piece of me.

Sensing my discomfort, he cups my cheeks in his hands but doesn’t move closer. I lift my eyes to his.

“You drive me crazy. Come on Saturday. I promise I’ll behave.”

“Okay.”

* * *

I’m on cloud nine for the rest of the day. Who wouldn’t be after a mind-blowing kiss from the hottest guy at school? When I walk through the front door of my house, my mom and dad are sitting in the living room talking.

“Hi, honey, how was your day?” Mom calls out.

I float into the living room with a Cheshire cat grin on my face. “Wonderful. I got invited to a party at the lake this weekend with Bethany to celebrate my birthday. Can I go?”

“Pumpkin, why don’t you sit down?” Dad taps the seat next to him, and my smile falters.

I drop my bag by my feet and sit. “What’s going on?”

“Your mother and I booked a vacation. We leave on Saturday.” He smiles as though he didn’t just break my heart.

I’m... confused. They booked a vacation? Doesn’t one usually plan a vacation months in advance? “Where are we going?”

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“Wyoming. We’re spending two weeks on a dude ranch. They have hiking, swimming, and horseback riding among other activities. It’s a place called Black Stallion Ranch.” He hands me his laptop with the page pulled up, and my eyes scroll through the mountaneousque landscapes and pictures of the smiling, happy people. The exact opposite of how I feel. “Make sure to pack some jeans for horseback riding.”

My eyes shoot up to him. “What?” I shout. “No! I can’t go there. The party. This is huge. The biggest event of the season! My birthday...” My chance to get to know Joe on a deeper level.

“There’ll be other parties. We’ll only be gone for two weeks and can celebrate it out there. You can see Bethany and your friends when we get back and have a party then,” Mom reassures by rubbing my shoulders.

Tears sting my eyes, and I put the laptop on the table. “No, Mom, you don’t understand. I have to go to this party.” I take a steadying breath. “When did you book this? Why didn’t you tell me before today?”

“I’m working on a business deal, and the client’s going. It sounded fun, and with the school year ending, the timing made sense. I’m sorry about the party, pumpkin, but we’re going and that’s final. It’ll be good for you to see this side of the country. A new adventure.” He smiles, trying to ease the pain of the blow he just dealt me.

The only adventure I wanted was with Joe at the lake.

Chapter 2

Tristan

I scan the list of the new guests arriving today and mentally prepare for another round of city slickers who want to pretend to be cowboys. There are eighteen people in this new group, so it'll be busy this week—all hands will be needed on deck. We have a few families with young kids and two more with teenage girls. I hope the girls aren't worried about messing up their nails.

Aren't all city girls worried about that sort of thing? Kasey, my girlfriend, always seems to be bitching about that. Guess I'll find out soon enough.

This is my last season working the ranch before I travel the whole fifteen miles to become a college freshman. Okay, so it's not far, but I'm the first one in my family to go and Mom and Dad couldn't be prouder. I even got a full ride football scholarship to play with the Cowboys as I study for my business degree. I had my hopes set on a school farther away, but I couldn't pass up a full ride. Especially when Mom and Dad don't have the extra funds to hire someone else to help at the ranch.

I sit on the porch with my clipboard as I go through the morning checklist and sip my coffee. I have a football training session with my coach in a few hours, so I like to get an early start and help out where I can. I won't be good for much more than a shower and a hot meal when I get home tonight. Coach works us hard, and since this is my last one with him, I know it'll be brutal.

Mom joins me on the porch, holding her steamy mug of coffee in her favorite purple floral mug. She leans down and places a chaste kiss to the top of my shaggy, brown hair. She pulls my hair back off my forehead. "You need a haircut. It must fall in your eyes when you run on the field."

I roll my eyes. My hair's fine. Plus, Kasey likes that she can grab it. "Kasey likes it like this."

She sighs, and I see her shake her head from the corner of my eyes. She likes the Bowmans, and she and Dad are close with them, but she doesn't care for how Kasey treats me. "I know you like Kasey, baby."

I grit my teeth. It's too early for this conversation. "I'm not talking about this right now. I need to finish looking over the checklist for today and get to practice."

"Let me make you something to take with you." She gets up and walks back into the house, leaving me to finish.

"Morning, Tristan," Kristy, one of the guests, says. She's a nice girl, but she's about twelve and has a major crush on me. I'm so happy she's leaving with her family today. She follows me around like a lost puppy.

"Morning, Kristy. You and your family ready to ship out today?"

She pouts. "Yes. We're packed and leaving for the airport in an hour."

"Is there anything else we can do for you before then?"

Mom and Dad always ask that question when they see guests on the last day, hoping to leave a lasting impression. It's a good way to make them feel valued until the very end of their stay.

She blushes and looks at the ground, kicking a rock. "Um, do you have Twitter? Can I add you as a friend?"

I smirk to myself. How can I tell her no without breaking her heart? "I'm sorry, I don't have an account."

Her face is as red as a tomato, and she refuses to meet my eyes. "Oh."

Her father comes around the corner and waves as he walks with her toward the dining area. She looks back at me but doesn't say anything else as they walk out of ear shot.

Kasey's red truck flies down the driveway. She stops in front of the house and jumps out, running up to me. Her strawberry blonde hair is in a low ponytail, and her shorts are so small they are riding up her ass. Fuck, she has a killer body.

"How's my favorite running back this morning?" She threads her fingers through my hair and tugs my head back. A guttural moan escapes with the bite of her pull. "Good boy," she whispers before her lips crash down over mine. She slides her hands down the side of my face and body as her fingers trace the harsh lines of my muscles.

I deepen the kiss and pull her onto my lap. I stop her hands as she reaches my gray football shorts. I can't be this wound up when I go to practice, and we can't do this where guests can see. It's unprofessional. I've been working too hard to keep good reviews coming in to allow her to mess it up because she wants a play session.

I drop my forehead to hers. "Mom's inside, and we have guests awake." She huffs, rolls her eyes, and climbs off my lap, wiping some stray lip gloss off her mouth. "Youseem excited. What's going on?" I smile at her, trying to lighten the mood.

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“I got in!”

She shoves an envelope in my face, and I pull the letter out. The letterhead reads The University of California, Los Angeles. The words blur together on the page as I read her acceptance letter. She was supposed to go to the University of Wyoming with me. We were going to get our degrees together, move into an apartment sophomore year, and get married.

What the fuck happened to our plans?

I stand and shove the letter back in her hands. “I thought we were going to school together?” I ask, my voice coming out louder than it should. “We had plans. When did you apply to UCLA?” I demand.

Her mouth pops open, then she snaps it shut, crosses her arms, and looks angry as she answers. “It was a last-minute decision. I wanted to see if I could get in, and I thought you’d be happy about it.” She tosses her arms up. “Jesus, Tristan, I didn’t think the world would come to an end if I tried something new.”

She stomps down the stairs toward her truck. She pulls the door open and spins to glare at me. “We’re checking out the campus this week. Take the week and figure out how to congratulate your girlfriend the right way.”

“No. We’re talking about this now.” I storm over to her truck, take the keys out of the ignition, and toss them in the field.

“What the fuck, Tristan?” she yells and pounds her tiny fists into my solid chest.

Then she takes off toward the field to get her keys. “You’re insane, you know that?” she yells over her shoulder. “I thought you’d be happy for me. You were the first person I wanted to tell. I was so excited, and you shit all over it.”

I follow her and lower my voice. I know people can hear us. “I’m not shitting on it. I’m trying to understand. We had a plan, you and I. We were going to move in together next year, graduate together, get a house, have a family—”

Her sparkly keychain catches the sunlight, and she snatches them up from the ground. “Why would I want to have a family with someone who can’t even be happy for me? Screw you. I’m done.”

She’s done? All because I wasn’t happy she messed with the plans we had?

“Done with what?”

“Us.” She motions back and forth between us. “I can’t do this anymore. All we do is whatyouwant. I want it to be about me.”

There it is. Her. What she doesn’t realize is I’ve given up so much for her. I almost missed the game where the scouts came to watch me play because she just had to go to a movie with some friends. Or that time I flunked my algebra test because she was sick and made me bring her soup during lunch. She tells me to jump, I say how high. Every. Fucking. Time.

Everything is clear now. It’s like a lightbulb finally turning on. I can’t live to please her anymore. I need to live my life for me. I have a chance to be a great ball player and get my degree. No one will tie me down. No one can make me change my plans for the future.

“Have fun in L.A., Kasey. Don’t bother calling me.”

I look up and see Mom standing in the doorway, hiding a smirk behind her mug of coffee. I grab my bags from the porch and toss everything in the back of my pickup to get to the field in time for practice. I watch her in the rear-view mirror as I drive away—shock and anger cloud her features.

I feel lighter than I've felt in the past two years. Maybe I should have tossed the extra baggage a long time ago.

Chapter 3

Lana

I push open the window blind as we make our initial descent into Laramie, Wyoming. We had to switch from our nice, first class seats in Cheyenne to a puddle jumper that has been bumping and shaking so hard I'm surprised we didn't lose a wing on take-off.

Seriously, where the hell am I going that first-class accommodations aren't an option?

I glance at Mom and Dad. They're reviewing the brochure they picked up in the airport for the ranch, and Mom is pointing to activities she wants to do. She smiles and leans her head on Dad's shoulder before turning to me.

"Lana, look." She leans over the aisle and points to a pond. "You said you wanted to go to the lake. There's also horseback riding, and every Thursday night, they host a dance. They even offer square dance lessons. Maybe there will be a cute boy to teach you how." She raises her eyebrows and smiles, acting more like a friend than my mom.

I can't stay mad at her forever, and I smirk. "Okay, Mom."

She hands the brochure to me, and I hold it but lean my head back and close my eyes. Only a few more minutes, and I'll be able to get off this flying tin can. My stomach is starting to hate the bumps, so I focus on taking deep breaths through my nose and out through my mouth. I dig a barf bag out of the backseat pocket, just in case. I can't be too careful.

* * *

Twenty minutes, and the longest bumpy dirt road ever, we arrive. I haven't had service on my phone since we landed in Laramie, and I'm dying to text Bethany to find out how the party is going. It's eleven here, so it's one in the afternoon back home. The party must be in full swing. Is Joe thinking about me? Is he already hooking up with someone else?

I can't think like that. Positive thoughts only. He's bummed I'm not there and pining for me. I smile inwardly thinking about him.

I slide out of the SUV and slam the door behind me as I hold my phone to the sky in Lion King fashion, praying for a signal. Just one bar. I need something—anything!

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A woman who looks to be in her early fifties pushes open a screen door and jogs down the steps to us. “Howdy, welcome to Black Stallion Ranch. I’m Liz Ellis, one of the owners.”

“Hi, Liz.” My dad shakes her hand. “I’m Henry Robinson. This is my wife, Violet, and our daughter, Lana.” He chuckles as I ignore him, still holding my phone up to the sky. “Sorry, she’s missing a party and is trying to connect with friends.”

“There’s no service here, dear. We can get you hooked up to Wi-Fi, but you won’t be able to make calls on that thing. And the Wi-Fi can be a bit spotty.”

No signal? I drop my arm and stare at her, eyes wide and mouth popped open in horror. She has dark hair that’s pulled into a low ponytail and clear gray eyes. She has some wrinkles around her eyes as she smiles at me. “How do you people live here?” I mutter, only it isn’t as quiet as I thought.

She covers her mouth with her fingers, trying to hide her laughter. “We make do. Usually, you can get service in town, but out here on the ranch—nothing. Most people find it relaxing to be able to disconnect.”

“Most people didn’t have an important party to attend either,” I mumble. This time, if she heard me, she doesn’t comment.

“Henry, Violet, and Lana, why don’t I show you to your cabin so you can get settled? We have a welcome celebration starting in an hour. My husband, John, and I will talk about all the amenities the ranch has to offer.”

We walk to our cabin as she talks animatedly about the activities they offer and the fun we will have. She points out different spots as we pass, but I'm too wrapped up in my thoughts to notice.

"Lana, have you ever been horseback riding?" She turns her head to look at me as I trail behind them all.

I glance up at her and shrug. "A few times. It's not really my thing."

"Well, if you decide to give it a go, Clementine is yours for your stay here. She's a mild-mannered horse, and I think you'll get along great with her. If you want to ride, check in with our son, Tristan, or our other hand, Holden. Tristan should be back tonight."

"Where is he?" I'm not actually curious, but I know I've been rude since arriving. Mom made sure to give me "the look."

"He has football practice. He's attending the University of Wyoming this fall to play with the Cowboys." She beams with pride as she speaks. "First one in the family to go to college, and he's on a scholarship, too. This is his last practice until August. He'll be back for dinner."

"Oh, Liz, that's wonderful. Congratulations," Mom says.

My mom has a way of making friends everywhere she goes. I imagine, by the end of these two weeks, she will have added the Ellis family to her Christmas card list.

Liz waves at a boy carrying some ropes. "Holden, come meet the Robinsons." He pushes his cowboy hat up enough to look at us and comes over, a smile plastered to his face. "Henry, Violet, Lana, this is Holden. He's one of our ranch hands here. You'll see a lot of him. If you need anything, he can help you."

Holden's actually pretty handsome. Tall, around six-feet, broad shoulders, slim waist, and brown hair and eyes.

He shakes hands with my parents and smiles wide as he looks at me. "Lana, that's a pretty name. If you need anything, let me know. I'd be happy to help." He gives me a once over before winking.

"Holden, enough of that. Stop flirting with the girl. You're going to scare her." Liz swats his arm, and he has the good grace to blush.

"Yes, ma'am. You all have fun now. I'll see you in a bit." He walks off, giving me a great view of his backside. His tight jeans mold around his ass and thick legs. His blue plaid shirt sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, showing off his muscular arms.

Maybe it won't be so bad here after all. My libido's motor just started running, and she wants to chase after Holden. I don't want to have sex with him, maybe just make out in the stables, or roll around in the hay. Give me a chance to feel what's under those clothes.

Liz clears her throat, and I shake the thoughts from my head and peek up at her through my lashes, my face ten shades of red. She's standing in front of the cabin door, holding it open for me.

Oops.

She leans close. "Be careful with that one, darling. He's a good kid, but he'll break your heart." She stands tall again and addresses us all. "I'll see you folks at the main house in an hour."

* * *

Maybe this won't be so bad after all. The cabin is nice. I have my own room, and I can see the pond from the window. I have a few books with me, and it's been a long time since I've been able to sit and read. Bethany constantly has me going places with her—shopping, movies, parties.

It's not that I don't enjoy doing those things; I just miss getting lost in a good book. I want the romance, the lust of it all, the suspense of will they, or won't they. I carry a book with me as we walk back to the main house for the celebration.

I promised Mom and Dad I'd try to have fun and make the best of it. It's very different than Connecticut. The land is so green, and the mountains in the distance look huge. I can't even imagine how big they would be if I were to stand next to them. There's nothing like this back home. The closest we have to mountains look like hills in comparison.

"Hey, it's Lana, right?" Holden comes up behind me. I nod and look to the ground. "I'd be happy to give you a private riding lesson, or we could go for a hike. I know the trails really well. Anything I can do to help make your stay more enjoyable, I'm happy to help." He flashes me a toothy grin.

Does he have any idea how dirty that sounded, or am I just that dirty minded? He has to know, right? I see a slight twinkle in his brown eyes. He knows.

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“Thanks for the offer, Holden. I plan on spending time by the pond, reading. I was actually going to head there after dinner.” I hold my book up in his line of vision.

“No, you gotta stick around. We have a campfire tonight and stuff to make s’mores. It’ll be a lot of fun. Maybe I can convince you to take me up on my offer.”

I shrug and hide my sly smile. “Maybe. I’ve always wanted to learn toride.” Man, I need to stop reading these damn books. My mind just stays in the gutter.

I run to catch up with my parents, leaving Holden standing there with a goofy grin on his face and his hands shoved into his pockets.

We arrive out front and stand around with the other families. It looks like there are four others here now. Three families with younger kids who are all running around chasing one another, and another family with a girl my age.

Dad approaches the family with a teenage girl. “Pete, it’s great to see you. This place is amazing.” They shake hands and carry on with idle chit chat while I open my book to read about my favorite book couple, Quinn and Caleb. I wander around the small area with my nose in the book, internally screaming at the characters to kiss already. I don’t even see the sweaty boy in front of me until it’s too late.

Our bodies collide, and as I start falling, he reaches out, wraps his rough hands around my upper arms, and steadies me. My book slips from my grasp and lands in the dirt by my feet. I don’t even care, though. His hold is strong, and if the way his body felt when I walked into it was any indication, he is packing some serious muscles. I blink and stare into the most beautiful gray eyes I’ve ever seen. He has

several inches on my five-two frame. I feel so small in his embrace.

“Sorry about that, I didn’t see you.” His voice is deep, a hint of humor present. I’m too stunned to say anything, so I just blink back at him.

This guy is a hottie with a body!

Shaggy brown hair that’s damp at the end and curls at the nape of his neck. Large gray eyes that shine bright, square jawline with a little stubble on it, and muscular arms and thighs. His football shorts leave little to the imagination. Yup, I was right.

My own book boyfriend is real. I’ve read so many books and pictured the perfect hero so many times, but none of my thoughts have ever done my ideal man justice. This man hits the nail on the head.

He stoops down and picks up my book, dusting off the cover before handing it back to me.

“I’m Tristin Ellis. My family owns this here ranch. Who are you?” There’s a slight twang to his words, but the accent’s not as strong as some I’ve heard.

My mouth is dry, but I force the words out. “L-Lana Robinson. My family and I arrived today. We’re here for two weeks.”

He smiles, and I swear the birds sing louder and the wind through the trees creates a symphony around us. “Welcome to Black Stallion Ranch.”

Chapter 4

Tristan

I've been pissed off since I left the field today. Kasey showed up halfway through practice and tried to talk me out of the break-up. She wouldn't budge from her spot on the bleachers until Coach finally told her she needed to leave.

Then, she was waiting for me by my car. I just want dinner and a shower. Leave me the fuck alone. I got rid of her by telling her we will talk when she gets back from the campus tour in California next week.

I pull up to my house and see guests milling around. I'm late. I should have been home and showered twenty minutes ago, but Coach had one more drill he wanted me to run through.

Then I ran into the meek girl with her nose in a book, and my whole day changed. Lana Robinson. She's pretty. Different than Kasey. She doesn't have a face full of make-up or clothes that show off half her body. She's a natural beauty. Blonde hair, hazel eyes, and a smattering of freckles along the bridge of her nose. When I knocked into her, my whole body came alive. It's like it knows something my brain is too slow to comprehend.

She was like a jolt of electricity to my system. Then she blinked her eyes at me, and her mouth popped open in surprise. The urge to kiss her was so strong, I had to clench my jaw and step away from her.

I walk up to Mom and Dad and give my mom a kiss on the cheek. "I'm gonna shower real fast. Sorry I'm late."

"It's fine, dear. Want us to wait for you? I know you like helping with this part of the night. We can stall for a few," Mom says.

I look out at the guests and grin when I see Lana watching me. I raise my eyebrow and match her stare, then lift my hand, giving her a small wave. She buries her face in

her book again, and if I'm not mistaken, I see her cheeks redden. "No, I'll be back for supper." I glance back at Mom who's smiling. I roll my eyes and huff. "What?"

"Nothing." She shrugs one shoulder. "She's pretty. Holden was hitting on her earlier today, too."

"I'm not hitting on her. She's cute, but I slammed into her. I want to make sure she doesn't have a concussion or something."

She chuckles and pokes me in the stomach. "I'm sure she's fine. You don't have that many muscles. Go get clean. You smell bad." She scrunches her face and shakes her head.

I sniff my pit and wrinkle my face in disgust. She has a point. I drop my stuff off in the mud room and jog up the steps, pulling my shirt off as I walk. I make the shower as fast as possible so I can get back to everyone. Once I'm done, I change into a pair of fitted jeans and a white t-shirt. I toss on a pair of boots and make it back outside to hear everyone clapping.

Lana sits at one of the benches, her nose back in the book, ignoring the riveting speech my dad gives every week. "Everyone, this is our son, Tristan." Her head snaps up at the mention of my name. "He'll also be around to help you with anything you need," Dad says, placing his hand on my shoulder.

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I wave to the crowd and shove my hands in my pockets, rocking back on my heels.

Holden smacks me on the arm and leans in to talk quietly. "I saw her first, you know. Plus, don't you already have a girlfriend?"

"Hadis more like it. We broke up, and fuck if it doesn't feel amazing to be rid of her." Mom scowls at me, and I know she heard me swear. I mouth an apology to her and lower my voice further. "She's going to school at UCLA and forgot to tell me she even applied."

"Shit." His face lights up as he elbows me in the ribs. I pull back from him and rub the tender spot. "That means you and I can have some fun this summer. It sucked being the lone wolf while you were basically married to the girl."

I keep glancing at Lana, and she looks between the two of us and licks her lips. What are you thinking about, dirty girl?

"It did not suck. You chase so much tail, I think you'll hate having the competition." He smirks, and I knock his hat off the back of his head. I follow his line of sight, and he's staring at Lana like he can see through her clothes. "Don't," I say firmly.

He looks at me and smirks. "Whatever, man. I'd love to get to know Lana for the two weeks she's here."

"What if she has a boyfriend?" I cross my arms over my chest and glance out at her. She's talking with another girl around the same age as her. The two of them smile at something, and she bats her eyes at me, a smile playing on the corners of her lips. The

other girl is cute, but she's got nothing on Lana.

"The way she keeps looking at us, I have a feeling she's single."

* * *

After dinner, I help Holden get the campfire going. All the guests are mingling as they wait for us to get the s'mores fixings out. I'm ready to pass out after such a tough session, but then I catch a glimpse of Lana and get my second wind.

She's sitting at a table, still reading that damn book of hers. Her dad walks over to her and says something. She scowls and puts the book down, joining the rest of the guests. I wander over to the table and pick up the book, reading the back.

Romance. It's a damn romance. She is a dirty girl, after all. Kasey liked this shit, too. Made me try out a few things she read in them, and I always knew when she had been reading. She would practically pounce on me.

"Can I have my book back?" I glance up to find Lana with her hand out, palm up.

I look at the cover again and back at her, a knowing grin tugging at my lips. "Depends. What do I get out of it?" Why the hell did I say that?

She raises an eyebrow in surprise and shrugs. "I don't know. What do you want?"

To run my fingers through your silky hair. No, to run my nose along your cheek. I need to know if you smell as good as you did earlier. Or maybe to see if your pink lips taste like cherries or strawberries. All the images I conjure up do nothing to stop my dick from growing in my pants.

"Lana, come on. I thought you were getting your—oh," Molly, the other teenage girl,

says. “Hi, Tristan.” She waves and looks down.

“Hi. Molly, is it?” She nods. “Happy to have you here at Black Stallion Ranch. You ladies having some s’mores tonight?”

“I was thinking of enjoying the rest of the sunlight by the water, reading. Molly said she wanted to check it out, too.”

She takes her book from me and turns, muttering something about having a good night. Molly is hot on her heels, giggling as they walk out of ear shot. I sigh and walk back to the fire and take a seat next to Holden. We help a few of the younger kids get their marshmallows on a stick, and when everyone has had their fill, we clean up, leaving the fire burning.

Slowly, the guests leave as the sun dips behind the mountains. Most people want to get an early start fishing, hiking, or trail riding. I enjoy this part of the night when it’s quiet and allows me time to think. I poke the fire with a stick, sending embers flying into the night air. My phone buzzes, and I pull it out of my pocket as Kasey’s name flashes across the screen. I silence the ringer and pocket it again.

“You get service here?” Lana asks from behind me.

I turn to look at her. “Yeah, why?”

She wraps her arms around herself and gnaws at her unpainted thumb nail. “I don’t have service, and I’ve been trying to reach out to a friend all day. Your mom set me up on the Wi-Fi, but it keeps dropping.”

“Okay,” I say, drawing the word out, waiting for her to continue.

“Can I use yours? I promise it’ll be quick.”

“How about you sit by the fire with me for a few minutes and tell me about yourself. I like to get to know some of our guests.” I lean back and relax into my camping chair, waiting for her to talk.

She sits and leans forward, resting her forearms on the top of her knees. I notice a glint of something—maybe mischief—in her eyes. “Oh yeah? All the guests? Should I get my parents out here, too?”

She’s baiting me, and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t love it. “Sure. I’d love to get to know the Robinsons. Where in Connecticut are you from?”

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We fall into an easy back and forth conversation. She has a lot of energy and seems to know what she wants from life. She tells me about her dreams of moving to New York to study architecture. Wow! That's ambitious, and I have to say I'm impressed. Judging by her clothes, I'd have guessed fashion. When I mention as much, she shuts down a little and pulls into herself.

I'll figure that one out later.

I need to bring the happy girl back. "A deal's a deal. Here's my phone." I hand it to her. Her eyes light up, and a smile spreads across her face. She locates the number she needs from her phone and dials it with lightning speed. She paces in front of the fire until I hear a female's voice on the other end.

She blurts out words faster than I can keep up with in my lethargic state. I wipe my hands down my face, trying to keep sleep at bay, but I know I have to call it a night after this. Mom and Dad will put the fire out.

"Seriously?" She sounds distraught. Suddenly, I'm very interested as to why. "Yeah, okay. Thanks, Beth. I'll see you in a few weeks." She covers the mouth piece and glances over at me. "If she needs to reach me, is it okay for her to call your phone?"

I nod, and she finishes her phone call. The air around her has changed. Gone is the carefree girl. Now, I feel anger rolling off her, and her hand shakes as she gives me my phone. It's slight, and I'm not sure she even knows she did it.

"Everything all right? You look pissed."

She clenches her jaw and nods, but the shimmer of unshed tears doesn't go unnoticed. She wipes the water before it has a chance to fall and clears her throat. "Thank you for letting me use your phone. Have a good night, Tristan." I hear the rasp in her words and don't want her to leave like this. I stand, ready to pull her in for a hug, but she turns before I can take a step closer.

She walks out of sight to her cabin. I feel a desperate urge to make things better and put a smile back on her face. Tomorrow will be a good day for her, even if I have to force her to like it.

Chapter 5

Lana

I wake the next morning, my pillow stained with mascara and tears. When I got back to my room last night, I was too upset to wash the makeup off my face. All I could muster was getting into pajamas and curling up into a tight ball to cry.

I must look like a damn raccoon.

Beth told me Joe was flirting with other girls at the party. Like, all over them. She even said she thought she saw him come out of the girl's restroom. If I wasn't stuck at this stupid ranch in the middle of the damn country, this never would have happened. Mom knocks on my door, and I ignore her.

"Wake up, sleepy. It's a beautiful day, and there's tons to do. Your father and I are going on a hike. Want to come?" She sits on the side of my bed and pushes my hair out of my face. She clucks her tongue when she sees the black stains on my cheeks. "What's wrong, Lana?"

"You both dragged me to this stupid place, and the boy I like was all over other girls

at the party that I was supposed to be at. I have no service here on my phone, so I can't get in touch with my friends, and I'm in the middle of nowhere. Shall I continue?" I whisper yell in response.

"Lana, I know you're upset, but there's no reason for you to talk to me like that. I'm sorry you missed out on the party, but if that boy was flirting with other girls because you weren't there, then he doesn't like you as much as you want him to." Her voice is firm yet still soft and understanding.

I sit up and glare at her. "You don't know anything. You don't get it. I don't want to go on a hike."

She stands and walks to the door, then stops and turns to me. "Suit yourself. If you want to miss out on everything this place has to offer, you do that. You're going to look back on it one day and be sad you didn't enjoy this experience."

She closes the door behind her, and I scream all my frustrations into my pillow. I lay still for another twenty minutes or so before I finally drag myself out of bed and shower so I can get something to eat.

I pull my wet hair into a ponytail and put on my bathing suit. I stare at the cute bikini I packed but think better of it. My thoughts turn, and I remember the conversation with Beth last night. I bought that bikini to impress Joe, and he forgot about me the moment I was out of sight.

I pull up my shorts, toss a tank top over my head, and pull on a pair of hot pink converse to complete the outfit. I need some food and decide to take my book with me so I can read afterwards.

I stopped reading last night at a good part, and I'm dying to know how this story is going to end. I open it and read as I walk, dodging a set of kids who run right in my

path. I don't account for the mass of muscle who proceeds to put himself directly in my path and end up walking into him.

He grabs my waist and holds tight, and this time, I manage to hold on to my book. I look up at him and pull out of his grasp. His arms don't feel as nice on me as Tristan's did last night.

"Morning, Holden. Sorry, I wasn't watching where I was walking."

He smiles a toothy grin and tips his hat. "No problem at all. Morning, Lana. Where are you off to this morning?" He takes a small step closer, and I wrap my arms tighter around myself, hugging the book close to my chest.

"I was going to get some breakfast and sit by the pond to read." I walk around him, and he falls in line next to me.

He's cute, but after last night, and the warning Liz gave me yesterday, I want to stay away from him. I don't need another boy breaking my heart.

"Are you sure I can't convince you to go horseback riding? I'd be happy to teach you the proper way to ride." He smirks, and his brown eyes darken at the insinuation. If I weren't a virgin, or on vacation with my mom and dad, I might take him up on the offer just to rid thoughts of Joe from my mind.

"No, thanks. Maybe a different day. I want to finish my book."

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“Is he bothering you?” My heart pounds against my chest as Tristan jogs up to us. He’s wearing a snug pair of jeans, a dark blue t-shirt that hugs his wide shoulders, brown boots, and sunglasses.

When did it become the Sahara Desert here? Also, when did guys start paying so much attention to me? I lick my lips as he stops directly in front of me. I can’t help it when my eyes flit up and down his frame one more time.

I point up to his empty head. “Aren’t you supposed to wear a cowboy hat or something? We’re on a ranch.”

He dips his head and snorts, shaking his head. He peeks up at me, and I can see his beautiful eyes over the rim of his sunglasses. “I left it in the barn. I’ll make sure to pull it out next time I see you.”

“All right, you two. No need to flirt with one another while I’m standing here,” Holden interjects.

I shake my head, my eyes wide and my face burning with embarrassment. “N-no. I’m not flirting with him.” I hear Tristan mumble something under his breath, and it almost sounds like he said, “Shame.” My stomach picks the right time to beg for food and rumbles loudly.

If I didn’t die from embarrassment a few moments ago, I am now.

I look straight ahead and see Molly walking with her family. I excuse myself from the boys and run up to her. I glance back one last time to see the guys talking—watching

me. For extra measure, I add a little shake to my hips before disappearing inside to feed the grumbling beast.

* * *

I've been sitting on the dock by the pond for the better part of an hour. Molly got bored with me after a few minutes by the water and ran off to find Holden. When I told her he was offering riding lessons, she jumped at the chance. I read the last line of my story before I see the two most dreaded words—'the end'.

I'm a smiling fool as I put the book down next to me and kick some water up with my feet. A few droplets of cold water land on my upper thighs, and I gasp in surprise. My feet are used to it, but the sun has warmed my thighs so much I wasn't anticipating the temperature difference.

My phone rings, and I look down at it, confused. I don't get service, so why is it ringing? I pick it up and see I have two bars. "Son of a bitch," I say to myself, amused. I open the message from Beth, but the pictures she sent won't load.

Me: I have bad reception. The pictures won't load. What are they?

I watch impatiently as the sending message stays on the screen and the timer circles over and over. Standing, I hold my phone to the sky, hoping the added height will be what it needs. When it does nothing, I stand on tiptoes for the extra inch. The ugly red words 'tap to resend' appear under my message, and I growl before pressing the button again.

"Thought you didn't get service?"

I jump in surprise, squeak, and place my hand over my beating heart. "Jesus, Tristan, you scared the shit out of me. Is that what you do for fun? Scare innocent girls?"

His lips pull up in the corner as he continues to lean against the post at the end of the pier. I look up and see he put on a light-colored cowboy hat. I'll make sure to pull it out next time I see you. That's what he had said before I ran away from him this morning. He walks toward me, the wood creaking under his weight as he gets closer and stops in front of me

I incline my head quickly toward his hat. "I see you followed through with your promise."

He stops in front of me and keeps his eyes glued to mine. I can feel the heat coming off him, and every time I breathe in, my chest brushes against his. I lower my eyes, not able to handle his stare anymore.

"I always keep my promises, Lana." He says it loud enough for me to hear, but quiet enough for it to sound intimate. My girly parts just woke up, and they definitely have a mind of their own. His fingers skate along my hips, and on instinct, I step closer to him, breathing him in. "Wanna go for a swim?"

My phone rings, and I step away, the heated moment between us passing.

Bethany: Pictures from the party. See what you missed. Joe has been asking about you.

My heart squeezes, and I suddenly want to be alone. Maybe Tristan will let me use his phone to call Joe.

As if he could read my mind, he says, "No."

I scrunch my face. Did I ask out loud? "No to what? You asked me the last question, remember?"

“You’re not using my phone to call some loser boy who forgot about you the moment you left town.”

How could he have possibly known that? My blood boils just under the surface, and I jab my finger into his chest and push him back a few inches to drive my point home. “You don’t know anything about him. He’s not a loser. He’s a great guy and wants to get to know me on a deeper level.”

The words leave my mouth with a conviction I myself don’t even believe. Wasn’t I worried about the same thing a few days ago when I talked with Bethany—or even last night? I want to believe what I just told him... but I can’t.

He smirks, and his eyes darken as he tosses his hat behind him on the grass and peels his t-shirt over his head. Dear lord, he has a nice body. I want to skim my fingers over every ripple, but there’s no way I have the guts for that. Next, he kicks off his boots and socks. The button to his pants is undone before he slides them down his legs, standing there in his black boxer-briefs. “I think you need some time to cool off.”

Chapter 6

Tristan

I have no idea what has come over me. Mom sent me out this way to check on Lana, make sure she was okay. And I was only doing this because I happened to be standing there when Mrs. Robinson mentioned she wanted Lana to have some fun on their vacation.

Now, I'm standing here in just my boxers, trying to keep my cool with her. If some loser wants to forget her the moment she leaves, she should do the same. She looks me up and down and blushes when she stares between my legs a little too long. My cock jumps under the scrutiny, which only makes her blush deeper.

“Are you getting changed, or am I tossing you in with your clothes on?”

She backs up a step and shakes her head, her sudden burst of anger now gone. “I’m not going in there. It’s freezing.”

“Exactly.”

“Exactly what?” she huffs.

“It’s freezing, and you need to cool off. No reason to get hot-headed with me. I didn’t forget about you the second you were out of my sight.”

No, I’ve been thinking about her non-stop since last night. She plagued my dreams, and when I woke up this morning, I wanted to spend my whole day with her and get to know her. Mom sending me over was just an excuse so she didn’t catch on.

Crushing on a guest has never been an issue, but I'm pretty sure Mom and Dad would have a conniption if they knew what I wanted to do with her. Best to keep this one under wraps.

She narrows her eyes again and stomps her bare foot on the pier. "He didn't forget about me. He wants to talk to me, but I don't get any damn signal in Nowheresville, USA." She waves her phone in front of my face to finish driving her point home.

I snatch it out of her hand, toss it on the grass, and drag her by the arm to the end of the pier. "Let go of me," she yells, tugging on her arm. I let go with my back facing the water. I see in her eyes the moment she decides her next move. Her hands press hard on my chest, and I start falling backwards into the water. I wrap my fingers around her tiny wrists and pull her with me. If I'm going in, so are you.

We crash through the surface into the cold water below us. We kick to the surface, and when my head breaks through, I shake the water from my hair and open my eyes. She's flailing her arms and gasping for breath, struggling to stay afloat.

Shit! I don't think she knows how to swim. She's only a few feet away from me, and I reach her, wrapping my arms around her waist, holding her above the water.

"Don't worry, I've got you. Can't you swim?" I drag us closer to the shore so I can stand, and she wraps her legs around my waist and her arms around my neck, pressing herself against me. Her lips hover inches from mine, and I reach out to run my finger along the seam. She bats her eyes at me in response. Her body is so soft wrapped around mine. I shift her weight up higher, settling her firmly against my hard dick. The moment she decided to press her sexy body against mine, I was done for. This was a bad idea. All I want now is to be balls deep in this girl with the big hazel eyes.

She shakes her head and shifts her weight, rubbing against me a little more. "Not

well. I like the water, only when I can stand, though.”

“You should be able to stand now.” To my disappointment, she releases her legs’ grip around my hips, and I guide her to the rocky shore. When I’m sure she’s fine, I step back again, giving her some space.

She looks down at her wet clothes and back at me, narrowing her eyes. So much for having her cool down. She looks even madder at me than she did moments ago. Although, having her wrapped tight around me was totally worth the death glare I’m receiving from her now.

“Do me a favor. Stay away from me.” She pulls herself out of the water, and I watch her, following her wet path as she stops at my clothes. She bends down, gathering them in her arms, and pulls them to her wet chest.

“Hey, where ya going with my clothes?”

She looks at me and smiles. It’s not a ‘warm, happy to see me’ smile, either. It’s an ‘up to no good’ smile. She throws them as hard as she can off the end of the pier, and they land in the water. I swim as fast as I can to get them before they sink and get swept away in the lazy current.

She grabs her stuff and runs away before I have the chance to get out. It’s a good thing I left my phone in the barn; otherwise, I would have been pissed. As it is now, I’m annoyed, but I guess I deserve it. I did pull her in with me. Even if I didn’t, though, I was going to force her in.

I toss the wet clothes back on the pier and lay on my back, looking up at the clear blue sky. There are a few clouds sprinkled around, but overall, it’s another perfect day. Images of a pissed Lana filter through my mind, bringing a smile to my face. Damn, she’s cute when she’s upset.

An image of Kasey pops into my mind next, and my good mood sours. She's already called twice today and sent a few messages. Pictures of the campus and shit like that. I looked at the first one and put my phone away after. I don't need to deal with her shit right now.

I pull myself out of the water and put my hat on my dripping wet head as I slowly make my way back to the house. I hold my jeans and t-shirt in front of myself, hoping for some sort of decency.

I hear him laughing before I can even see him. "What the hell happened to you?" Holden asks.

"Mom asked me to get Lana involved, and I thought swimming would be a good activity." I hold up my dripping clothes for him to see. "Didn't quite go as planned. I'll be back, just want to get some dry clothes on."

He laughs at me some more until he's out of ear shot, and I make it to the house. Mom and Mrs. Robinson are sitting on the porch, talking, and Mom gasps when she sees me.

"Tristan William, what happened?" She stands from her chair to get a better view.

"Had an accident by the pond with Lana." I glance up at Violet. "I thought she would enjoy a swim since she's spent so much time by the water already. Turns out I was wrong." She tries to speak, and I stop her. "She's fine. She's also getting into some dry clothes."

"She's not much of a swimmer, I'm afraid." She covers her mouth, trying not to let me see her laugh.

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“I figured that one out the hard way. If you’ll excuse me, I need to change and get back to some guests.”

I pull open the screen door and trudge to my room. “Clean up your wet mess before you leave again,” Mom calls after me.

I drop my soaked clothes into the tub and grab a towel to dry myself off. Looking out my window, I see Lana walking to the house. I pull a pair of shorts and a t-shirt on and race down the stairs, then stop and stand in the doorway as she reaches the top landing. Her steps falter when she sees me standing there.

Her mouth pops open into an O shape, and then she narrows her eyes at me before ignoring me and turning to her mom.

“Heard you went for a dip in the pond?” Violet asks.

“Yes.” She glares in my direction. “It was unexpected.” I push open the door and put my hat on top of my head. She raises her hand in my direction. “Tristan thought it would be fun for me to cool down. I didn’t get a chance to tell him I’m not a good swimmer until he pulled me in with him.”

I clear my throat to gain her attention, and she looks at me. “Don’t forget to tell them how you pushed me in first,” I smirk, and she stares at me wide-eyed.

“Lana, did you push him in?” her mom asks.

Her cheeks turn red as she ducks her head. “He started it,” she mumbles.

“I don’t care, young lady. Apologize to him.”

Her mouth pops open again, and she gives her mom the ‘do I have to’ look. When her mom doesn’t back down, she huffs.

“Sorry for pushing you into the water.”

I smirk. “You can make it up to me by going on a hike. A few people said they wanted to check out the trails, and I said I would go. I’m sure adding another to the group won’t hurt.”

She crosses her arms over her chest. “Actually, Holden offered me riding lessons. I saw him on my way back to get changed and decided to take him up on the offer. Maybe another time.”

My grin falls, and my mood sours once again. She talks with her mom another minute while I just stare at her. Holden? He’s my best friend—like the brother I’ve never had—but there is no way I want her hanging out with him. He has had his fair share of tail over the past year. And he’s looking to get more. She will end up as just another notch on his belt if she’s not careful.

Girls flock to him, and he enjoys every minute of it. He once told me I could get as much action as him if I’d ditch Kasey. I was in too deep with her, though. Too stuck in my picket fence fantasy with the sexy cheerleader to even give it a second thought.

I clench my hands into fists, thinking of Kasey. I need a distraction. I look out and see Holden walking up the path with Molly by his side. Holden laughs, and Molly smiles up at him. She bats her eyes and smacks him playfully on his arm.

Hook, line, and sinker. He’s caught another one.

Lana jogs down the steps and stops in front of him. I hear her ask about riding lessons, and he glances up at me, waiting for permission. I keep my eyes glued to his and give a slight nod. It's not like I can really stop her. She looks back at me, sensing the silent conversation between us, and rolls her eyes.

Then, she stomps off in the direction of the barn, not even waiting for Holden to join her.

Chapter 7

Lana

The nerve of that guy! I saw Holden look to Tristan, but for what? Permission? Screw that. I don't need permission for a guy—whom I hardly know—to do anything. Holden jogs up behind me when he reaches my side, falling into step. I pick up the pace, and he stays with me. I don't notice when he stops until he calls for me.

“Lana, barn's this way.”

I turn and see he's stopped with his thumb over his shoulder, waiting for me. I walk past him in the direction he's pointing, and he catches up again.

“Wanna talk about what's bothering you? Clearly, something's on your mind.”

“Nope, how about we go riding? Show me your favorite place to go.” The barn comes into view, but I can smell it before I can see it.

“Ever been riding?” he asks.

I nod and tell him a few times as he leads me over to a brown horse with white spots along her neck. He introduces me to Clementine, the horse that's been assigned to me

for the vacation. He takes me through the steps of getting her saddled, not that I'll actually need to know how. I think it's a ploy to stand closer to me and brush against me.

Holden takes her reins and walks her and another horse out of the barn before tying them to a hitching post.

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“What’s his name?” I nod to his horse and keep petting Clementine’s mane. She keeps pushing her head close to me, and I can’t help but smile.

“Duke.” He smirks after he says it.

I reach out and pet Duke in the same fashion as Clementine. When he jerks away from my touch, I yank my hand away and take a step back.

“He won’t hurt you. Just not used to other people touching him. Come on, let’s get you in the saddle, and I’ll give you a quick lesson.”

I’m short, and the saddle is up high, so he gives me a small step stool to stand on and swing my leg over. He adjusts the leg stirrups, and when I’m as comfortable as I can be, he goes over how to handle the reins and how to get her to speed up or slow down. When I’m comfortable enough, he unties her and hops on Duke.

Holden leads us on to some trails, and I admire the views around us. It’s a clear blue day, and the sun is warm on my shoulders and back. The tall grass blows in the wind as the animals meander to their destinations.

“Why’d you have to get permission to ride with me?” I blurt out, still annoyed.

He turns to look at me and pushes his hat up out of his face so I can see his brown eyes. “Who said I needed permission?”

“I saw you look back at Tristan. What if he said no? What then?” I bite out.

“Nothing.” He shrugs. “We’d go riding.”

Not the response I thought I’d get. I take in the landscape around us for another minute before I blurt out, “Will you tell me about him?”

He smirks and looks straight ahead. “Damn. That was fast.”

“What was fast?”

“You like him.” He looks at me and raises his eyebrow, daring me to challenge him.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! I don’t like him. He tossed me in the pond, remember?”

He shrugs, and his smile grows into a full grin. “Foreplay.”

This is the moment in a movie that, if I was drinking something, I would do a spit take. Foreplay. That’s not what that was. He did it because I annoyed him. He thought it would be funny to toss me in. That’s not foreplay. Foreplay is light touches, soft words whispered, and kisses.

Not being tossed in the water.

Although, when he saw I was struggling, he came over and helped me. It felt nice to wrap my legs around his waist and arms around his neck. Then, he touched my lips. It was feather-light but sent a wave of warmth through my body. I didn’t want to let go.

Yeah, because you like him. No. I like Joe. It was a misunderstanding. I’m sure, when I can talk to Joe, he’ll sort it out. Tristan is just some guy that’s cute. He lives here, and I live in Connecticut. Our lives are too far apart and too different.

Holden is still talking, and I’ve missed half of what he’s said, but I definitely heard

the word ‘girlfriend’.

“Wait a minute. He has a girlfriend?”

He shakes his head. “I saidhada girlfriend. He and Kasey were together all through high school and recently broke up.”

Oh, great! If he is flirting—not saying he is—he’s using me as a rebound girl. I’m afraid to even ask how long ago the break-up was. “How recent?”

“Doesn’t matter. He’s better off without her. Don’t get me wrong, I like the girl, but she was weighing him down. Too needy. He needs to live a little. Ya know?”

Do I know? Yeah, I think I do. My whole life has been centered around school until recently. I’m supposed to get normal experiences out of the way now, so I can go to college and try the hard stuff. Isn’t that how it’s supposed to be?

I shrug as he slows Duke down. We’re in a large, open field. Straight in front of us are the northernmost Rocky Mountains with their snow-capped peaks. They span for miles to the right and left of us until they disappear on the horizon.

“Wow,” I whisper in amazement. Now, this is seriously cool. I could spend the rest of the vacation out here in the open field with my books and be happy.

“Bet you don’t get this back east.”

I swing my leg over and slide off Clementine to the plush ground below. Multicolored wildflowers grow in spurts around the field, adding pops of color. Holden climbs down and takes the reins of both horses as I walk to a nearby tree and stand in the shade.

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I turn to face Holden, who's watching me from a distance. He takes his hat off and wipes some sweat from his forehead. "How long can we stay out here?"

"I promised Molly I'd take her out on a boat in an hour, but we can come back tomorrow."

My face falls. "Oh. Okay."

"Tristan can bring you back later today if you want. We have a fire pit over there." He points to a small pile of stones to the right of me in the distance. "Maybe if you ask him real nice, he'll bring you out here at night to see the stars." He smiles and wiggles his eyebrows.

I walk around for a few more minutes, taking in the views and breathing the fresh air. I pick a dandelion and tuck it behind my ear, wishing I had a few more minutes to stay out here. It's so peaceful. Holden helps me back on Clementine, and we begin our slow trot back to the ranch.

"Just so you know, he doesn't half-ass anything. He's extremely loyal."

I always keep my promises. His words from earlier replay in my head. I glance over at him as I sway in the saddle. "Can I get your honest opinion?"

He shrugs. "Sure. Why not?"

"Was he flirting with me? Tossing me in the pond and all that." I look down at the ground in front of me, waiting for his answer.

“Considering he told me not to hit on you, I’d say yes.” He smiles at me as my face turns bright red.

* * *

I’ve been trying to read another book as I wait on the front porch for Tristan to come back from his hike. I read the same paragraph about eight times before I shove the book marker in place and close the book in a huff.

“Dinner will be in another hour or so. Great job, guys,” Tristan’s voice carries through the trees. I perk up, hearing his deep rumble. When he sees me, he slows his pace and stops at the bottom of the stairs.

“Hi,” I say, offering him a small wave of my fingers.

“How was the ride? Everything you expected?” His tone borders on sarcastic, and he keeps his muscles tensed.

I stand and take a few steps down to meet him on the ground. “Can we start over? I’m sorry for earlier today. It wasn’t right of me to toss your clothes into the pond. I know you were only trying to make me feel better.” I stick my hand out and watch as his body relaxes. “Hi, I’m Lana Robinson. I’m seventeen, and I’m from Connecticut. I’ll be eighteen on Wednesday.”

He lifts one side of his mouth in a smirk, then wraps his hand around mine and shakes it. “Hi, Lana. It’s nice to meet you. I’m Tristan Ellis, and my family owns The Black Stallion Ranch. I’m eighteen, turn nineteen in the fall, and I’ll be attending the University of Wyoming in the fall on a football scholarship.”

He walks me back to my cabin, and we talk the entire way. He’s easy to get along with. He’s easy on the eyes, too. Maybe this vacation wasn’t such a horrible idea after

all.

We stop in front of the cabin, and I turn to look at him. “Holden took me to a clearing, and he said there’s a firepit there and we can see lots of stars. Would you take me out one night to see them? I don’t get to see a lot of them back home; the city lights block most of them out.”

“How’s tomorrow night? Tonight, we have a backyard bar-b-que, and Bill has been cooking up a storm all day.” He pats his flat stomach and grins at me. “It’s my favorite night of the week,” he whisper-yells.

I lift my eyebrows and nod. “Sure, save me a seat then.”

“Right next to me. Promise.” I always keep my promises. “See you in a bit.” He walks off, leaving me a light shade of red and unable to find the words to speak.

Tristan Ellis, I really want to kiss you.

Chapter 8

Tristan

I’ve never felt an instant connection with someone like I do with Lana. The guy she’s hung up on is an idiot for forgetting about her the second she left town. I can’t stop thinking about her. She’s so different than the girls in my circle of friends. She dresses with a lot of style but doesn’t need to be the center of attention. She’s just as happy being left alone to read. Fuck, if I didn’t think she would have pushed me away, I would have kissed her and taken what I so desperately need.

“How’d I do?” Holden asks, walking up to me. He rubs his damp hair with a towel.

“Amazing. Thank you. Whatever you said to her helped.” I motion to his head.
“Thought you were just going to the pond with Molly. Didn’t realize you were going in, too.”

“I wasn’t planning on it, but Molly is very persuasive. That is, until her parents and little brother showed up.” He shakes his head and chuckles. “Figured it would be best to get out of there before dear old dad figured out what was going on.”

“You didn’t...”

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His grin grows wider. “No. I was getting a nice rub down, though.”

“Try to keep it in your pants.”

I can’t even be mad at him. He’s getting what I want. We part ways to get ready for dinner. Holden lives close by, but we set him up with a room so he can keep some of his stuff here with us.

By the time I get downstairs, several guests have already come out and are drinking. Kids are playing cornhole and chasing each other. Parents are talking and laughing together, but the one girl I’m hoping to see isn’t here yet. Holden sidles up to Molly, and she giggles as he hands her a drink.

Mom asks for help putting food on the tables, so I begrudgingly oblige. I’m so busy, I don’t even notice she’s behind me until I step on her foot. She yelps in surprise, and I spin around, almost knocking her over. I grab her shoulders at the last second, holding her upright.

“Oh shit, I’m so sorry. Are you hurt?”

“You love trying to push me over, don’t you?” A corner of her mouth lifts. “I’m fine. My shoe is dirty now, but I’m sure I’ll live.”

I step back and really get a chance to look at her. She’s wearing a navy knit skirt with a big pink hibiscus on the bottom, a simple white tank top, and her pink converse. Her hair is done in a side braid and sits in front of her shoulder. She has a smattering of makeup on her face, covering her freckles, but it makes her hazel eyes pop.

I lean forward to kiss her cheek but pull myself back at the last second. It doesn't stop me from getting a good whiff of her shampoo, though. She smells like apples. "You look nice."

Again, that damn blush of hers. She bows her head and kicks a rock with her foot as she mumbles a quiet thank you.

I tap her elbow. "Come on, I saved us the best seats in the house." I lead her to a table for two, away from everyone, and motion for her to sit down.

She looks down at the table and then behind her at the other ones. "Won't it be weird we're not with everyone else?"

Shaking my head, I tell her, "Trust me, in about thirty minutes, this is the best seat in the house. Usually, we reserve it for couples, but I asked Mom if I could snag it tonight." She plays with her shirt. "Not that we're a couple or anything." Then she looks up. Her expression is hard to read, but it looks like she's saddened. "I mean. Ugh." Way to shove my foot way into my mouth. She giggles, and I know it will be okay.

After leading her to the seat that will give her the perfect view of the sunset dipping behind the mountains, we each pick up a plate and join the rest of the crowd by the food table. I load my plate up with chicken, ribs, potato wedges, and green beans. She picks up some chicken, salad, and potatoes.

I salivate looking at the food in front of me and dig in when we sit down again. I glance up at her, halfway through a rib, and she scrunches her face at me.

"What?" I ask, swallowing a bite of meat.

"You weren't lying about this being your favorite night, were you?" She takes a bite

of a potato wedge and chews slowly.

“No, and Bill changes it up every now and again. It helps that there are only about twenty people that can stay with us at one time. He’s able to do stuff like this.”

We continue eating, and when she gets up for more food, Mom happens to come by. She smiles and bends so she can talk quietly. “How’s the date?”

I take a bite of my food, trying to ignore her. “Not a date, Mom. I told you I wanted to show her the sunset. That’s all.”

“Well, whatever it is, she seems to be happy, and the Robinsons are happy she’s not sulking in her room.” She stands and rubs my back. “You seem happy, too, sweetheart.”

“Hi, Lana. Having a better day?”

“Much, thank you.” She puts her plate down and takes her seat again. Mom leaves us alone, and I look at my watch. Ten minutes until show time. I shift in my seat, my nerves taking hold as I wait. The sun is barely above the mountains when I place my hand on hers, stopping her mid bite.

“Watch the sun go down. You won’t see anything like this anywhere else.”

I pull my seat next to hers so we can watch it together. The orange, red, yellow, and blue hues in the sky blend perfectly. She takes out her phone, trying to snap a picture of it. When she looks at her screen, her lips turn down in a frown.

“You need a good camera to capture the vibrant colors. My cousin has taken some pictures of the sky. I can find one for you to take home if you’d like.”

She looks up at me, her eyes wide in surprise, and a smile spreads across her face. “I’d like that a lot. Thank you, Tristan.”

“Look straight up. See all the stars?” She does and nods. “When we go to the field tomorrow night, there’ll be tons more of them. You’ll see shooting stars, too, if you keep an eye out.”

She beams. “Really?” I nod and smile. “I’ve never seen a shooting star. We have meteor showers back home, but it’s usually too cloudy or bright to see them. When they come up during the winter months, it’s too cold to be out there. I don’t like the cold.” She scrunches her face, then laughs.

“Well, I hope to be able to experience your first one with you.” I lean closer and lower my voice. “Don’t forget to make a wish.”

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She knocks her shoulder against mine, and I want to pull her toward me. “The likelihood of it coming true just because I wished on a star is pretty low. But I like your optimism.”

“Never say never. Great things can happen when you least expect them to.”

Like meeting you. She blushes as if she can read my thoughts, and we look out again. The sun is almost completely hidden behind the horizon. I reach my hand out, brushing my fingers against hers. When she opens her palm, I interlace our fingers.

Warmth radiates from my palm up my arm as the sun fully sets behind the horizon.

“Wanna go for a walk?” I turn my head to look at her.

“S-sure. Let me tell my parents.” She releases my hand and walks off.

I glance down at my palm and seek her out again. It’s like I need to see her and can sense her around me. What a strange feeling. Without her hand in mine, I’m left bereft. She kisses her mom on the cheek and walks quickly back to me.

“Have me back to my cabin in an hour.”

I smile and take her hand in mine then lead the way. I have no idea where I want to go; I just wanted to get us away from everyone. I want to talk to her without ears around—mainly my mom’s.

After an extended moment, she risks asking, “How long have you and your girlfriend

been broken up?"

I sigh. Holden. "We broke up yesterday before you got here, but it was a long time coming." I continue my story and tell her all the reasons Kasey and I aren't right for one another. "It's been an infatuation, that's all. Hot cheerleader, her parents are friends with my parents... It seemed inevitable that we'd end up dating."

She pulls her hand from mine and links her fingers behind her back. The moon shines down, cascading us in a soft blue glow.

She points around but avoids eye contact. "Where are we?" She changes the subject and takes a small step away from me.

"Are you mad?"

She shakes her head. "No. I'm not going to be a rebound, though. The girlfriend is away, the boyfriend will play—"

"That's not what this is, Lana," I snap. My voice comes out louder than I mean it to.

She jumps and takes another small step away. "Okay." Her voice is small. "What is it then?"

"It's two people taking the time to get to know one another. I'm not with Kasey anymore." I swallow my fear and continue. "I'd be lying if I said I wasn't attracted to you. You're different."

"Oh, great, just what a girl wants to hear," she mutters.

"Trust me, it's a good thing. Most of the girls I know only care about superficial shit like hair and nails. There's more to you. I like that. I think you're special, and that

guy back home is the dumbest fucker around if he can't see how special you are. Hell, I've been around you for a day and a half, and I can already see it."

She looks up, and her eyes are bright. Her lips pull at the corners into a lazy smile. "You clearly don't know a lot of girls. There are more girls like me than you think. Thank you for saying that, though." She pulls her arms in front of her and grabs ahold of her left elbow, then ducks her head.

I step closer into her space. "Lana, I'd really like to kiss you now."

Chapter 9

Lana

"W-what?" I snap my head up, my eyes and mouth wide. My heart speeds up, and my palms become clammy. He wants to kiss me.

He dips his head and rubs the back of his neck. "Please don't make me say it again. This is going to be really awkward if you don't want to."

"N-no, it's not that. I, um, I want to," I fumble. He tucks a stray lock of hair behind my ear and leans down, stopping mere centimeters from my lips. He waits for me to seal the deal and close the gap. I press up on my toes until our lips lock.

Fireworks doesn't even describe what this kiss is like. It's an explosion of light behind my eyelids. Every atom in my being fires on all cylinders. He holds the side of my face tighter, threading his fingertips through the hair at the nape of my neck. My hands fall to his waist, and I pull myself closer to him, feeling every hard contour of his body.

I whimper when he sucks my lower lip between his teeth and then pulls away with a

pop. My eyes are still closed, and I lean in, urging him to continue.

When he chuckles, I blink my eyes until he comes into focus. What the hell was that? That was not a typical kiss. That was an entire fourth of July fireworks show condensed into less than a minute. I felt that kiss in my core—that's dangerous. It was more than it was with Joe. With Joe, it was my body reacting to his. With Tristan, it felt as if our souls collided.

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“Wow. That was some kiss.” His voice is low and deep.

I bite my lip and nod, not trusting that words will come out if I try to speak. I need more than that, though. This boy has my emotions all over the map in the two days I’ve known him. I wrap my hand around the back of his neck, pulling him back to me. He opens his mouth, and I slip my tongue into his, deepening the kiss.

My rub club bank has new material.

His hands fly to my waist, and he walks me backward until I’m pressed against the trunk of a tree. He presses his body flush against mine as we continue to kiss. Wetness rushes to my core, and I arch my back, hoping to find some relief for the tight coil of need in the pit of my belly.

He takes my wrists in his large left hand and pins them above my head. He then slowly drags his fingers down the side of my body. Goosebumps rise in its wake. I gasp as he trails kisses along my cheek and down to the crook of my neck. I’m so blissed out that, when he reaches out and squeezes my breast, I moan loud.

“Fuck, Lana. You sound so sexy,” he admits between kisses.

I tug at my arms, and when he releases them, I wrap my arms around his neck and hike my leg over his hip. He grinds into me, and I feel him clear as day between my legs. I want him. I want to feel him on every inch of my body. Everything becomes real, and my lust induced haze fades as I think about where this is headed. We’re moving too fast. I’ve known him for two days, and that’s not enough time to give someone my V-card. I drop my leg from him and tense under his touch.

“Wait. Stop, Tristan. We can’t.” I apply gentle pressure to his chest, and he steps back. His gray eyes are dark, his pupils huge. I touch my face, the burn from his short stubble a reminder of what we just did.

My body screams at me for relief, but my brain wins this round. He dips his head to the crook of my neck again and whispers, “I know.”

I relax against him, and he wraps his arms around me, holding me. I’m comfortable in his embrace. I don’t want to leave, but I have to be back at my cabin soon.

“I need to get back. Mom and Dad will be mad if I’m not back when I said I would be.”

He extricates himself from me and takes my hand in his. I want nothing more than to wrap myself around him and let him do whatever he wants to me. Snap out of it, Lana! Two days! Geez, the guy gives me the best kiss of my life, and I’m ready to jump his bones. No one likes an eager beaver.

The walk to my cabin is short, and we stop by the fire. Mom and Dad are still sitting there, talking with Dad’s potential client. Mom looks at our conjoined hands, and I drop his under her attentive gaze.

“Any chance there’s some ice cream around? I’d kill for a cone.” Or maybe just dunk me in the pond. I need to cool down.

He turns his head to the side, thinking. “I don’t think there is, but there’s a place downtown that sells awesome homemade ice cream. They’re open late.”

I kick a rock and twist side to side. “I don’t think my parents would let me go into town with you.”

He nods, understanding. "It's fine. Maybe another night. Walk me back to my cabin? I'm thinking of going for a hike early tomorrow and want to get some sleep."

Lies. I want some time alone to relive the kiss and make the pressure between my legs go away.

He nods. "Want some company?" A look of pure fear crosses my features. I blink at him a few times, and he raises his eyebrows at me. "Tomorrow? The hike?"

I sigh in relief and close my eyes, a giggle escaping. I thought he read my mind for a minute. That would be so awkward. "Yeah. That would be good."

He smirks. "What did you think I meant?"

"N-nothing."

I say goodnight to my parents, and he walks me back to the cabin. I feel like I'm being dropped off after a date that I don't want to end. I play with the ends of my braid and look down between us.

"Thanks for showing me the sunset and for, you know, the walk." I feel my face heating up as I talk, and the tingles around my lips from his beard burn are back. I touch my lips and rub my fingers along them.

With a smirk, he leans close. "Just the walk?" His voice is low, and I want to pull him to me for another kiss. I swallow hard and open my mouth to speak. "You're cute when you blush. I had a good time, too. I'll be by to get you at seven tomorrow."

That's so early! "Seven? How about we shoot for eight?"

He crosses his arms over his chest. "What's the rush to go to bed then? It's only

nine.”

I reach up and give him another chaste kiss. “Goodnight, Tristan. I’ll see you at eight tomorrow.”

“Meet me at seven for breakfast. I’ll have Bill make something special for you. Any allergies?”

I shake my head. “I don’t like bananas, though. It’s a texture thing.” I glance down between his legs as my mind wanders. Is he thinking the same thing as me, or am I truly that perverted? He places his hands in front of his growing bulge, and I look back up, smirking.

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“I’ll keep that in mind. No bananas. Got it.” I push open the door and turn one last time to see him watching me.

“Goodnight.”

* * *

The alarm goes off at six, and I groan. I turn it off and pull the pillow over my eyes to block the sun that’s peeking through the curtains. I want to go back to sleep.

There’s a dull ache between my legs from when I took care of business last night—twice. My mind was reeling too much for one orgasm to be enough to let me sleep. After my second one, I practically passed out from exhaustion.

I set the alarm so I could wake up and do something with my hair. We’re going for a hike, so I’ll wear a pair of shorts and a Greenwich Preparatory tank top (go Spartians!) with hiking boots, but I’m sure I’ll sweat. My hair puffs up like an afro when that happens.

I peek out into the living room. Mom is sitting on the couch, reading a book, and drinking coffee. I get my love of romance novels from her. She loves living in the fantasy of it, but she reads more historical romance of books while I lean more toward traditional contemporary.

“How’s Reginald this morning?”

She pulls her reading glasses off and pats the seat next to her. “Tristan seems like a

nice boy, Lana.”

I sit and tuck my legs under me. “He is. We’re going hiking this morning.”

“Just be careful. We’re only here for another week and a half. I don’t want you getting too attached and leave with a broken heart.”

I nod. I know she’s right. “I’ll be careful. I’m meeting him for breakfast first. Could you braid my hair in French braid pigtails? I don’t want it to frizz up.”

She smiles and puts her book down. I turn, and she works with practiced ease to get my hair into braids. When she’s done, she pats my shoulder. I invite her to breakfast, but she declines, telling me she’s going to wait for Dad. I’m grateful because I really didn’t want her there; I only asked to be courteous.

After getting changed, I make my way over to the main house. I’m early, so I bring a book with me and sit at one of the picnic benches. There’s a slight chill to the air this morning. I wish I’d brought my sweatshirt out with me, but it should warm up soon, especially once we start hiking. I crack open my book and start reading.

I’m not sure how long it is before he comes and finds me, but as soon as he’s close, I can feel his presence. My skin breaks out in goosebumps, and a shiver runs down my spine. I look up and see him leaning against the pole on the porch. He’s in a pair of gray basketball shorts, a loose University of Wyoming football t-shirt, and a pair of hiking boots.

“Morning, Lana. Sleep well?”

I close my book and swing my leg over the bench to go to him. “I did. You?”

“Not really. I couldn’t seem to stop thinking about this girl I kissed.”

I nibble on some skin on my lower lip, trying to keep my smile at bay. My arms are crossed over my book, holding it tight to my chest. “Oh yeah?”

“Whatcha reading?” He gently pulls on the book, and I let him take it. He looks at the half-naked man on the cover and gives me a quizzical look. “You seem to like your romance books.” He lowers his voice. “Is it because the men are so hot, or is it because they turn you on?”

My entire body flushes with mortification. “It’s because real life sucks, and romance is a getaway. No matter what, the couples are going to live happily ever after. I like the fantasy of it all. The meet cute, the drama, and the perfect happily ever after.” I need to change the subject because he’s looking at me like he wants to eat me for breakfast. “So, what’s for breakfast?”

Chapter 10

Tristan

Bill made us omelets and toast with a side of fresh fruit. Lana seemed to really enjoy it. Although, she didn’t mention not liking mushrooms, and she picked all of those out of the eggs. I’ll make sure I tell him no mushrooms next time. I tell her about the hike we’re doing today, and when I explain we have to drive to it, her demeanor changes.

She seems hesitant at first, but when my dad comes by and tells her what a great hike it is, she relaxes and agrees. I open the truck door for her and help her up into the cab. It’s only about thirty minutes out to the start of the trail, and then it’s about a two-hour hike roundtrip. I’ve made sure to pack plenty of snacks, and we each have a water pack.

The music blares when I start my truck, and I turn it down. She makes a face at my

choice, and when I ask her about it, she tells me she hates country music. Clearly, she doesn't know what good music is.

"Who doesn't like country music?" I ask in disbelief.

"Um, a lot of people." She laughs. "Did you drive out with the hikers yesterday, too?" she asks as I turn left onto the highway.

"No. There are some trails through the woods close to the ranch. I took two families with small kids, and they didn't want anything too strenuous. You'll like this trail. There are a lot of rock formations, and we might even see a moose or two."

Her eyes light up. "Oh yeah? I've never seen one before. Is the hike going to be hard?"

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“It shouldn’t be too bad. If you don’t like it after we start, we can turn around.”

She nods and looks out the window as we speed past vast fields. I glance over at her as she looks out the side window.

“I also wanted to come out this way to get you ice cream after. You mentioned it last night, so I thought it would be fun.” I flip between watching her and the road. She smiles wide and plays with the end of her pigtails.

My mind wanders to all sorts of dirty thoughts. I imagine grabbing her pigtails and pulling her head back. With her soft, lithe neck exposed to me, I could run my tongue along her fluttering pulse point, up to her ear, and nibble on it. She’d moan for me. I’d tell her not to move and run my fingers down her body, feeling every delicate curve.

Fuck. My dick is so hard now, I need to cool it. I shake the thoughts from my head. It’s been too long since I’ve gotten laid—almost a month. Kasey and I had phone sex, but I’ve been too busy with the guests at the ranch and practice that we hadn’t had time alone. I shouldn’t be thinking of Lana like this. She’s better than just spank bank material.

I clear my throat and concentrate on the road. We pull into the parking lot a few minutes later and start up the trail. I point out different birds and plants as we begin our climb. There are a few others on the path, but mostly it’s barren. I reach out and take her hand in mine, and when she doesn’t pull it back, I smile to myself.

“So, I noticed your tank top. It’s your high school, right?”

She nods and plays with her braid again. She really needs to stop doing that. There's no one around; it would be so easy to push her off the trail and explore her with my tongue and teeth—to find all her pleasure points. Focus, Tristan.

“Yup. It's a private school, and I have a uniform I have to wear. I'm going into my senior year.”

I groan inwardly. Naughty school girl. The pigtails, the plaid skirt, telling me she's been naughty and needs to be spanked. I stick my knuckle between my teeth and bite down, then slide my hand down to the front of my shorts and try to hide the massive hard-on I'm rocking.

She glances down at my hand and blushes. I can see the color change even with my sunglasses on.

“Sorry,” I murmur.

“Let me guess? Schoolgirl outfit?”

I chuckle and feel the heat rise on my own face. “Something like that. What school are you looking at next year?”

“Well, I told you I want to go into architecture. My dream school is Cornell or MIT. So, I'll apply to both of those, and then I'll look into some local schools just in case. I've worked my ass off to keep my grades up.

“I've also been tutoring students, and my dad knows someone on the board at Cornell, so I think I have a real shot at getting in. Not that I want my dad to pull strings, but if it helps, might as well.” She shrugs as she finishes.

I whistle. “Wow. Cornell. That's a really good school, isn't it?”

“It’s in the top twenty schools in all of America.”

She continues to tell me about why she likes it and how she got into architecture. When she was five, she was given a K’nex set and couldn’t stop. She would build bridges, structures, and even roller coasters. Finally, her mom saw how interested she was and bought her sketchbooks to draw her own designs. She branched out into interior design with the sketchbooks.

“What’s your favorite thing to design? I bet it’s a huge skyscraper, like in New York City, right?”

She smiles and then laughs to herself. “Actually, no. I love designing houses. I can create the blueprints for the space, but also help design the inside. I would love knowing a family picked my piece because they loved it so much and wanted the space to be theirs. It would make me happy knowing I’d made others happy.”

Not sure I expected that answer. She’s passionate. It’s kind of sexy. That and the damn school girl thought hasn’t left my mind.

We stop a few times for water and a snack. I sit on a rock and stretch my legs out in front of me, tilting my head back to let the sun warm my face. A branch snaps in the distance, and I focus on where the noise is coming from. She notices my intense focus and stiffens beside me.

“What was that?” she asks, scooting closer to me.

I stand, hoping for a better view through the trees. I gasp, and she grabs my hand, holding tight.

“Stand up, look.” I point in the direction I’m focused on. She lifts her sunglasses and follows the direction I’m pointing to. “See the moose calf with momma?”

She nods and pulls herself closer to me as she watches them eat leaves and bark from the close trees.

“Are they going to charge?”

I loosen my arm from her death grip and wrap them around her instead. When she presses her face against my chest, I kiss the top of her head. “No. As long as we don’t go close to them, they shouldn’t feel threatened.”

I then rattle off random facts I’ve learned about moose from my years of hiking with the guests. She seems interested, but until they finally move on, she stays tense in my arms. Not that I’m complaining. I like having her seek solace in my embrace.

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I twist one of her pigtails in my hands and tug on it. Not enough to hurt, just tease. When she lifts her chin, I press my lips to hers. It's like the dam breaks, and all my senses fill with Lana. I need her like she's the air I breathe. Every time I'm close to this girl, I lose all sense of myself.

When a moan escapes her lips, I pull her closer and deepen the kiss. My hands slide down and settle against her ass as she rubs herself against my leg. I want to rip the clothes off her body and bury myself in her warm heat. When she starts tugging at my t-shirt, I rein in my need and take her wrists in my hands, stopping her. I don't want her to do something she's going to regret.

I pull back to speak. "We have a hike we need to finish. I don't want you doing something you'll regret later."

She blinks at me in a daze, her hazel eyes slowly returning to their normal color, then nods and takes a step back. My hands fall to my sides as we both take a much-needed reprieve.

What are you doing to me, Lana? I've tasted you, but now I want more. My body craves more, but I can't. She's here for just over a week, too short of a time to get involved.

When I look at her, I see so much more than a girl in high school. I see her passion, her drive, and her innocence.

Innocence.

This is the second time in two days I've wanted to steal more than just a kiss from this girl. I don't know if that's even a real option. I think I need to talk to Holden and get his opinion. I'm not sure he's the best person to ask, but I need to talk to someone, and most of my friends are also Kasey's friends.

Chapter 11

Lana

I'm dripping by the time we make it back to the car, and I'm not only talking about sweat. I'm glad he made me get up early so we could hit the trail because it's hot and muggy now that the sun is out. Without a cloud in the sky, there's very little in the way of shade.

Two amazing kisses in two days, and my girly parts are screaming at me for more. Tristan Ellis is a very good kisser. I find myself falling more and more for him. How many girls has he practiced with? The moment of insecurity creeps up and settles deep in my gut. I fold my hands in my lap as we travel down the road back to town.

"Thanks for bringing me out there. It was really nice, and I'm glad I got to experience it."

"Glad you enjoyed it. I'm sure I'm going to remember this hike for a long time."

It can't be because of the kiss, right? He must have brought girls out here before and dazzled them with his knowledge of moose. "Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"First time I've made out with a girl out there." He smiles but keeps his eyes on the road.

"You never brought Kasey out this way? You're good. I'm sure you've kissed lots of

girls, so why haven't you brought one of them with you?" I try to keep my voice even, but a small tinge of jealousy hits as I finish.

He narrows his eyes as he flits his gaze in my direction. "Kasey isn't into anything outside of the mall. I also haven't kissed a lot of girls. We were together for most of high school. Not many opportunities to kiss someone else." His voice is cold, a warning to drop the subject.

An awkward silence fills the cab of the truck, and I reach for my braid to roll the end around my fingers. I see him glance at me then back to the road from the corner of my eye.

"Please stop playing with that damn braid," he mutters quietly.

"Why?" I drop my hand and look at him.

"Because I'm trying real damn hard to be a good guy here, when all I want to do is take what I want. You're a tease." I open my mouth to protest, but he continues. "You're here, but I can't have you."

"Why not? What's stopping you?" I ask quietly.

"Because I'm not going to take something that doesn't belong to me."

Belong to him? I simmer and clench my jaw as I replay his words until I can't stand it. "I don't belong to anyone. I'm not an animal, you know."

He sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. "That's not what I meant. I mean... have you ever slept with a guy?"

Oh. He wants to know if I'm still a virgin. Moment of truth. Should I be proud of still

having my v-card intact, or do I act like it's no big deal? Do I even want to give it up to him? If his kisses are any indication, then hell yes! I don't live in the middle ages. I know it's not some magical thing, but still.

“Yeah, I've slept with a guy before. It's no big deal.”

Half-truth. My cousin slept over before and stayed in my room with me. We were seven or so, and we slept. See, not a complete lie.

He raises his eyebrows but doesn't say anything as he pulls into the ice cream shop. It's in the middle of downtown, wedged between a hardware store and a drug store. A few people sit at the tables outside, enjoying their frozen treats.

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He gets out and comes to my side, helping me slide out of the truck.

“Their sizes are big, so don’t go crazy unless you can eat a lot. This place is my favorite. They have the best ice cream by far.” He pulls the door open and places his hand on my lower back, ushering me up to the cashier. The place is small—a few tables and chairs littering the inside and a few pictures of the wall showcasing the high school sports teams. Most of the space is taken up by large see-through coolers filled with ice cream choices.

We take a few minutes to look over the menu, and I decide to order cookie dough, my favorite. He chooses coffee brownie and pulls his wallet out to pay for both. When they hand us our ice cream, I snort. He wasn’t lying when he said the portions are huge. I went with a small, but even that seems like a mistake. Two huge scoops fill my cone.

We sit outside the shop at a small metal table, neither of us saying a lot as we lick the melting, sweet treat. My mind wanders, and I’m suddenly very aware of how it looks when my tongue darts out to lick a patch of ice cream that’s sliding down the side of the cone. I turn red, and when he asks me if I’m okay, I lie and say it’s hot sitting in the sun.

I watch him through lowered lashes as he eats his cone. He licks around the lower part of his scoop, and I remember what that tongue does to me. I want to feel that tongue somewhere besides my mouth, so badly.

Right now, I wish I was more like Molly or Bethany and could just grab the bull by the horns and take what I want. I’m too shy for that though. Plus, he’s already made it

clear he isn't going to try anything. I can be happy with kissing, right? It's a good way to forget about Joe like he forgot about me.

We finish eating and head back to the ranch. Mom and Dad are hanging around the front with Mr. and Mrs. Ellis, waiting for us to get back, and I groan as they wave at us. We get out, and they ask how the hike was. I show them the few pictures we snapped together, and then they let us go.

He walks me back to my cabin, and once we are out of view of the house, he takes my hand in his. As we pass the barn, I hear a few breathy pants. We slow our walking, and Tristan holds back a laugh.

"Harder, Holden," Molly moans.

I turn bright red. Those two are going at it like bunnies in the middle of the barn. I hear him groan before everything quiets down again. What I wouldn't give to be doing that with Tristan right now. I discreetly clamp my thighs, trying to ward off the ever-growing need for him.

My life in Connecticut seems so far away now. I left three days ago, but everything has changed. Joe seems like a distant memory now. My heart is leaping out of my chest for Tristan. Everything about him makes me happy—his smile, laugh, looks, even the way he rattles off random facts.

He's passionate.

He's who I want to take me. I want him to be my first. The longer I spend in his presence, the more I know he's the right choice. He would be gentle, I know it. He wouldn't move too fast. He cares too much about people.

Wow, girl! Too fast. Time to pull back and deal with your sexual frustrations another

way. I'm not sure I want to remember my first time as being a rebound, and I know that's exactly what I would be to him. Unless you're not, a little voice inside my head yells at me.

"I've gotta check on some of the guests. I'll see you later for stargazing?"

I nod. "Sure. Are we going to ride out there?"

"We'll take the ATV. Make sure to bring a sweatshirt and maybe wear a pair of jeans. It can get chilly at night. Wouldn't want you to get cold."

"Darn, and here I thought you'd be willing to warm me up," I smirk and bite my lip when he squints ever so slightly at me.

"Who said I wasn't going to do that anyway?"

* * *

Dad walks with me to the front of the house to meet with Tristan. He sees me and smiles, then sees my dad and is confused.

"Hey, Mr. Robinson. Is everything all right?"

"Tristan, you seem like a fine young man, but Lana isn't going out with you tonight to stargaze. I'm not comfortable with it being just the two of you."

"Dad, I told you. We're just friends. Boys and girls can be friends." I cross my arms and glare at him. "You're the one who wanted me to have fun. This is me having fun."

"It's not going to be just us," he interjects.

“It’s not?” Dad and I ask at the same time. His tone is skeptical, and mine is shocked.

He shakes his head and smiles. “No, sir. Holden and Molly are coming, too. Thought both girls would enjoy the stars. Lana and Molly seem to be getting close with one another.”

What? No, we aren’t. We’ve hung out a few times for no more than thirty minutes, but she got bored with me reading. I keep my lips sealed, letting the two of them talk before Dad finally agrees to let me go. Molly and Holden appear moments later, and they’re holding hands. She’s glowing. Must be the crazy barn sex she had. A pang of jealousy courses through me, but I push the feeling aside.

The sun is barely above the horizon when we make it to the open field. The engines for both ATVs die out, and it’s peaceful; a few birds and crickets can be heard, but other than that, it’s quiet. I let go of Tristan’s waist and pull the helmet off my head. He pushes a few loose tendrils out of my face and smiles.

Molly and Holden have already taken off, running toward a few trees in the distance.

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“Hope he’s got protection,” I murmur.

Tristan laughs and pulls a folded blanket and basket off the back of the ATV. He spreads it out and pulls out a soda, grapes, and cheese, then tells me to take a seat. It was very thoughtful of him to think of bringing snacks.

I lie down and look straight up at the sky, a sigh leaving my lips. Then turn my head to look at Tristan, who’s looking up at the sky, his head resting on his hands. Molly giggles in the distance, and I think about hearing her today.

It had to have turned him on, too, right? It couldn’t have just affected me.

“Um, Tristan?” I ask.

“Yeah?” he asks, not even looking at me.

“Today, when we heard Molly and Holden...” He turns to look at me, a twinkle in his eye. I take a deep breath before lowering my gaze to the grass behind him. I can do this. “Did it turn you on?”

A smile creeps over his face as he rolls to his side, resting his head on his hand. I can feel his warm breath fan across my face and glance back at him when he runs his finger along my cheek.

“Why? Did it turn you on, Lana?” He lowers his voice so it comes out deep and a touch husky. My skin sears under the touch of his finger that’s still on my cheek.

Lie. Don't tell him the truth. It's going to make it that much harder to face him if he knows.

I can't even look at him to answer, so I turn my head, and his finger drops from my face. "No. I just didn't know if it turned you on."

He drags his upper half over me and places his arm on the other side of my head, caging me below him. He presses his chest against mine, and I can feel his heart beating fast against his ribcage. My breath comes out in shallow pants, and my lips instinctively part.

"Yes, it did," he accuses. "Because it was hot, and yes, it turned me on, too."

I inch my face toward his, and he pulls back, sliding off me. "Time to find some shooting stars. If you wish hard enough, one of them might come true." He lies back again, and I miss the heat of his body looming over me.

I sigh. Maybe we can get naked like Molly and Holden.

Chapter 12

Tristan

"Maybe we can get naked like Molly and Holden," she mutters quietly to herself.

Did she really just say that out loud? I mean, she muttered it under her breath, but I'm pretty sure I wasn't supposed to hear it. Still, I want that so fucking bad. My intent with coming out here—besides showing her the stars—was maybe for some dry humping, something to take the edge off this pent-up energy. She's driving me insane, and I don't even think she realizes it.

Ever since I felt her against me in the water, I've had fantasies of taking her and fucking her hard and fast. I'd make her come all over me and then make her clean it as I come in her mouth. The idea has been running through my mind all day, making it hard to control myself. Especially because tomorrow she's eighteen and then the only thing stopping me is her.

She still has the damn pigtails in, and I keep picturing her on her knees with my dick between her lips as I pull her face forward by her hair. Molly shrieks and giggles again. I clench my jaw and take a deep breath through my nose. Fucking Holden. He's making this really difficult for me.

I sit up and open the container of grapes. I need some sort of distraction.

"So, what's on the agenda for tomorrow?" I ask, popping a grape into my mouth.

She sits up and crosses her legs in front of her. "I don't know," she says on a shrug. "I have another book I can read. Maybe I'll come out here and sit under a tree. Isn't there a dance or something tomorrow night?"

"Thursday. We have them every week. If I'm not too busy with guests, I help Mom and Dad teach a basic line dance so the guests can have some fun." I offer her a grape, and she pops it into her mouth. "Isn't it your birthday tomorrow?"

"Yeah, I'm not making a big deal about it and I've asked Mom and Dad not to either. We will celebrate when we get home." She asks what I'm up to. Her eyes light up with hope only to disappear when I tell her I'm booked for riding lessons during the day. One of the families wants to get their younger kids on a horse before they head back to Illinois. Since most only come here for a week, time is almost out for them.

After another twenty minutes or so, Molly and Holden wander back, and he lays a blanket beside us to sit on. I glare at him, and he gives me an innocent look before his

lips turn up into a cocky grin. Asshole.

“Don’t be jealous,” he whispers.

I am. That’s the problem. He’s taking care of his needs—and, from the sound of it, her needs, too. Lana shifts in her spot and stands after a few minutes. She wanders away from the blanket, so I chase after her.

“Hey, everything okay?” I ask as I fall in step next to her.

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She nods but doesn't answer. Something's not right, though; I can feel the unease rolling off her body. She tilts her head up, the sky is completely dark now. She points out a few of the large constellations, and when her finger dips lower to the horizon, she points out Cassiopeia.

"Do you know her story? How she came to be?" I ask, taking both her hands in mine.

"She pissed off Poseidon, saying she and her daughter were more beautiful than the sea spirits. I forget what they're called, though."

"Nereids."

Her face lights up. "Guess you already know the story. Why am I even telling you?" she chuckles.

"Because I like when you talk. It makes me happy." I take a small step closer, wanting to have her scent around me.

"Thanks." Her smile fades as she continues. "This is happening so fast. I really like you, but I'll leave in another week. It's not fair."

I lift a hand to her cheek and brush my knuckles along her fair skin. "We haven't done anything yet we can't take back. We'll take it slow. Like you said, we have a week left, and it's not like we can't stay in touch, you know, if you want. The internet is great." I smile wide, showing her my perfect teeth and hoping to see her smile.

We both look up right as a shooting star passes above our heads. "Make a wish," I

whisper into her ear.

She closes her eyes, her lashes fanning against her smooth skin, and presses her lips into a thin line as she concentrates. She blinks them open and looks at me.

“What’d you wish for?” she whispers.

I grin. “I can’t tell you that; otherwise, it won’t come true.”

I want more time with this girl. That’s my wish tonight. It’s not even about sex at this point. I mean, it would be great to get this boner to go away, but it’s more than that. There’s something about her that intrigues me. I want all the other guests to go away so I can focus on her for the rest of the time she’s here.

Her scent fills my senses as I roam my eyes over her body. She squirms under my attentive gaze. Even in the darkness, I can see her fidget. I brush my lips over hers, and she gives me a breathy sigh, her hands squeezing mine. I do it again, just to hear that sinful sound flow past her lips. She’s a drug. Everything about her draws me in, my own personal high.

My phone buzzes, effectively ruining the moment. I glare at the screen in annoyance. It’s Dad telling me to come back. We’ve been gone for almost two hours, and it barely feels like any time as passed.

“Gotta head back. It’s getting late.”

Molly and Holden are wrapped around one another—again.

“Hey, get a room,” I call out. Holden extends his middle finger in my direction and continues to kiss her.

When we get back and walk the girls to their cabins, I get a chance to talk to Holden. We divert into the barn for a few minutes alone.

Kade, my horse, snorts at our intrusion, but when he hears my voice, he calms down and goes back to gnawing on some hay.

“Be careful with her, Holden. I’ve never known you to get involved with a guest. What’s different about her?” I stroke Kade’s mane, distracting myself from the question I really want to ask.

“I’m being careful. She’s the one who came on to me. Told me she’s looking for some fun and then, when we were taking a break from riding, came on to me. She’s hot and bored. Her dad wanted to try his hand at being a cowboy. She’s going through a ‘screw you phase’.” He shrugs. “Not my problem. I’m just the lucky bastard who’s getting his dick wet.

“What’s going on with Lana? You guys seem to be spending a fair amount of time together. You hook up with her yet?”

I shake my head. “No. Although, we walked by the barn today and heard how much fun you and Molly were having. Maybe choose somewhere a little more private next time. There are too many guests around that could have heard you.”

He rolls his eyes, even though he knows I’m right. “All right, Ellis, spit it out. Clearly, something’s on your mind.” Holden gives me his full attention and crosses his arms.

I run my fingers through my shaggy brown hair. “I really like this girl. She’s fun, smart, and actually has a passion for something besides shopping. It’s a nice change. I just...” I huff out a breath.

“Just what?”

“I don’t want to fuck it up and get attached. I don’t need another girl trying to control me. She leaves next week. We’ll never see each other again.”

“So, do what I do—fuck and run. I’ve been trying to teach you my ways for a while now. Are you finally ready to learn? You don’t have anyone tying you down.”

Holden has such a calm demeanor about him. I don’t know how to float through life without a care in the world as to the opposite sex. Maybe I’m soft because I was with Kasey for so long and thought it was love. She was just using me, though. I see that now. She wanted the football player boyfriend, and I was more than willing to jump into that role.

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I take a deep breath. It's time to have some fun instead of worrying about everything.
"Teach me the ways of the force, Obi Wan."

He walks me back to the house before going home for the night, but he leaves me with this final piece of advice. "Play the game, but don't get caught up in the rules." That's what I intend to do this summer.

Watch out, Lana Robinson. I'm coming for you.

Chapter 13

Lana

Unlike yesterday, Tristan and Holden are nowhere to be found today. Mom and Dad had a cupcake waiting for me in the room this morning and told me happy birthday. Since they promised not to make a big deal out of it here, they let me go on my own. I've spent the better part of the day reading, but now I'm sitting by the pond with Molly. I need someone to talk to, and she's the best I have since I have no cell service.

To start, I am curious about her and Holden hooking up. I would be lying if I didn't want to know about it. "Can I ask you about Holden?" I splash some water with my toes, avoiding her gaze.

"What do you want to know?" she asks, a smile stretching her lips.

My face is bright red now. I can read about sex stuff, no problem. Why is it so hard to

say out loud? “Well, Tristan and I were walking by the barn yesterday and heard you two. Then again last night. Is he, was he your first, or have you done that before?”

Molly and I are about the same age. I know I don’t have a lot of experience, and it’s possible she does, but I don’t know. She looks like the kind of girl who hangs out with all the cool kids—the one who has boys throwing themselves at her feet to gain her attention. Her confidence is intimidating at times.

“Yup. I’m pissed at my parents for dragging me out here, and he’s hot. Never thought my first would be a cowboy.” She kicks some water up, and it lands on my thigh.

I wipe it off my skin and furrow my brow. “Wait, so because you’re pissed off at your parents, you gave up your V-card?”

She shrugs like she just told me the weather, not that she gave up her virginity. “Yeah, they have a strict rule with me not dating unless they have approved the guy. Here, since there are so many activities to do, they can’t keep an eye on me. You’re helping, too, you know. My dad trusts you, and your dad already talked you up. If I tell them I’m hanging with you, he’s cool with it.”

I don’t know if I should be hurt that she’s using me, or applaud her for finding a way around her parents’ rules. I nod, not really knowing what else to say to her. I really hope this doesn’t come around to bite me in the ass.

“He’s really good at it, too,” she continues. “I mean, I’ve never had anyone else, but I’ve given a blow job before, and he’s the biggest I’ve ever had.”

She keeps talking about Holden and his ‘massive size’. I’ve never done any of that. The most I’ve done is some heavy petting, and that was just this week! I’ve only kissed Joe, and this boy Kyle when I was in fourth grade. He ran up to me on the playground, grabbed my arms, and planted a wet kiss on my lips. I was horrified and

pushed him away.

“Hello, earth to Lana?” Her voice cuts through my thoughts.

“Huh? What?” I smile shyly at her.

“I asked if you’ve done anything with Tristan yet? He’s really the one I wanted to get to know, but he gave me the brush off.”

“We’ve only kissed.” I’m embarrassed to tell her, but once again, she’s all I’ve got. “I’ve never done more than kissing and a little dry humping with a guy.”

“Do you want to do more with him?”

Yes. I really do. I made up my mind last night while watching the stars with him. I yearned for him to do something—anything. But he was a perfect gentleman. We kissed a bit. I wished really hard on a star that he’d drag me back to the blanket and show me how good he can make me feel. Let me figure out how loud I can be.

None of that happened. We kissed, and just as I finally got the courage to ask him for more, his phone buzzed, and we all packed up our stuff to get back. Turns out, my dad was getting worried because it was so late and all of us were out there. So, really, I can thank my dad for cock-blocking me.

“Yeah, I do. I really like him.” I hug my knees to my chest and smile as I picture his handsome face.

“No.” I purse my lips and look at her, confused. “That’s how you end up the crazy girl he slept with. No feelings. Shut that shit down. It’s about the two of you feeling good. Make it a chemical release only.”

I'm appalled. "I can't just shut my emotions down like that. How can you sleep with someone and not have feelings for them?"

She shrugs like it's no big deal. "Okay, listen. Even if you do have feelings, don't let him know that. If you tell him you want sex, no strings attached, I'm sure he'll jump at the chance. I've seen how he looks at you."

That catches my attention, and I perk up. "Oh yeah? How does he look at me?"

"Like he wants to rip your clothes off and take you the moment he sees you." She giggles. "It's actually really hot."

No, he doesn't. But haven't I had that same fantasy a few times today? I've started another book, and when I got to their first sex scene, I pictured Tristan and me. I could barely keep a straight face and squirmed the whole time as I read the scene. The need was so strong I almost went back to the cabin for a quick session, but Mom and Dad have been lurking around today.

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Holden walks up behind Molly and blows a raspberry on her cheek. She squeals and jerks away from him, laughing.

“What are you ladies up to?”

“Nothing,” we say together.

“Great, then you won’t mind if I steal Molly here for a few minutes. I need her to show me how she does that thing with her back again.” He helps her stand, and the two of them run off, leaving me to my thoughts again.

I’m too antsy to sit and read any longer. Bethany told me after she lost her V-card at prom, I’d know when it was time to lose mine. Prom. How predictable, right? My prom experience was a lot less physical. I went with Matt Morrison, and it was fine. We had a good time. He refused to touch me anywhere but my waist and only kissed my cheek at the end of the night.

I wanted to go with Joe, but he promised Leah Hennisey they would go together. It wasn’t a total wash, though, since he saved me a slow dance. After that night, he spent a lot of time hanging around me. I was too nervous to do anything until right before we left for vacation when we shared our first kiss.

Why was it so hard for me to kiss Joe, but so easy with Tristan? Because Joe is superficial, and Tristan is different. Joe didn’t see me until I changed my clothes and started hanging out with the popular crowd. Tristan noticed me from the moment he saw me. Now, that may also have to do with the fact that I got Bethany’s makeover before coming here. But even though I haven’t been dressing the same as I do back

home, he still finds a way to make me feel like the prettiest girl around.

Grrr, sometimes I really wish my inner voice would stop being so astute.

The only way to have anything physical with Tristan is to make him believe it means nothing more to me than blowing off some steam. I stand with new determination. I can do this. It will be like acting. How hard can it be?

I walk by the barn, and he's there with a family. He's about to head out to the field with them, and boy does he look good on the horse. His muscular legs hug the horse's back, and I can see just a small amount of his firm ass peeking from above the back of the saddle.

Thoughts of my legs wrapped around him in the water resurface, and I want a repeat of that, except I want us connected below the waist. I bite my lower lip, hard. I watch him ride until he's disappeared past a few trees, and then I stand there daydreaming a little longer. His rough hands running over my sensitive flesh. His soft lips finding the hidden spots that make me squirm.

A hand lands on my shoulder, making me jump. I twist around quickly, my hand over my racing heart.

"Sorry, pumpkin. I called your name, you didn't seem to hear me," Dad says.

"Sorry, zoned out there. I'm a little tired, I guess."

"Mom and I are going for a hike, and we would really like you to come. We want to get a few family pictures, and you've been busy the past few days with Molly and Tristan. Go get changed so we can head out."

I start to complain, but he gives me the look, and I shut my mouth. Parents are good

at giving that look. It basically says ‘try me, see what happens’. I drop my head in defeat and change into some hiking clothes. Not the way I wanted to spend my eighteenth birthday.

Slowly, I walk back to the main house and find my parents talking with Molly’s parents.

“Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Morrell. Are you coming hiking, too?” I ask, looking around for Molly.

“Yes, Henry invited us, thought we could discuss a few things,” Mr. Morrell says, slapping my dad on the back like they are long lost friends.

I perk up. “Is Molly coming, too?” At least, if I have to go, I could have someone to talk to.

“No, she said she wasn’t feeling well and is lying down.”

Lying down. Probably not because she’s sick. I wish I was her right now. Not that Tristan has been around all day anyway. I’m dying to see him—to kiss him. The thought of him drives me crazy and sends heat rushing to my core.

We start the hike, and both sets of parents are talking as I trail behind them, wrapped up in my own dirty fantasies. Would we sneak off and have sex in the barn against the wall? Would he be romantic and take me in the field under the stars? Different scenarios run through my mind as I think about him.

How am I going to bring this idea up to him? Hi, Tristan, I want to have sex with you. Do you want to have sex with me? It will be for fun, no strings attached. Ugh. I can’t do this.

“You okay back there, pumpkin?” Dad calls over his shoulder.

“Yeah, great,” I mumble.

I want to get this hike done so I can get back and see Tristan. I kick a loose rock out of my way, except it gets caught under my boot. Losing my balance, I yelp as my ankle twists, and I fall hard on my knees and hands, sending pain shooting through my joints.

“Fuck,” I yell out, grabbing my left leg as a dull ache takes over.

“Lana Elizabeth!” Mom calls out. She turns and sees me on the ground, holding my leg. “What happened?”

“A rock jumped out and attacked me,” I reply sarcastically.

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Mom and Dad help me stand, and when I put weight on it, I wince. I try again, and although I can bear weight on it, I won't be able to continue our hike. Mom offers to come with me, but I wave her on, telling her I'll make it back myself and apologizing to Mr. and Mrs. Morrell.

An hour later, I finally make it back to the cabin, and I'm so tired from having to keep most of my weight off it. At this point, I just want to crash. I struggle to get my boot off, and when I do, my ankle swells.

"Fucking great," I say, peeling the sock off my foot. "Happy birthday to me." I hobble to the bathroom and turn the cold water on. I need to get the swelling to go down, but I'm in no condition to walk to the house for ice. I'm sure my hike back down is why it's as swollen as it is.

My eyes light up. I can call and have someone bring me ice. I scramble to the phone and dial the main line. Mrs. Ellis picks up on the second ring.

"Black Stallion Ranch, this is Liz. How can I help you?"

"Hi, Mrs. Ellis. It's Lana Robinson in cabin seven. I twisted my ankle bad on a hike today, and it's swollen. Mom and Dad are still out. Are you able to bring me some ice so I can get the swelling to go down?"

"Oh, honey, I'm sorry." She covers the receiver and says something to someone. "Tristan just got back from a ride. I'll send him over with some ice and ibuprofen. He should be there in about five minutes."

Tristan?“Th-Thanks.”

When I hang up, my hands fly to my hair and body. I don’t want him seeing me like this—with my legs dirty and my ankle swollen. I look like an idiot for not being able to keep my footing on the trail.

Five minutes is up too fast when I hear a knock on my door. I managed to get into my pajamas, which consist of a tank top and some loose short shorts. I wiped the dirt off my knees and pulled my frizzy hair up into a messy bun.

He knocks again, this time a little louder. “Lana, are you there?”

“Hang on, coming,” I call as I hobble through the cabin. As I reach the front door, he drags his eyes down my half-naked body and back up to my hazel eyes. His gray eyes look like the clouds when a storm rolls in, and he licks his lips like a man dying of thirst and I’m a tall glass of water. My nipples pebble under his attentive gaze, and I fight back the moan that wants to escape.

“Damn,” he mumbles. I’m not sure if he’s talking about my swollen ankle or my pajamas. He shakes his head, and his gray eyes return to normal. “Mom said you twisted your ankle. What happened?”

He grabs my arm and wraps it around his neck, putting his other arm around my waist, and helps me back to the couch. I sit on one end while he sits on the other, pulling my feet into his lap. When he holds the ice to my ankle, he gives an apologetic look as I hiss at the cold.

“We were hiking, and I wasn’t paying attention. I zoned out and was attacked by a rock.”

He laughs and rubs the bottom of my good foot. “Yes. The elusive Wyoming rocks.

You have to be careful of those. When they choose their victim, there's no way to escape. You're lucky to have made it out alive." He snickers, and I can't help but smile in return. He presses against the ball of my foot, and I feel like I could melt into a puddle of goo. "Happy birthday. What a crummy way to spend it."

"Thank you. Seeing you has made it better already." I tilt my head back. No one has ever rubbed my feet, not unless you count the times I've gotten a pedicure. This seems so intimate. "I was too busy thinking about something I read."

His smile stays firmly in place as I let small moans of pleasure pass my lips. "Oh yeah? What'd you read?" His voice is low and seductive, trying to coax the words from my lips.

"N-nothing important." I must be about ten shades of red right now. I lower my eyes to his hands, and when he still his movements, I look up.

Is this the look Molly was talking about? How he wants to eat me? His eyes are glued to mine, and it's like there's some magnetic pull between us. He licks his lips, and I mirror his action. I want him more than I've ever wanted anything in my entire life, and I could have the chance if I'd just say the damn words.

I open my mouth as I hear the door handle jiggle. Tristan jumps up from his spot on the couch as the door swings wide and my parents walk in.

"Tristan, what are you doing here?" Dad asks, looking between the two of us. He crosses his arms over his chest and raises his eyebrow, waiting for an answer.

"Lana called for some ice for her ankle, and Mom sent me over with it and some ibuprofen." He turns to me. "Hope your ankle feels better."

He passes my parents on the way out, and I watch as Dad keeps his eyes firmly

planted on him.

Chapter 14

Tristan

Shit. Her dad really doesn't seem to like me. I haven't even done anything to his daughter, but he looks at me like I've defiled her or something. I've been nothing but nice to that man and his family since he arrived.

"Tristan, can I speak to you for a second?" Henry jogs after me.

I turn and look at him. "How can I help you, Mr. Robinson?"

"Listen, son. I'm not sure what's going on between you and Lana, but she's my only child. You seem like a nice kid with a good head on your shoulders, but I don't want to see her get hurt." He pauses and searches my eyes. "You understand what I'm saying, don't you?" he asks.

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Is this a ‘don’t fuck my daughter’ talk? Only one way to find out. “I’m not sure I do. I’ve been trying to keep her company here. She told me she didn’t even want to come, but she seems to be having a pretty good time. We’re just friends. That’s all this is, sir. The last thing I want to do is lead her on.”

He assesses me and gives a curt nod. “Good. Thank you for the ice. Her ankle looks pretty bad.”

“She should be fine in a day or so as long as she keeps weight off it. I can have my mom or dad swing by with food tonight so she can stay off it.”

“You can bring it. I’m sure she’d enjoy spending dinner with you again and not us. Just... don’t hurt her, Tristan.”

“I promise.”

I jog up the stairs to my room to wash up for dinner. Something about the way Lana was looking at me made me want to push her back and take whatever she was willing to give me. Her hazel eyes were dark, almost completely brown, and were transfixed on my lips as I licked them. Then she opened her mouth to say something. What did she want to say?

Kasey called me again today. I sent her straight to voicemail. She should be back in another few days, and I know she’s going to want to talk. It’s been peaceful without her here, and I don’t have anything I want to say. I’m past the point of angry. Now, I genuinely want her to go to school in California and be happy.

Why is it I'm not upset that she fucked up our plans? I should be. I should be fucking livid, but I'm not. Not since another girl walked into my life. Lana. I'm so fucked. She leaves in a week. I'll never see her again. I can tell her until I'm blue in the face that we can stay in touch, but I know that's not how it works.

She's going to go home to that asshole, Joe, and forget about me. I'm just some boy she had a summer fling with. No, not even a fling. We've made out a few times. I will be the one she remembers as giving her a thrill. I want to be more than that to her.

My mind wanders to her soft lips and the quiet moans of pleasure when I nibbled her lower lip between my teeth. The way her body melts into mine as I pull her close to me. Even her damn blush when she catches me watching her, or when she thinks of something naughty.

That's my favorite. Those damn romance books have sex in them, right? Maybe that's what she's picturing when she looks at me and blushes. Maybe I'm the fantasy man she pictures when she reads them. I'm the one to whisper all the naughty words into her ear as I bring her to orgasm.

God, I hope so. I'd love that. Jacking off in the shower isn't helping any, and I keep picturing her face when we heard Holden and Molly. Her eyes glossed over, and she looked to the ground, trying to hide her reaction from me. I should have pushed her against the wall and kissed her hard, ground into her. Let her feel what she does to me—how much I want her.

I chickened out. No more, though. I'm going to lay it on the table for her tonight when I bring her dinner and see if she wants the same thing from me.

* * *

I knock on cabin seven's door and wait with a tray of food. Dinner tonight is

simple—burgers, hot dogs, and a few sides. I ran into town to get a surprise cupcake for her, too. No birthday is complete without cake. Her mom answers and smiles brightly at me.

“Hi, Tristan. Thanks so much for bringing dinner to her here. Henry and I will get out of your hair in a minute.” She ushers me inside, and I put the tray down on the small dining table.

Lana’s on the couch, a book in her hands, and her leg propped up on a few pillows. She looks over her shoulder and smiles at me. Damn, her smile is dazzling. My cock jumps just from me looking at her, knowing how sinful her lips can be. I tip my hat at her and pull it off my head. The hat was definitely the right thing to wear. She rakes her eyes over my form and discreetly licks her lips, a pretty blush creeping up her cheeks.

Score one for Tristan. Then I catch sight of Henry as he watches our exchange. I offer him a smile, but I’d be lying if I said the look he gives me doesn’t scare me a little.

Violet and Henry leave, and I help Lana to the table. She’s still in her pajamas, and when I help her prop her leg up, her shorts ride up her legs even more. She might as well just be wearing underwear at this point.

I swallow hard and lay the food out, trying my best to ignore how silky her skin looks and how much I want to run my hands up her leg.

I scratch the back of my head. “I, ah, I didn’t know what you’d want, so I brought a little of everything.”

Her eyes sparkle as she reaches for a burger. “This is perfect, thank you.” She points to the covered cupcake and blushes. “You brought me a cupcake?”

“It’s your birthday. You need cake on your birthday, but it’s dessert. You can’t have it yet,” I smirk.

I sit down next to her and dig in, loading up my plate. She watches me as she chews her food slowly. Everything seems awkward between us. I’m not even sure why. Did her dad say something to her after he spoke with me? She keeps dropping her eyes to my lips and back up.

She takes a bite of her burger and ends up with a little ketchup on the side of her mouth. When she wipes it with her thumb and sucks it into her mouth, it’s like something snaps in me. I can’t hold back my growing hunger for her anymore.

I need this girl.

Any fear I’ve had about saying how I feel flies out the window. I need her to know what she does to me. “Lana, I’ve never wanted someone as much as I want you.” She swallows, and her mouth pops open. “Please, tell me you want me. I can’t be the only one thinking this way.” I’m going to die if she doesn’t feel the same way.

All the blood rushes to her face, and she’s blushing hard. She sucks in a shaky breath and blinks back at me in surprise with her beautiful eyes. I slide my chair closer to her, waiting for any kind of response from her.

“I want you, too, Tristan.”

I pull her onto my lap, forgetting about her hurt ankle, but she doesn’t seem to mind. She straddles me and presses her body close as I hold her tight. Every touch from her is like fire, and I twist my hands in her hair, exposing her neck to me. Her pulse is beating like crazy as I place my lips over it, kissing the spot I found that makes her crazy.

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She squirms and rubs herself over me as I grow hard under her. Jesus, I fucking need her. I move the hand that's at her waist to her ass and squeeze hard, helping her rub herself back and forth over my hard length. Her head dips to my neck as I kiss her bare shoulder, moving toward her chest.

Leaning back, she pulls her shirt over her head, and I stop to stare at her for a minute. Her bra is white as snow with a little fringe along the edges of it. I look back up into her eyes and watch as she bites her lip. She looks so unsure, and I don't want to push her to do anything she doesn't want.

She reaches her hand behind her back to unclasp her bra, the cups still covering her pebbled nipples. She slides the straps down her arms and tosses it on the floor next to us, then sits forward on my lap, her chest bare.

"Beautiful," I whisper before dipping my head, taking a nipple into my mouth. She digs her fingers into my hair and pulls. The sting feels too good, sending me into overdrive. I swirl my tongue over the rosy bud, and when I bite down, she gasps and pulls me closer to her.

I don't have enough hands for what I want to do. I want to feel her everywhere. I want to know what each curve and crevice of her body feels like under mine. She tugs at the back of my shirt, and I pull away from her just long enough to get it over my head.

"Can we go to the bedroom?" Her chest heaves, and her eyes are so bright and green, they look like the grass outside in the sun.

She wraps her legs around my waist as I lift her and take the ten steps to her bedroom. I swing the door closed with my foot and drop her onto the bed. She giggles, and as her eyes drop to my shorts, she bites her lip and moans. When her eyes meet mine again, I almost lose it. I roll my hips into her.

“Are you sure about this? We don’t have to do anything if you’re not ready.” I’m already climbing over her, her nipple in my mouth again as I roll her other one with my thumb and forefinger. She arches into my grasp, and I kiss my way down, over her stomach, and stop when I reach her shorts.

I need her to answer me. I’m not moving any further until she tells me she’s ready for this. I’m so hard it borders on being painful. My thoughts are so consumed with sliding into her, feeling her clench around me. It’s been too damn long.

She’s frozen in a lust-filled state. She doesn’t respond to me, and I climb off her, towering over her small frame. Her hands fly to her breasts, covering them, a blush creeping over her body. Her lip trembles, and she bites it to stop the emotion from bubbling over.

“I’ve never done anything like this. I don’t know what to do,” she whispers.

I fucking knew it. “You said you’ve slept with a guy before.”

She shakes her head sadly. “Not in that way.”

She sits up and stares at me. I pace the small space in front of her twin bed and run my fingers through my hair. She pulls knees to her chest, coving her bare breasts, and lays her cheek on them, refusing to meet my gaze.

I can’t believe I’m about to ask this. Maybe it’s my damn boner that’s doing the thinking for me. “Do you want to learn?”

She jerks her head up to look at me and nibbles her lip some more. Her eyes are wide like she's frightened. I'm not sure if she's going to answer me, but eventually, she does with a quiet, "Yes," and a nod of her head.

I'm not sure why that makes me so happy, but it does. "Do you want me to teach you?"

Again, she nods. "I trust you, Tristan. You won't hurt me."

Her eyes keep darting to the door and back to me. She's scared of someone walking in on us. I open the door, pick up her clothes, and hand them to her.

"Tonight's not the night. Get your clothes on and come back out. We'll have dinner and figure out a plan. You're going to have to be open and honest with me if you want to learn. Can you do that?"

"Will you be, too?" I nod. "Okay then."

Chapter 15

Lana

Ididn't expect dinner to take a turn like this. I was so caught up in the moment, so hot for him that I almost took it too far. What if Mom and Dad came back while we were messing around? What would happen then?

No, I have to be smart about this if I want it. I want to learn anything and everything he's willing to teach me. I promised him honesty, but I really didn't think it was going to be this difficult. I feel like we're playing a game of sexual twenty questions. They started off easy but are getting harder and harder to answer.

I swipe my finger through some of the vanilla frosting on top of the cupcake and stick it in my mouth wiping it clean. He intently watches me as I pull my finger out with a pop. I swipe my finger though it one more time and he grabs my hand stopping my movement. Then leans forward, taking my finger in his mouth to lick it clean. My breathing picks up and I lick my lips, wishing his mouth was somewhere else.

He smirks and lets my hand go. “Do you masturbate?” He leans back in his chair, his long, lean legs extended under the table.

I clear my throat. “Why do you need to know that?” I’m bright red. My whole body tingles, and I wrap my arms around my waist, trying to pull into myself. It’s personal. I don’t see why he needs to know.

“Because I’m trying to figure out if you even know what you like. How can someone else figure it out if you don’t know?” He’s so casual about all of this. It’s like he’s asking me how the weather is, not how I like to orgasm.

“Yeah.”

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His eyes darken at my admission, and he licks his lips, a smile tugging at the corners. “Have you thought about me while you flick it?” His words are harsh, but his voice is low and full of need. He cocks his eyebrow as he waits for my answer. I glance down to see him straining against his loose shorts.

I’m trying so hard to keep myself planted in my seat. I want to see everything that’s hiding under his shorts. I grip the corners with such force, I’m surprised the wood hasn’t splintered under my fingers. My voice won’t work, so I nod instead. His smile grows wider before he changes the subject.

“Sex is just as much about giving as receiving. I want you to feel good, but I want you to make me feel good, too,” he says, popping a chip in his mouth. “If I can get you off, you’re going to practically be begging to get me off.” He’s eighteen. What eighteen-year-old even thinks like this?

“Don’t most people take what they want and don’t care about what the other person wants?”

He shakes his head and tries to hide his smile behind his hand. “Yeah, maybe if the guy’s an asshole. If he does that, run away. I’d never leave my girl hanging just so I could get off.”

I push my plate away and rest my cheek on my hand. “Why?”

“Seriously?” He asks it like I slapped him across the face. “Because he doesn’t care about you or your needs if he does that.” His face gets serious. “Lana, don’t settle. You’re better than that. You deserve better than that.”

“How do you know all this?” I have to know how he became a sex guru.

He sighs and leans back in his chair, arms crossed over his broad chest. His face hardens as he speaks. “Kasey always wanted the best of everything—that included sex. She sent me enough reading material when we first started to make sure I was well versed.” He huffs a laugh. “I guess that’s one good thing I got from that relationship.”

That is the sort of thing I would read in one of my books or even see in a movie. What guy cares enough about his girl, as a teenager, to read about the dos and don’ts of sex? I smile inwardly when the answer crosses my mind. Tristan would. He’s so damned caring and wants those around him to be happy.

Images of Joe flash through my mind. Would he make me orgasm, or would he make me get him off and be done? Honestly... I bet he’d only worry about himself. I sink down in my seat a little, my shoulders hunching forward as the thought sinks in.

As if Tristan can read my mind, he leans forward and places a sweet feather-like kiss to my lips. My breath catches in my throat. “You always taste so good,” he murmurs against me.

“So do you.”

We hear the key slide into the door and jump apart like electricity zapped us both. We’ve been done eating for a while, but the food is still out, and our plates are still sitting in front of us. Mom and Dad come into the room and smile at us.

“How was dinner?” she asks, unaware of our conversations.

“Good,” I say nonchalantly, not breaking eye contact with Tristan.

He stands and stretches, his shirt lifting up to show a bit of his toned abs. I resist the urge to run my finger down and feel him. I may not have seen what he's packing with my own eyes, but I know it's a hell of a lot. How the hell is he going to fit in me?

The thought of Tristan and everything he has below the belt makes me blush. As if he knows what I'm thinking, he smirks and gives me a subtle shake of his head. I smile shyly up at him, knowing I've been caught.

"Stay off your ankle the rest of the night, but it's looking better. Don't forget, Molly said to meet her by the pond tomorrow morning after breakfast." I turn my head to the side a fraction and scrunch my face. His look softens, and he gives me a subtle nod of his head. Oh! It's his way of not tipping off my parents.

"We need you better for line dancing tomorrow night." He turns to my parents. "Some of the people from town show up. It's a good time. Are you going to learn the dance tomorrow?"

My mom blushes a little. She loves dancing but complains of having two left feet. "That could be fun. What time?"

"Class is at two in the afternoon. Party starts at six. We have a local bluegrass band, Fiddlin' Fools, that are coming out to play for you folks."

He packs up the rest of the untouched food and plates and carries them out as he wishes us all a good night. I have so many unanswered questions, and I wish I had a phone I could use to text him. I want to continue more of these questions and maybe flirt a bit more. Would he send back dirty texts? Would he flirt? Am I just a big noob who is reading too much into things?

No. Feelings.

I can't get caught up in this. What he's going to give me are instructions. A guide that I can take with me when I get home and use it in the future. Maybe with Joe? I make a face as I think his name. The thought of doing anything with anyone besides Tristan sours my stomach. Shit. Not good.

* * *

My ankle is much better in the morning, but it's still a little sore. I don't want to do too much today, so I walk slowly to the pond and wait for "Molly" to show up. I laugh to myself as I think about the lie he told. As long as Mom and Dad don't show up or see Molly out somewhere else, we should be all right.

I strip out of my t-shirt dress and sit on a towel by the pond bank in just my white bikini. My hair is piled on top of my head as I lay on my stomach and read a book while I wait.

I wonder what lesson I'm going to get today. My mind is a jumbled mess as I wait for him to get here. Molly runs into view with Holden hot on her heels. She giggles and screams as he wraps his arms around her waist and pulls her against him.

My face drops when I look past them and don't see Tristan anywhere. I open my mouth to ask, but Holden cuts in.

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“He got caught up helping a guest but will be here soon. It seems Molly and I are your cover for the day.” His face lights up as he smirks.

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I mumble, trying to keep the butterflies at bay.

He shrugs and turns his attention back to Molly, who’s stripping down to her bathing suit.

I wish I looked like her. She’s really skinny and looks great in the cutest teal bikini I’ve ever seen. Her body is perfect, not a little soft like mine. I grab my dress and pull it in front of my belly, trying to hide the small roll that pokes out when I sit. I know I’m not fat, but looking at her and then back at myself makes me second guess that.

She jumps in the water, and Holden plops down next to me, admiring her from a distance. His mouth curves up into a smile as she swears because the water is still cold and hasn’t been warmed by the sun yet.

“What are you going to do when she leaves?” I ask as Molly floats on her back, oblivious to the world around her.

He shrugs and offers a noncommittal answer. Leaves crunch under someone’s foot falls, and Tristan comes into view. My whole face lights up when he smiles down at me.

“Sorry, got caught up with the Bender Family. I have a few hours before Mom expects me back.” He reaches his hand out for me, and I take it as he pulls me to a

standing position. He wraps his large hand behind my head and pulls me to him for a quick kiss before releasing me. I don't think I'll ever get used to that, or the current of electricity that courses through me every time we touch.

I look at his khaki shorts and plain navy t-shirt and down at my bathing suit. "I thought we were hanging out by the pond. I would have worn regular clothes, but I didn't know where we were going." I pull my dress over my bathing suit and slip into my flip flops.

"We're staying close by. Come on."

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do," Molly chides. I hear her giggle and feel embarrassment creeping up my neck.

"Did you have to tell them?" I whisper yell when we're out of earshot.

"The only thing Holden knows is we're hanging out for the day, and your dad doesn't want us to be alone. Other than that, I told him nothing."

"Oh." I feel ashamed for assuming he told them what we were doing. I don't need them knowing I'm getting lessons on sex.

He speeds up his pace, and I pull back, effectively stopping him. He turns to look at me when I stick my foot out, reminding him of my sore ankle. "Sorry, forgot about your ankle. Hop on." He squats a little so I can jump on his back.

I shake my head. "I'm too heavy," I say, taking a small step back.

He looks at me like I'm crazy then drops his chin as his eyebrows shoot up to his hairline. "Lana, I carried you to the bedroom last night, and I play football. I have guys twice your size tackling me, and I toss them over my back like they weigh

nothing. Trust me, you're not too heavy."

He holds his arms to the side and waits for me to jump on. I place my hands on his strong shoulders and jump, wrapping my legs around his waist. When I drape my arms around his neck and lean into him, he smells like eucalyptus. It's fresh, not like medicine, and I take a deep breath.

He wraps his arms under my legs and adjusts me so I sit higher on his back. Every step he takes, I can feel the muscles in his arms and waist pulling under his shirt. I would love to watch his muscles flex as he does some sort of physical activity. Oh, who am I kidding! I want to watch his muscles flex as he's doing all sorts of dirty things to me!

I'm working myself into a frenzy. My mind is going a hundred miles a minute, and all my thoughts are focused on one thing. Getting Tristan naked.

I squeeze my legs and arms around him tighter and drop my lips to his neck, placing feather-light kisses along his sun-bronzed skin.

"What are you doing?" His voice vibrates under my lips.

"Kissing you." No need to tell him I thought about him last night and wondered if he thought of me, too. Did he touch himself? Did he get off thinking of what we almost did last night like I did?

I had problems sleeping. The butterflies turned into pterodactyls in the middle of the night, and I tossed and turned until I finally slipped my fingers under the waistband of my shorts and calmed myself down.

Except it didn't. It started a craving worse than the last one, and if he doesn't help me today, I'm sure I'm going to explode.

“We’re here.”

I look at the small building, and my eyes widen. This is where I’m losing my virginity?

Chapter 16

Tristan

She’s kissing my neck and driving me insane. I wanted to get her here quick so I had time to work her up; that’s why I picked her up. Feeling her heat seep through her bathing suit bottoms and feeling her legs clench around me sends me into a spiral. I’m hard just thinking about what I’m going to do to her.

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My vision goes a little dark around the edges as I push down the incessant need to pin her against a tree and grind into her.

She slides off me when we get to the fishing house, and I miss her warmth wrapped around me. Soon.

“Where are we?”

“Someplace where we won’t be bothered by anyone.” She’s hesitant and bites the inside of her cheek as she shifts from foot to foot. “We’re not having sex today,” I assure her.

She whips her head to look at me. “We’re not?”

I shake my head and squeeze her hand. “No. You don’t trust me enough for that. I want you to be really sure. You can’t take that back.”

I think about the first time with Kasey. She was so eager, too, told me she was ready, but I hurt her. Neither of us had a clue what we were doing besides insert tab A into slot B. She was so nervous and couldn’t relax under my touch.

My first push into her, she cried out in pain. I tried smothering her in kisses to take it away, but she told me to just get it over with. I got off in two thrusts, and she didn’t at all. I tried to make it up to her, but she was too annoyed and didn’t want me to touch her.

Once she finally cooled down, we took the time to learn one another. We would

sneak out early mornings, telling our parents we were going for a run, and find someplace to explore one another. It was during one of those meet-ups I learned she likes control, and I wanted to make her happy.

The thing is, though, I don't like giving up the control. I'm too type A for that shit. I want it done the way I want. There were so many signs the two of us shouldn't have been together, but I was just too blind to see them. Now that I have, I wish we'd broken up sooner.

"I'm sure this is what I want." She's trying to sound so confident, but I hear the uncertainty in her voice.

"Regardless, it's not happening."

I open the door and wait for her to walk inside. The space is cramped, but considering what we'll be using it for, that doesn't matter. It's better to be close anyway. Shelves line the perimeter of the shack, housing winter gear and fishing equipment. There are two backed stools pushed into a corner, and I laid some blankets out to make it a little more comfortable.

I close the door handle, making sure it's secure before I turn to her. Her arms are wrapped around her midsection while she looks around at everything. I point to the ground.

"Sit."

Her wide eyes meet mine, and I see her fear. She's too nervous. This isn't going to work unless she can calm down.

I step into her space, wrap my arm around her waist, and caress her cheek with my hand. She places her hands on my hips, steadying herself. Her lips part, and her

breathing hitches. I lower my lips to hers and lick along the seam of her mouth, teasing her. Then she huffs out a breath, and when she opens for me, I explore. Our tongues dance together as I pull her closer, needing to feel her curves against my body.

She rocks into my growing length, and a small moan escapes that I promptly swallow, hoping to elicit more as the morning goes on. Today is about her. I want to make her feel good. I want her to help me figure out what she likes.

I pull back. Her eyes are hooded, and her lips are kiss swollen. “Sit,” I say as I push gently on her shoulders. She relents and goes down onto her knees, sitting back on her heels. I stand in front of her as she stares right at my crotch. She licks her lips and reaches her hand up to it.

I wrap my fingers around her wrist, stopping her. She looks up at me with wide, begging eyes. I shake my head and pull a blue and white striped tie out from my pocket, holding it out for her to touch it before I kneel down in front of her.

“I’ll blindfold myself. Today is about you. We’ll try a few things and see if you like it. Okay?”

“What things?” Her voice is thick and deeper than normal. She’s already so turned on.

“You already told me last night was the furthest you’ve been with a guy, so I thought you could help me figure out what you like.” She nods slowly in understanding. “Take everything off.”

Her fingers hesitate at the hem of her dress, and she blushes. I’ve already seen her in less than the white bikini she has on under it, but this is about her being comfortable. I put the silky tie to my eyes and tie it around the back of my head, darkening

everything around me.

I hear the rustle of her clothing. She takes a deep breath and settles down again.

“Can, um... can you take your clothes off, too?” she asks. I don’t even need to see her to know she’s blushing from head to toe.

“I’ll take off my shirt. This is about you, Lana.”

I grab the back of my shirt and pull it over my head, tossing it to the side. She touches me, and my stomach contracts when her cold fingers come in contact with my warm skin. She tries to pull back, but I hold her hand in place.

Placing my hand in the center of her chest, I apply a small amount of pressure. “Lay down,” I whisper.

I keep my hand on her as she lowers herself down onto her back. I crawl next to her, my face inches from her face. “I want you to use my fingers to touch yourself.”

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She sucks in a shaky breath. “Why?”

“I want to know what you think feels good. If you’re not okay with that, then how about I lay my fingers over yours?”

“Two fingers,” she says as she takes my right hand in hers. I point two fingers, and she pushes them against her clit and starts rubbing small circles.

Shit, she’s so warm. I attach my mouth to hers, helping her get lost in the sensations. She moves her hips around and moans into my mouth. She stops moving her fingers, but I continue to rub her as she digs her fingers through my hair, pushing my face down to her breasts. I lick around one of her nipples, and when I graze my teeth over it, she shudders.

Her hips are rocking back and forth, and I time it so when I take her pebbled nipple in my mouth and bite down, I slide a finger deep into her and rub my finger along her inner walls.

Fuck me, she’s gripping my finger to death, she’s so tight. She whimpers, and I rub my thumb over her clit, making sure not to lose the momentum. She’s so turned on, I can smell her excitement. She’s getting wetter by the second, and I add a second finger. Her body no longer fights it. She’s opening up to me. She pants and tries to pull away as she clamps down around my fingers.

“Come on, baby. You’re so close.”

“P-please, Tristan. It’s t-too much.” She rocks her hips up into my hand, her body

chasing the pleasure. She reaches her hand down and starts rubbing me over my shorts. She arches her back as her body begins to shake.

“Oh, God, I’m coming,” she moans. I don’t let up. Instead, I press harder and thrust faster, working her through her orgasm. When her body shakes, I slow and pull my fingers out of her then bring them to my lips to smell her scent on my fingers.

I know she’s watching me as I put my fingers into my mouth, cleaning her off. She moans, and I wish I could see her face. When she pushes the blindfold off, I’m surprised.

“Your turn?” She’s still laid out before me, not bothering to cover herself in her post-orgasmic bliss.

“Nope. Today is about you.”

Fuck. I really wish I’d thought through this better. I’m like a steel pipe at this point, listening to her get off, and her hand is still over my throbbing dick. I really want to pull my pants down and shove into her, but that’s for another day.

She yawns and gives me a lazy smile. “You can’t leave here like this. If you won’t let me touch you, c-can I watch?” she stutters.

I’ve never wanted to get out of my pants as fast as I do right now. I lick my lips and nibble at some dry skin on my lower one, thinking it over.

“You watch, I watch. That’s the only way.” My plan was to get her off by fingering her, then do it again by eating her once she was relaxed enough. I planned to not get off, which is why I jacked off this morning after thinking about her last night. I kept picturing her as she was picturing me, rubbing herself.

She reaches her hands between her legs and starts rubbing slow, lazy circles around her sensitive clit, using her other hand to hold her lips open, putting everything on display for me to feast on.

“Fuck,” I whisper as I shove my pants down around my ankles. My boxers are still around my waist, but I’m pointing in her direction. I stick my hand inside the band of my boxers and stroke it under the flimsy material.

She’s waiting so patiently for me to continue, and I do, pushing them off, exposing myself entirely to her. She scoots her face closer to me, and my cock jumps under her scrutiny. Despite being desperate to feel her lips around me, I shake my head.

“No, baby, watch only. You can touch tomorrow.” My dick jumps at the thought of her tiny hand or warm, sweet mouth on my length. I groan and lie on my side so I can watch her better.

Our eyes are glued to each other’s hands as we work in tandem to bring ourselves to the edge. She picks up her speed, and I match it, stroking myself faster, imagining it’s her fingers wrapped around me. My butt muscles clench as I rock my hips into my hand.

“Are you close?” I grit my teeth, trying to hold back.

Her hips rock against her hand as her fingers slip into her slick heat. Her face contorts in pleasure, her mouth dropping open as she pants.

“Oh, fuck.” I can’t look at her anymore. I squeeze my eyes closed. Her fingers brush over the tip, and I can’t hold back. My ab muscles and biceps flex as spurts of hot, sticky cum land on my stomach. I pop my eyes open in time to watch her own release.

“Tristan,” she whispers as her body shakes with her own orgasm.

Damn, she’s beautiful. My name on her lips is pure heaven. I want to pull her toward me and kiss her, but I don’t want to get her sticky. She removes her fingers and slides them into her mouth to taste herself. Fuck me, this girl is going to kill me in the next week.

* * *

We get cleaned up in the pond and walk back hand in hand to the main house to grab lunch. I’m starving, but what I really want isn’t something that’s laid out on the tables. I keep peeking glances at Lana, and she’s beaming. Every time she catches me looking at her, she drops her eyes to the ground and blushes. It’s the cutest fucking thing I’ve ever seen.

My good mood sours when a familiar shrill voice pierces the tranquility of the day.

“Tristan, there you are. I’ve been calling you, but you’re not answering. Your mom said you were helping some guests.” She stops short when she notices our conjoined hands.

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“What do you want, Kasey?”

Lana looks at her and back at me, releasing my hand like it’s burned her skin. “I’m going to get some food. I’ll see you later, Tristan. Thanks for the lesson,” she murmurs.

Kasey glares at her as she scurries away from us.

I roll my eyes and sigh heavily. “What do you want, Kasey?” My voice is stern, and I cross my arms over my chest.

She looks at my arms and bites her lip, taking a step into my space. Then runs her finger down the length of my arm, and I turn my body away from her. She drops her arm and frowns. Her gaze hardens as she glances at Lana again. I bite my tongue, waiting for her to answer because, if I don’t, I’m sure I’ll say something I’ll regret.

“I want to talk to you, but you haven’t given me the time of day. You owe me that much, at least.”

“Kasey, I don’t have time for this right now. You’re going to California and forgot to include me in your plans. It’s fine. It’s time we move on from one another. I’m staying here, and you’re going to UCLA. I’ve moved passed it.”

“Tristan, honey, can you come help me?” Mom calls out.

“Hi, Mrs. Ellis.” Kasey waves to Mom.

She smiles and gives a small wave back. “Hello, dear, how was your trip?”

“It was great, thanks for asking. Mom said she was going to come by tonight for the dance.”

“Perfect, I’ll see you all later then.”

“Save me a dance?” she calls out as I walk away from her.

I look toward Lana as she glances up from her plate and looks between the two of us as she waits for my response.

“Later, Kasey.”

Chapter 17

Lana

Things sure don’t seem to be over between Kasey and Tristan—at least, not for her. Her showing up just made things really awkward. Now, I’m trying to avoid her and her death glare like the plague.

I poke at my food, hoping for a distraction from the conversations going on around me. What the two of them talk about is none of my business. What Tristan and I are doing is strictly for educational purposes. We aren’t a couple, so he can date whoever he wants.

The green jealousy monster is peeking out, and I have to force it down. We aren’t a couple. We are just two consenting people having fun and exploring. No strings attached.

Okay, that one stings even though I know it's true. I can't let him know I'm starting to fall for him, or he will stop giving me lessons. I don't think I could stop now—I'm in too deep. His fingers felt like magic. I couldn't even concentrate on what I was doing; I wanted more of him. Then he fingered me. And let me tell you, that boy definitely knows what he's doing.

A dull ache forms between my legs as I think about watching him come. His is the first dick I've seen—ever. It was thick, veiny, and looked heavy in his hand. I was mesmerized as his hand stroked up and down his shaft, pulling his skin taut with each stroke.

I wanted to crawl over to him and wrap my lips around it. The thought of tasting him sent me into a tizzy, and I couldn't help but touch him at the end. I wanted to know if it was as smooth as it looked. When his muscles constricted and flexed as he started coming, it was what pushed me over the edge.

Great. And now I'm horny. Again.

I look up from my now cold food, and Tristan is nowhere in sight. Although Kasey is gone, too. Thank God for small miracles.

I push my plate aside when Dad calls out for me. I look up with a smile and wave at both of them. They look so happy here. The wrinkles that seemed permanently etched in Dad's forehead have all but disappeared, and he's glowing. Mom kisses his forehead when he sits with me.

“Your mother is dragging me to line dance lessons today. Are you planning on coming, too?”

“Yeah, I was planning on it. Tristan said he'll be helping to teach the class.”

His features darken at the mention of Tristan's name. "Be careful with that boy, Lana."

I feel the blood pump through my body as my anger rises. "He's a nice boy, Dad. You don't have to be judgmental."

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He leans forward and lowers his voice. “I’m not being judgmental, pumpkin. He seems like a boy with a good head on his shoulders. But I also see you and know you’re starting to develop feelings for him.”

“I’m not, but even if I was, why would it matter? It’s the twenty-first century. There’s the internet and different ways to stay in touch. Maybe I’ll come out here for school so we can be close.”

His jaw ticks. I know he won’t allow me to come to school this far from home, especially for a boy.

“Lana, donotthrow away your chances of a good school for a damn boy. Your education is more important than that.”

Mom picks the perfect time to come back with some food for the two of them. She looks between the two of us and sighs, knowing we’re butting heads again. See, I’m just like my dad—stubborn as hell. We’re always fighting.

“Henry, stop,” Mom chides. “She’s having fun. Tristan seems like a good boy. They aren’t hurting anyone. You two are dropping this. I don’t want to hear any more about it.” A smug smirk tugs at my lips. She looks at me. “Lana, be careful.”

“I am, Mom. Promise.”

I look over her shoulder and see Tristan walking closer with a smile aimed right at me. When Dad turns his head to look at him, his smile falters, but he continues walking to the table, albeit with less vigor.

“Hey, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. Are you coming to the line dance lesson in thirty minutes?” He sits down next to me with his own plate of food and starts eating.

“Yes. Violet wants to learn. We’ll be there,” Dad replies gruffly.

He nods slowly, and the tension in the air crackles between them. I roll my eyes and scoff and take Tristan’s hand in mine. He looks at me from the corner of his eye and smirks at my bold gesture. The familiar tingles run through my hand, warming me from the inside out.

I refuse to let my dad try to run my life. The way he’s acting solidifies my thoughts in making Tristan my first. A whoosh of excitement runs through me. Is it bad that I’m happy because it pisses my dad off? Isn’t this why Molly slept with Holden, because she’s pissed at her parents?

My high of excitement diminishes just as quickly as it started. I don’t want to sleep with him just because it will piss my parents off. I don’t want to look back on this vacation and think about how much we fought.

“Dad,” I start. He looks at me and waits patiently for me to continue. “Save me a dance tonight?”

His face softens, and he gives me a small smile. “Sure, pumpkin. I’d like that a lot.”

For now, the tension between Dad and I fizzles, and we all finish eating. Tristan walks me back to the cabin, and I quickly change into a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. I figured it would be more comfortable to learn to dance. I step out of my room, and he pushes me against the wall, his lips on mine and his hands tangling in my hair.

I melt into him and fist his shirt in my hands, pulling him closer to me. He breaks the kiss, and I blink up at him, smiling.

“What’s that for, cowboy?” I flirt.

“Just thinking about earlier today. I can’t wait to do it again. Tomorrow morning, tell your parents you’re going for a run. I’ll meet you in front of the house. We’ll take the ATV out to the field.”

“Okay,” I answer on a breath.

I haven’t been able to stop thinking about Kasey since she came around today. I want to ask about her and what she wanted, but I also know it’s none of my business. I’m tense as we walk back to the main house, and he seems to notice my mind is racing with questions.

“What’s wrong, Lana?”

“Do you still have feelings for her?” The question tumbles out before I can stop it, and I’m surprised when he gives a quiet answer.

“She was my first love. I’ll always have feelings for her, but I don’t want to be with her.” He stops walking and holds my chin between his index finger and thumb. “Lana, I’m not the cheating type. If I was with her, we wouldn’t be messing around.”

His words should comfort me, but I’m still a bundle of nerves by the time we reach the house. Most of the guests are waiting for the lesson to start. We all look like a bunch of schmucks trying to look country. I’m in shorts and a t-shirt now, but Bethany made me bring cowboy boots, and I fully plan on pulling those out tonight.

Liz is standing under the outdoor covered stage. The picnic tables are pushed to the sides, so we all gather around when she calls for us through the microphone. Tristan squeezes my hand and jogs up to stand next to his mom and dad. I move through the crowd until I’m standing with my parents, and Dad pulls me against his side and

kisses the top of my head.

“Welcome to our little line dancing lesson. Tonight, we have a local band coming to play for you all. It’s a lot of fun, but it’s not a real dance without some line dancing. So, I have my trusty instructors, John and Tristan, here to show you all some of the moves.”

I’ve seen Mr. Ellis a few times since we’ve arrived, but seeing Tristan standing next to him now, I can see where he gets his good looks from. He has the same strong jawline and shaggy brown hair, but while his dad has dark eyes, Tristan’s eyes are light like his mom’s. I blush when he seeks me out in the crowd and smiles.

The lesson is what you’d expect. Fifteen or so people tripping over their feet as we all try to nail down the steps. There are lots of laughs, and several couples break off and dance on their own, including my mom and dad. The song is too fast for the speed they are dancing, but they’re too wrapped up in one another to care.

Dad’s arm is around Mom’s waist, and she lays her head on his chest. My heart swells, seeing them like this. They’re affectionate at home, but I don’t see it often. Each of them is busy with work and different town events. Mom works at town hall, and there is always something going on that she drags Dad to.

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Tristan and John walk amongst the crowd and help some of the people when they struggle with the moves. The younger kids give up after about two minutes and are chasing one another around. Tristan stands next to me and taps his right heel on the ground in front of him and to the side as he does a grapevine step.

I inherited my mom's two left feet, so while I can follow instructions, my moves aren't as graceful as Tristan's. We turn to the left, and he stands behind me as we move through the same eight moves again. Tristan reaches his hands out and places them on my hips as I shake them back and forth.

He laughs behind me, and I push down the feeling of wanting him to pull me against him. He stays by me until the end of the song. Everyone claps and laughs when it ends.

"Fiddlin' Foolswill be by tonight to play for you folks, and I expect everyone to be out on this floor shaking it. We taught you the moves, so there's no excuse!" Liz is beaming as she looks out at all of us.

Tristan stands right next to me so our shoulders are touching, and a wave of heat rolls through my body. "I'll make sure to wear my cowboy hat tonight. I know how much you like it." He keeps his voice low, but I don't miss the lust in his tone as he speaks.

"I'll make sure to wear my cowboy boots then."

He sucks in a deep breath and mutters something unintelligible under his breath. If his mind is going to the same place mine is going—and I'm sure it is—he's picturing me in just those boots as we explore one another.

“See ya later, cowboy.”

I walk away from him and have to force myself to not turn around and look at him again. Molly catches up to me, and the two of us walk away from our cowboy flings.

Molly looks around, making sure no one is close. “So, how was he?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Don’t be coy. Tristan. How was he? I’m not stupid. I know you guys were sneaking off to have sex. Was it what you expected?”

I shake my head. “We didn’t.”

She scoffs and drops her mouth open. “How could you not have sex with him?” Her voice rises in volume, and I cover her mouth.

“Dude, keep it down.” I drop my hand. “We’re getting there.”

“Well, hurry it up. I want all the juicy details, and I leave Saturday morning.”

The first week is almost up. I didn’t want to come to this stupid ranch in the first place, but I know by the end of my time here, I’m not going to want to leave. Who would have thought a ranch in the middle of Wyoming would be the one place I’d want to be?

Chapter 18

Tristan

I’ve showered and changed into a pair of jeans and a blue plaid shirt, the sleeves

rolled up to my elbows. I put some product in my hair and muss it up. Some longer pieces fall in front of my face, so I push them aside before putting my hat on.

Mom knocks on the door and pushes it open when I tell her to come in. Her smile lets me know she approves of my outfit for the night. She leans on the doorframe and crosses her arms.

“You look handsome.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“The band is here and ready to go. Everything is set up, and the guests should be coming by any time. Donna just called. The Bowmans should be here soon. I wanted to give you a heads up.”

I wanted to forget Kasey was coming. “Thanks for the heads up, Mom.”

She leaves, and I pull up a new message to Kasey.

Me:Kasey, I think it would be better if you didn't come tonight.

Kasey:Too late. We're pulling into the driveway now.

Shit.

I race down the stairs to see the familiar blue SUV pull in. Donna and Paul Bowman wave to me from the front windshield. All three of them get out, and Kasey runs over, throwing her arms around me, pulling me tight. She's wearing the short shorts I used to love, cowboy boots, and a crop top. This used to be my favorite look on her. I knew I'd get lucky if she was wearing this. Now, the thought of it makes me disgusted.

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“Hi, Tristan,” Paul says.

“Hi, Mr. Bowman. How was the trip to California?” I ask. Kasey pulls back from me and tries to lace her fingers with mine. I pull out of her grasp and cross my arms. From the corner of my eyes, I can see she looks up at me but doesn’t say anything.

“Great. The campus is nice. It’s farther than I wanted her to go, but it looks like a nice school.”

Mom and Dad come out to greet them, and I turn away from Kasey, focusing on welcoming the families as they walk over from their cabins. The band has started playing, and some of the younger kids are jumping around on the dance floor. Most of the adults stop at the bar for a drink before hanging around the perimeter of the dance floor, swaying to the upbeat tune.

“Tristan, you can’t ignore me forever. I know you better than anyone, and you’ve had enough time to cool down.”

“Kasey, I don’t have time to do this right now.” I look around, making sure Lana or Molly aren’t around. “I’ve got guests to attend to.”

She narrows her eyes. “You do know you’re not the owner of this place, right? You’re eighteen, Tristan. You don’t have to be responsible for this place. It’s your parents’ business, not yours. I don’t know why you think you have to attend to the guests.”

It shouldn’t piss me off, but it does. I grit my teeth and push a harsh breath out of my nose. One more quick look around, and I grab her by the elbow, pulling her with me.

“Ow, you’re hurting me,” she cries out, drawing attention to us.

I glare at her but let her arm drop when we’re hidden behind the house and away from guests. She smirks when she looks around.

“Looking for a quickie, Tristan? I know you’re into some kinky shit. Does your rebound know, too?”

On one of our many attempts to hide from prying eyes, we learned that behind the house is the best place for a quickie. It’s great because it’s hidden, but if anyone was to approach, we would hear them before they could see us.

“Kasey,” I warn through gritted teeth.

She rolls her eyes. “Wow, you’ve become a lot less fun in the week since we broke up.”

“Say your piece and leave me alone.”

She steps into my space and puts her hands on my chest, pushing me against the side of the house. Then she steps between my legs. Her chest is pressed against mine as she tilts her head up to look into my eyes.

“We’re good together, you and I. You have a good head on your shoulders, and you’re safe. I like that.” She runs her hand down my chest and stomach, stopping at the top of my jeans. “I don’t want to lose you. You always said you were going to marry me. We can still have that, but I need this time to experience life outside of Laramie.”

She drags her fingers down and settles them over my flaccid dick. A week ago, her exploring my body would have made me perk up in seconds, but not now. Not when

Lana fills my mind. I grab her wrist and pull her hand off of me.

“Kasey, we’re not good for one another. I see that now. You’re too controlling, and I need someone who’ll support me, not try to change me. I know you came with your parents, so I won’t ask you to leave, but I need you to stay out of my way.”

“You don’t mean that.” She says it with a cocky tone then starts sinking to her knees, keeping her eyes locked with mine.

I’d be lying if I didn’t say she had an amazing mouth. Hardly any gag reflex, and she knows exactly what I like. Thank God I’ve gotten off twice today; otherwise, I might be tempted to have her suck me off for old time’s sake. I grab her shoulders and pull her back up to a standing position.

“I have guests waiting. I wish you the best of luck, Kasey. I really do. I know you’ll find someone who is perfect for you. It’s just not me.”

Her alabaster skin turns red, which makes her freckles darken even more. I leave her standing there, giving her a chance to cool down. When I turn the corner, Lana is walking toward me. She’s in a cream-colored lace tank top, a jean skirt that stops just above her knees, and a pair of tan cowboy boots. She looks every bit a cowgirl, and I want to wrap her in my arms and kiss her until she’s breathless and needy.

She looks up from her feet, and her mouth pops open when she sees me. She slowly lowers her eyes over me from head to toe, and a blush creeps up her neck and face. She just undressed me with her eyes and enjoyed the show.

“Um, your mom said you were out this way.”

“Yeah, just dealing with something. Come on, let’s get to the dance. I want to see how much you remember from your lesson today.”

She looks over my shoulder at Kasey, who has come out of her hiding spot to watch the interaction between us. Her arms are crossed over her chest as she glares at Lana.

She takes a small step back from me and glances between the two of us. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

I take her hand in mine and keep my eyes on her. “You didn’t interrupt anything. We were just talking.”

Kasey storms past us and mumbles something under her breath as she passes Lana. I couldn’t make it out, but it seems Lana did. She looks down at her clothes and pulls her eyebrows together in distress.

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My blood boils. I always knew she could be a bitch, but whatever she said was uncalled for. “What did you say to her?” I call after Kasey. I start walking toward her, but Lana tugs at my hand, stopping me mid-step.

She stands on her tiptoes and pulls my face down to hers, her lips touching mine, sending a surge of lust straight to my dick. I pull her closer and press my hips into hers, showing her exactly what she does to me. I ignore the scoff Kasey offers at our little display as she storms off.

After a few seconds, Lana pulls back to look at me. “It’s not worth getting into a fight with her because of me.”

Bullshit, it’s not. I push my hat up and place my forehead to hers. “Tell me what she said. I didn’t catch it.”

“It doesn’t matter. Are you going to dance with me, cowboy?” She holds her hand out for mine, and we make our way back to the party. I can see from the expression on her face what whatever Kasey said hurt her, but she’s trying to push it aside. The music gets louder as we make it to the front of the house, where everything is in full swing.

Mom and Dad are up front leading the line dancing, and a few couples are out there enjoying it. Kasey is nowhere to be found. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or not.

“You look really nice, Lana. The cowboy boots look great on you. A true cowgirl.”

A smile creeps over her features. “Thank you. You look nice as well. I really like

your shirt.”

Her eyes are focused on my bare forearms, and I flex them for her benefit. She sucks her lower lip between her teeth, and I reach my thumb out, pulling it free.

“You shouldn’t do that. It’s distracting.”

Dad waves me over to them as they prepare to do their speech of the night. It’s usually a big thank you to everyone since the guests are leaving soon. I usually say a few words, and then we let everyone get back to drinking and dancing.

“Be right back.” I leave her standing there alone. I see Holden on my way up and tell him Kasey is here. He knows from the way I grit her name out that I want him to watch Lana. I don’t want Kasey anywhere close to her. She doesn’t need an opportunity to say anything else to her.

He nods and walks over to where I left Lana. He knows how Kasey can get around other girls, having seen it once when another cheerleader was undressing me with her eyes. She ripped that girl a new asshole and basically isolated her from the rest of the team. She dropped out of the squad a month later. She has a vicious streak in her. I hope she grows out of it.

I stand by the band with Mom and Dad and look out to the thirty or so people standing around. This is going to be mine one day. A sense of pride overcomes me, and I smile wide. Dad is in the middle of his speech, saying his traditional thank yous and asking for anyone to talk to them if they aren’t completely satisfied.

Kasey approaches her parents, but her attention is trained on Lana. She scowls at her and narrows her eyes. Lana catches her looking and taps Holden’s arm. He bends down so she can talk in his ear, and he shakes his head. Whatever Kasey wants, she’s not going to get.

I'm getting antsy up here, knowing Kasey is stalking Lana like prey. When Dad finishes his speech, the applause dies down, and the band picks up again. Holden walks with her to the bar area, and I catch up when she places her order for a Roy Rogers.

"Thanks, man." I clasp Holden on his shoulder, and he nods. Molly is on the dance floor and cocks her finger to him in a come hither motion.

"She's got you whipped. What are you going to do on Saturday?"

He sighs. "I haven't thought that far ahead yet."

He leaves the two of us, and I turn to Lana. She sips her coke through a straw, and when she releases it, I see some of her pink lipstick around the plastic. I keep my eyes focused on the lip stain. The dirty thoughts running through my mind are crazy. It's not a dick—just a straw!

"Coke?" she offers, holding the cup out for me.

"Only if there's some Jack in it." Mom and Dad are pretty cool and let me drink as long as I'm staying at home, and the guests don't know. I just have to get the alcohol from the house, not out here in front of the guests.

I take her hand in mine and pull her to the dance floor. She deposits her drink on a nearby table on the way. The band slows down for a song, and I wrap my arms around her waist as she wraps her arms around my neck. We move together in a slow circle, getting lost in each other. I feel every sway of her hips and hear every hitch of her breath as my body presses against hers.

"Tell me what she said, Lana."

“Shhh. Don’t ruin this moment.” She lays her head on my chest, and a sense of relief washes over me. We keep a steady pace, swaying to the beat. I turn my head to watch Kasey, who’s shooting daggers at me. She has her arms crossed over her chest and is sitting rigid in her seat. I wrap my arms tighter around Lana.

“Tristan, are you okay?” She lifts her head off my chest and looks up at me.

“I will be.”

The song ends, and as the band shifts into another round of fast songs, a line forms. I stand to the right of Lana as the song we danced to today starts. I hook my thumbs into my jeans like a stereotypical cowboy would stand and start moving through the moves. She watches my feet as she tries to mimic me.

“This is the same dance from today. Don’t tell me you forgot it already.” I laugh.

She blushes, and it takes everything in me not to scoop her up and kiss the blush deeper.

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“I didn’t forget. I just have two left feet, and it’s hard to get the moves down. It's easier if I watch someone.”

She sticks her right heel out and taps it down, pulls it back, then puts her right toe down next to her left foot and takes four steps to the right in a grapevine step. She tries to add a small sway to her hips and starts laughing when she messes up. We turn to the left to do it all over again, and this time I get to stare at her ass.

Let me tell you, this girl is cute from the front and the back. The exposed skin on her legs has a subtle tan to them, and her cowboy boots are driving me crazy. I keep picturing them tossed over my shoulders as I bring her pleasure.

At some point, when I was spaced out, Kasey moves in close to us and manages to stumble into Lana. Lana goes down hard on her butt and looks up in horror. I reach my hand out for her to take, and once she stands, she drops my hand and excuses herself.

Molly is hot on her heels as they walk over to an empty table.

“What the fuck, Kasey?” I ask, trying to keep my voice down.

“What?” She feigns innocence. “I tripped over my own feet.”

“You did it on purpose,” I growl in frustration. “Just go home already. I don’t want you here.”

Her chin quivers, and her eyes gloss over. She wipes the water under her eyes and

looks back at Lana. “Enjoy your slut. Just remember, I’m the best you will ever have. There’s no one like me, Tristan Ellis. I hope she gives you herpes.”

She turns on her heel and walks back to her parents. She says something to them before her mom looks over at me, a somber look to her features. She nods, and Kasey takes the keys from her dad. Looks like Mom or Dad will have to drive the Bowmans home tonight. I hope this doesn’t affect their friendship with my parents. It’s not my fault their daughter is crazy.

I seek Lana out in the crowd, but she’s nowhere to be found. Holden is in a corner with Molly, trying to discreetly feel her up. I come up behind them and clear my throat. Holden jumps and turns to see who’s interrupting. When he sees it’s me, he rolls his eyes.

“Fuck, man. I thought you were her dad. How about not giving me a heart attack today.”

I don’t have time for a comeback. I need to get to Lana. “Where is she?” I ask.

Molly speaks up. “She said she was going back to her cabin for the night and wants to be left alone.”

I rub my hands down my face. “Shit. Was she okay?”

“She said she was fine, just wants some time alone. Maybe you should give it to her?” Molly hesitates on the last part.

“I need to talk to her,” I say, but I’ve already turned away and jog in the direction of her cabin.

As I draw closer, I see the light in her bedroom streaming past the drawn curtains, her

silhouette visible. I rap my knuckles on the window gently until she pulls back the curtain to look at me. She unlocks and pulls the window open.

“What?” Her voice is a little raspy like she’s been crying.

“I’m so sorry about Kasey. She shouldn’t have done that to you, and she shouldn’t have said whatever it is she said to you in passing. Are you ever going to tell me what she said?”

She shakes her head. “No, it doesn’t matter. She was probably right anyway.”

Kasey is never right, and anyone that starts thinking she is, is mistaken. “Whatever it is, I can tell you she’s not. She’s a jealous person, and when she talks from jealousy, she’s usually wrong.”

“It doesn’t matter, Tristan. I’m tired, so I’m going to bed. I’ll see you tomorrow.” She starts to close the window.

“Wait!” I reach out for the windowsill. “Are we still on for tomorrow morning? I’d really like to see you.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. I need some time alone. I was thinking of going for a ride in the morning.”

“I’ll come with you. You’re not supposed to ride alone. Ranch rules.” A whisper of a smile graces her face. It may not be a full-on smile, but at least the frown marring her face has disappeared.

“Goodnight, Tristan.” She closes the window and flips out the light.

Why does it feel things are ending before they’ve even had a chance to begin?

Chapter 19

Lana

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I wake the next morning with a new sense of determination. Kasey's words were toxic, and I bought into them for a minute, but I know who I am, and no one can take that away from me. 'You're too fat to wear that, slut.' That's what replayed through my mind throughout the night. I know I'm not a size zero, but I'm not fat either.

Screw her. I have the hottest guy at school back home who wants to date me. Except he fooled around with someone else as soon as you left. The insecurities in my mind creep up again, and I push them down. Tristan wants me. He already said I was beautiful when he saw me. He's just trying to get in your pants. Ugh, my brain really needs to start working with me—not against me.

I'm up and ready to go for a ride. I grabbed a sketch book and a few pencils and shoved them in my small backpack. I leave a note for Mom and Dad that I'm going riding, so they don't worry, and then step out into the cool morning air. The weather said it will be warm with a chance of a storm later on in the day, but the morning is going to be chilly.

I thought about heading straight to the barn but decided I should grab some food and maybe a few snacks. I'm not sure how long I'll be gone. Liz is up and putting food out for everyone.

"Morning, Mrs. Ellis."

Her smile lights up. "Good morning, Lana. Did you have fun last night?"

"The band was good, and I tried to dance with my two left feet." I chuckle. "I was tired, though, and went back early. It seems Mom and Dad partied it up last night."

They're still asleep."

She laughs quietly. "Oh, yes, those two tore up the dance floor. I wouldn't be surprised if they stay in bed until noon! What are your plans for the day?"

"I was coming to get something to eat and a few snacks, then I'm going to go for a ride to the open field to sketch or read for a bit."

The screen door opens, and Tristan comes into view. He kisses his mom on the cheek and looks at me. "Morning, Lana."

I lower my eyes to the ground, avoiding his intense stare. "Morning, Tristan." Kasey's words come back in full force the moment I set eyes on him.

"Make sure you take someone with you today. It's not safe to ride alone when you're not used to it."

"I'm going with her. I'll keep her safe."

She glances between the two of us and shrugs before wishing us fun and walking away. I grab a muffin and a few pieces of fruit, loading up my backpack. I try to ignore Tristan the best I can, but it seems to be of no use. He won't stop looking at me.

I sigh and look up at him. "Do I have something on my face or something?"

"Are you okay? I don't want things to be weird between us after what happened last night. I want things to be good between us."

"Why wouldn't they be?" I really don't want to talk about last night with him. I just want to forget it happened. I'm trying to move past it, but if he keeps pestering me,

I'm not going to be able to. "Listen, let's forget it. I want to move past it and enjoy my last week here."

"All right." He doesn't seem thrilled with my answer but lets it go nevertheless. "Come on, I'll help you get Clementine saddled up, and we can go."

He reaches his hand out for mine, and I stare at it for a moment. When I look up at him, he looks... hurt? I take his hand, and we walk to the barn in silence. He looks like he wants to say something, but at the last minute keeps silent.

"Thanks for dancing with me last night. I had fun up until... you know."

"I'm so sorry about her, Lana. That was childish, and I made her go home right after that. I didn't want you to leave, especially not while you were upset. I hoped we could have danced some more. Or maybe we could have found a dark corner and made out for a bit." He gives me a devilish grin.

I blush at the thought. I would have liked that a lot, too, actually. Things seem to return to normal between us as he saddles the horses and helps me up.

* * *

We arrive in the field and tie the horses to a nearby tree in the shade.

"So, are we continuing lessons today?" he asks, a hint of excitement lacing his word.

"Among other things," I smirk and sit on the ground, pulling my legs under me. "Can you tell me how your ranch got its name?"

He sits next to me, sprawling his long legs in front of him. "This ranch has been in my family for generations. It used to be known as Ellis Ranch and was a lot smaller.

Instead of twenty acres of land, it was only about five acres, or something like that. My grandad bought a neighboring ranch after the owners suffered a bad few seasons and couldn't keep it running.

“This land here,” he points out in front of us, “this is part of that old ranch. When he got it, there was a team of wild mustang horses that lived out here. The alpha was a black stallion. My dad said he used to watch the team run around when he was little. He even got to see some of the foals shortly after they were born.” Tristan gets a far off, dreamy look in his eyes.

I watch him intently. “What happened to the horses? To the alpha?”

“Grandad captured him and tamed him. The rest of them took off. Gage, my horse, is from that stallion's line. When Grandpa opened the ranch up to the public, he changed the name in honor of that horse, and Black Stallion Ranch was born.”

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I smile as I look out to the horizon, imagining wild horses roaming through the grassy land. “That’s really neat.” I pull my knees to my chest and continue to look out to the field.

“Lana.” I turn to look at him. His features are soft as he examines my face. “Will you please tell me what she said?”

My heart rate picks up, and I widen my eyes. “No. I don’t want to think about it.” My voice quivers as I speak.

I dig through my bag and pull out my sketch book. I’ve been picturing what it would be like to update this place. Design new cabins that aren’t as outdated, breathe new life into the ranch. Business doesn’t seem to be lacking, but I imagine updated rooms couldn’t hurt. I’ve had thoughts running through my mind since last night.

I couldn’t sleep after he left last night. I tossed and turned for a while before I pulled the sketch book out and started messing with some designs. It’s more than building new cabins, but the interior as well. Changing the layout, updating the fixtures, and adding more history to the ranch.

I flip open to the page I was working on last night—my bedroom at the ranch. I rearranged the furniture and added larger windows to the room. With this new information from Tristan, I want to add some elements of the ranch to keep it special and unique to its origin.

“Did you draw that?” he asks, his voice warm with admiration.

He's looking over my shoulder at my drawing. "Yeah. I couldn't sleep last night and kept picturing how I'd change the cabins and make them more modern if I could."

He holds his hands out for the sketchbook, and I give it to him as he examines my work. His smile grows as he flips back through other sketches I've done. Most of them are of rooms or buildings, but he stops on one. It's a profile of Joe. I had drawn it a few weeks ago.

"This the guy?" Tristan asks. His fingers grip the sides of the book a little tighter, and the muscles in his jaw clench.

"Yeah. That's him." I stare at the picture. I remember how excited I was when I sketched it. I thought it looked so much like him, and I couldn't get over how handsome he was. Now, when I look at it, it looks like every other guy at my school. No real defining features. Just another preppy jock who comes from a rich family and has never worked hard a day in his life. Funny how things can change in just a few short days.

"I'm not sure what I ever saw in him, to be honest." I peek at Tristan through my lashes and reach my hand out for his. "I need someone like you, not him. You strive for what you want and work hard to get it."

He tosses the book to the side and pulls me to him, our bodies and lips crashing together. I crawl over him, never breaking the kiss, and straddle his thick thighs.

Fuck.

Women are going to sing praises about his thighs if they get any bigger. I rock my hips back and forth. The seam of my jeans rubs against my clit, and my body trembles with anticipation. I moan as he wraps his hands around my face, holding me close to him. He nips my lower lip, and I gasp, the small amount of pain shooting

pleasure straight to my core.

“Tristan,” I whisper, my eyes rolling back.

“Come on, baby. I’ve got you. I want to see you come,” he says in between peppering my face with kisses.

His words should turn me on even more, but they’re sobering instead. My rocking slows, and I open my eyes to look at him. What am I doing? Kasey’s words come back tenfold, and I climb off him, suddenly aware of how heavy I must feel in his lap.

“Why’d you stop? What’s wrong?” A look of concern flashes across his face. He reaches out for my hand, but I pull it out of his reach.

“It’s nothing. I’m fine,” I mumble.

“You’re not fine. Two seconds ago, you were getting ready to come in my lap, telling me you need someone like me. And now you’re shying away.”

I sit there quietly and stare into the open field in front of me. My chin quivers, and I hold my breath, trying to stop the onset of tears. He puts himself in my line of vision, and I blink at him until he comes into focus.

“Can I make you feel good?”

It’s a loaded question. Yes, I’m sure he can. Do I want him to? Abso-fucking-lutely, but I’m stopping myself.

“Do you think I’m fat?” I hate the way my words sound so small. My life has changed so much in the past few months. I’m no longer that invisible girl with very few friends. I’m supposed to be cool and confident now. Yet I’m letting a few hurtful

words bring me down like an avalanche.

“Is that what Kasey said to you?” He keeps his voice soft, but I don’t miss the way his muscles flinch in his arm. When I don’t supply an answer, he continues. “No, Lana. I don’t think you’re fat. She said it because she’s jealous that I’ve moved on. She figured I’d wait for her until the day I died, and then you came along.”

“Yes, but I leave in a week.”

“Doesn’t matter. If we want this to work, we’ll make it happen. I like you, Lana.” He ruffles his hair and gives me his full attention so I don’t miss anything. “Fuck, I like you a lot. You make me excited for things I never thought possible.”

I turn my head to the side. “Like what?”

He smiles and picks up my sketch book. “Do you know I’ve thought about expanding and adding more cabins? I’ve never told Mom and Dad, but seeing your designs for changing that cabin makes me want to push the idea.”

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“That’s awesome. I think you should go for it.” I give him a soft smile.

“This ranch is my life. I want to make it the best it can be. Kasey never understood that. I think she hoped I would become a famous football player so she could reap the benefits of being with a professional athlete. That’s not my dream, though.”

He’s so passionate. I’m falling even harder for him at this moment. The passion in his voice is such a turn on. “Tristan,” I swallow, trying to push the words out, “can I touch you? Yours is the first I’ve ever seen, and I want to know what it feels like, what it really feels like.”

“You’ve never seen a dick before?”

I shake my head, shame flooding my system. I know I’m turning a few shades of red as I sit and wait for him to answer.

He doesn’t say anything, but he flips the button on his pants and unzips his fly. My heart races, and my mouth waters. He leans back on his hands, his pants undone, and I can see he’s straining against the denim.

Does he want me to reach in and touch it? I look at his crotch and back at him, unsure of what to do. He notices my hesitation and takes over.

“Pull it out.”

I scurry over and kneel beside him. My hand trembles as I reach past his black boxers and glide my fingers against his smooth skin. He groans when I wrap my small hand

around him and pull it through the opening of his boxers. He's heavy and warm in my palm, and the veins running down the underside of his shaft make me want to lick him.

I lean my head down and stick the tip past my lips. He has a salty flavor to him, but it's not entirely unpleasant. He rocks his hips up and slides it past my lips a little more. I hold my hand at the base and stroke in shallow movement.

"Fuck, Lana. Your mouth feels so good."

His words of praise have me dipping my head lower, taking more of him in my mouth. I swirl my tongue along the underside of his shaft and hollow my cheeks, taking more of him. He puts his hand on top of my head, helping guide me on how he likes it best. He lays flat on his back and rolls his hips up, making me take him a little deeper.

"Keep that up, and I'm gonna come."

I'm so unbelievably turned on doing this. Sucking his cock is empowering. I finally understand what my books are talking about now. Knowing I can make him lose his control, knowing it's bringing him pleasure, has me practically panting with need.

With deft hands, he pulls me off him and flips us so I'm on my back. He tugs at my jeans, and I help him slide them down to my ankles. He pushes his pants down and places his knees on either side of my head, so I can still suck him, but he can do the same to me.

His nose bumps my clit, and I press my hips to his waiting mouth as I take him back into mine. The two of us work in tandem to push each other over the edge.

"You taste so fucking good." The vibrations from his voice add a little extra to the

pleasure.

I'm so close. He sucks a little harder, and that's what does it for me. I moan around his hard length as my orgasm washes over me.

"Shit, I'm gonna come." He tries to climb off me, but I grab his hips, holding him down over me. His butt flexes, and he pumps his hips down into me, spilling his seed down my throat.

I cough as I try to swallow around him, and he pulls out. There's a string of spit that clings to him as he pulls away, but I swallow the rest of it. He's salty and slightly tangy, but it's not as horrible as I imagined.

"Holy shit. I can't believe we just did that." I chuckle, my hand resting over my stomach. I reach down and pull my pants up and rebutton them, Tristan doing the same.

"There is no way you haven't given a blow job before. You're too damn good at it."

I blush. "I, um... I read a lot of books. You are the first, though." He hums and closes his eyes. "Tristan?" He turns his head to look at me. "I think I'm ready to have sex with you."

His eyes widen, and I can't tell if it's in fear... or excitement.

Chapter 20

Tristan

My dick has a mind of his own, and even though I just came, I can feel it getting hard again.

“Are you sure that’s what you want, Lana?” I sit up, fully aware of every small movement. Her breathing changes, and her cheeks flush under my gaze.

“Yes. I trust you, Tristan. You won’t hurt me. I want this.”

“Are you on the pill?” I’m not fucking her without a condom anyway, but better to have the extra protection. She hesitates in her answer. “We’re using a condom, but I’d still like to know.”

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“Not the pill, but I’m on birth control.”

I breathe a little easier. I want to sink deep into this girl. I almost brought condoms with me but didn’t want to tempt fate out in the open. Other riders could come out here, or even people out for a stroll. What we did today was risky, but my dick had a mind of his own. She was so innocent and unsure. Some part of me couldn’t wait to take charge and tell her what to do. Then, when she obeyed without hesitation, it was hot as fuck.

It’s what I was missing with Kasey. She wanted to control, but I crave it. It’s like a part of me—a thrill I’m chasing.

“Tonight. We can come back out here. It’s private, so no one should bother us.”

I’m already picturing how this night is going to go in my head. We’ll tell everyone we’re going to watch the stars and take the ATV out here. I’ll take my time warming her up—driving her crazy. I want her to beg for me to fuck her. I want her to be a mumbling mess before I slowly ease my cock deep inside her.

Tonight has to be special, though. It’s her first time, and she’s going to remember it forever.

“Oh, the ground?” Her words cut through my thoughts.

Oh shit! I didn’t even think of that. Am I seriously going to make her first time in the middle of an open field on the hard ground? It’s one thing to fool around like this, but another to go all the way. Most girls have some big, elaborate night made up in their

heads, right? Didn't Kasey? Yeah, and I fucked it up.

The thought of her makes me shiver. I won't mess it up again.

I shake my head. "You're right. We shouldn't do it here, not for your first time. I'll figure something out. Give me some time. Come on, let's head back." I stand and reach my hand out for hers.

She bites her lip and looks at my hand. "Okay."

* * *

On the way back, my phone rings off the hook. Apparently, Peter Morrell caught Molly fooling around with Holden in the barn, and he's flipping shit. We ride a little faster to get there, my heart caught in my throat. Dad is trying to diffuse the situation, but Mom sounded scared on the phone.

How could he be so stupid? I told him to find a better place and be discreet, but he was just worried about getting his dick wet. I have to find him after this. I'm going to kick his ass.

We get back, and I jump off Gage and pass the reins to Billy, another kid that works the ranch in the summer. I help Lana down from Clementine, and the two of us race over to the argument at the front of the house.

Mr. Morrell is screaming at everyone under the sun, and Molly is sitting at a table crying, her mom and brother by her side.

"What kind of place are you running, John?"

"Daddy, I told you. It's not his fault!" she yells out.

They continue back and forth, with Peter not sure where to direct his anger. Then he catches a glimpse of Lana, and his face darkens.

“You!” He points his finger at her, and she shrinks behind me a little as he takes a step closer to her. I puff out my chest, keeping the distance between the two of them. “You were supposed to be hanging out with her. Where were you?”

“I—I—”

“Peter, that’s enough!” Henry comes up behind us. “It was not my daughter’s job to keep tabs on yours. If she was running around behind your back, that’s on her.”

Peter directs his attention to Henry. His face is so red I’m surprised I haven’t seen steam coming out of his ears. “You told me they would get along great and that they could hang out as we talked about business this week. It’s the only reason I allowed us to meet out here.”

He shrugs, and Peter turns to his wife and kids. “I’m not staying here another minute. We’re going to town and are staying at another hotel, and you bet your ass I’m writing a terrible review of this place. What type of disgusting people do you have working here? Taking advantage of an innocent girl. It’s deplorable!”

“Just remember, Mr. Morrell, it takes two to tango. Molly isn’t innocent in this.” No one bad mouths my best friend without getting some shit in return.

He takes a step closer to me, our chests practically touching, and I peer down at him, my jaw clenched. He’s a few inches shorter than me and a lot bigger around the gut, so my size and strength would give me the advantage. What he doesn’t know is this ranch means everything to me, and I won’t risk doing anything stupid.

“Stay away from me and my family,” he hisses.

He steps back and beckons for them like they're dogs, and the four of them head to the cabin. I have no doubt he's going to spend the night in town, and I will gladly call the cab myself.

"Lana, let's go." Her dad pulls her away by her elbow as she gives me a sad look. She mouths sorry and turns, extracting her arm from his hold.

Fuck!

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Holden pops his head out from the house when the coast is clear, and I narrow my eyes in his direction.

“You boys have a lot of explaining to do. Holden, you’re going to be mucking stalls for averylong time,” Dad announces.

“Yes, Mr. Ellis.” Holden casts his eyes to his feet as if he were a two-year-old kid who was caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

There are a few guests that were close enough to hear some of what was going on, so Mom took off to take care of them and do some damage control. The three of us head inside the house and to the back office so no one else can hear.

“What the fuck, Holden?” I dig at him.

“Hey!” Dad shouts. “Don’t use that language. Holden, tell me what happened?”

He looks at the ceiling and sighs, then looks at my dad. “She said she wanted to make this trip memorable. She had her sights on Tristan, but when he gave her the brush off for Lana, she came to me. I just wanted to show her a good time, and she’s old enough to make up her own mind. I figured we wouldn’t hurt anyone, and I was careful.”

He nods and stays silent for a minute, and I can see his mind working over what Holden said. “I never thought I’d have to say this. New rule here. No sleeping with the guests.” He looks back and forth between us, waiting for us to respond.

My face falls. I know I shouldn't sleep with Lana. It's unprofessional, but damn if that girl doesn't make me feel things for her. I have a week left, and this throws a wrench in my plans. We're going to have to be more careful than ever now.

"Got it," I murmur.

"Holden." He looks at my dad, waiting. "I love you like a son, but if you ever mess up like that again, I have no problems firing your ass. What's done is done. We can't take it back, just move forward."

Holden apologizes again, and we walk out to join Mom and some of the other guests. I'm hoping Lana has come back, but I don't see any of the Robinsons yet. This is the last night for most of the guests, and by tomorrow afternoon, no one but the few of us will have any idea this happened.

I get a new notification on my phone—a friend request on Facebook from Lana Robinson. Her phone must be working for the time being. I happily accept and send her a message.

Me: You okay?

Lana: Sorry about my dad and Mr. Morrell.

Me: You have nothing to be sorry for. Holden knows better. It's going to be fine.

Lana: My dad doesn't want me to be alone with you anymore.

Shit. This is going to make things a lot harder for us. At least, before, we had Molly as a cover, but I'm sure Holden won't be a good cover now.

Me: We'll figure it out. I don't want to ruffle any more feathers. Are you coming to

the house for the last night gathering?

I wait patiently as I see the three dots, waiting for her reply. After two minutes, it doesn't come. Maybe she decided not to risk it. That's a good thing. I don't need more trouble to be stirred up for us. I've looked into Mr. Robinson and Mr. Morrell, and both of them have the potential to shut us down if anyone out east cares. Both have a lot of money and friends in high places.

She still hasn't responded, so I help Mom as she puts plates of food out. I see the Morrell family from the corner of my eye as they pull their suitcases behind them. Holden comes out of the house and sees Molly. Her eyes are red and puffy as she looks at him.

When Mr. Morrell glares at him, he slinks back into the house. I hear Molly's cries pick up in volume, and Mom rushes over to them. They talk quietly for a few minutes, and when the cab arrives, they pick up their bags and leave without saying another word.

Holden pushes open the door and watches as Molly rides away without him. He looks hurt by not being able to say goodbye. I've known him for a long time. He may be a player, but that doesn't mean he doesn't care. She's hurt, and he's the one who caused it. That's going to be on his mind for a long time.

I clasp my hand on his shoulder and give a little squeeze. "Sorry, man."

"It's fine. I've got to get to work." He kicks a rock as he walks to the barn—alone. He's going to need some time to sort things out.

"Hey, Holden," I call after him. "Did you get her number or anything?"

He smirks. "Yup. It's not over. We'll still have some fun."

Just like Holden.

I run to the office to find the list of newcomers for tomorrow. We need to find someone around Lana's age to use as a scapegoat. Isn't that what got Molly in trouble? Gah! I hate when I start thinking rationally. Still, maybe if we can find someone to come with us on different activities, that would be enough.

I flip through the list of twenty people. There is a nineteen-year-old boy that will be here and his fifteen-year-old sister. A little younger than Lana, but that's not bad. The rest of the families have younger kids or are childless. Looks like The Carringtons are my only option.

* * *

The final night's gathering is in full swing, and I've been trying to keep my distance from her. She's sitting at a table with a book in her hands, but she keeps glancing at me from under her eyelashes. Her mom and dad are talking with mine, so this is my chance to steal a few moments with her.

"Lana," I say, taking a seat next to her.

"Sorry I didn't respond. The Wi-Fi dropped again, and my message wouldn't go through. How's Holden?"

I glance over at my friend, who's busy keeping up with the needs of the guests. "He's all right. It sucks, though. He really seemed to care for Molly."

She closes her book and lays her hands on top of it. "Do you think he's going to follow through with his threat and leave a bad review? It's not your parents' fault it happened."

"I'm not sure. If it happens, it happens. Nothing we can do about it."

She looks out toward her parents, and a flash of concern crosses her features. I follow her line of vision and see her dad standing next to mine with his arms crossed over his chest, watching us.

Shit.

“Lana, when can I see you again? Alone.”

She’s playing with the hair that’s draped over her shoulder and bites her lip. “I don’t know. We’re going to a few museums in town tomorrow. Dad wants to check them out. We’re going to be gone most of the day, or so I’ve heard. I begged them to let me stay behind and read by the pond, or draw in the field, but they don’t want to leave me alone with you.”

“Give it a day or two. I’m sure it will all blow over by then.”

I hope it does. I’m down to seven days left with this girl, and I don’t know if I’ll ever be the same after she leaves.

Chapter 21

Lana

Dad comes into my room early the next morning and sits on the edge of my bed. I’ve been awake for a while, trying to get the damn Wi-Fi to work so I can at least message Tristan. When I heard him approach, I tucked my phone under my pillow and turned my back to the door.

“Morning, sleeping beauty. Time to get up. We have a big day planned.”

“Can’t I just stay here? Please?” I turn, and the sheets twist around my body, trapping me in.

“No, pumpkin. We’ve hardly seen you this trip, and we still don’t have many pictures. It will be good to get away from the ranch for a bit.”

“Why? So I can’t see Tristan?” I deadpan.

He scoffs and shakes his head. “There’s more to life than some boy. You’re eighteen, and I’m giving you a chance to see and experience some of the world. I’m sure he’ll be here when we get back. You can have dinner with him. Get up. We’re leaving to get some breakfast soon, and then we’ll be on our way.”

He gets up and leaves without another word, closing the door softly behind him. I can hear him speaking with Mom in the living room, but the sounds through the wall are too muffled. I take a fast shower and put on a pair of shorts and a plain pink t-shirt, along with my Converse. I pile my hair on top of my head and emerge.

When we make it to the front of the house, most of the guests are there eating breakfast. A few people are missing; they either had early flights, or they’re still sleeping. Tristan is busy running around, and I don’t want to interrupt him. I smile and wave when he looks in my direction, and he pauses long enough to do the same.

The three of us sit and eat breakfast. Mom and Dad are socializing with some of the other families close by, but I open my book and try to tune everyone out.

“Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson.” Tristan looks at me. “Good morning, Lana.”

“Hi, Tristan.” I blush.

“You all are headed off to town today, right?”

“Yes. We are going to a few museums and getting a tour of the city,” my dad replies.

“That will be fun. Tonight, we’re doing a bonfire in the open field to watch the stars. It’s supposed to be a beautiful night. Are you going to come?”

My eyes light up. I want to go so bad, and I look at my parents, silently pleading with

them.

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“Yes, Tristan. We’ll be back in time for that. It sounds nice,” Mom says. Dad gives her an annoyed look but doesn’t offer anything else.

Tristan and I both smile at one another. “Great. I’ll save you a seat next to me on the ride over. Have a great day.” He waves to us and leaves.

* * *

This town is like a never-ending series of museums. We had to have gone into four or five of them, and let me tell you, Dad was in his glory. He loves learning about the history of different places. But just because he likes it doesn’t mean I have to.

I spend the majority of my day looking for a few minutes, and then pulling a book out to read. When Dad would scold me, I’d put it away for a few minutes and then bring it out in the next exhibit. It was a never-ending cycle, really.

The coolest museum is the state prison historic site. It’s neat being able to walk through the same halls as the infamous Butch Cassidy. It’s a self-guided tour, but there are enough signs so I can follow along with what I’m looking at. I keep imagining what it would have been like to roam these halls in the late eighteen hundreds.

The actual highlight to my day, though, is getting cell service. My phone starts erupting with text messages and Facebook messages from various friends back home.

“Someone’s popular,” Dad says.

“It’s all the messages Bethany has been trying to send to me this week. I’m going to call her.” I dial her familiar two-zero-three number and put the phone to my ear.

“Holy shit, Lana. Where the hell have you been?” Bethany squeals through the phone.

“No service out here. We’re in town, and I found a random spot with service, so I don’t know how long it will last. Tell me what’s been going on.”

She proceeds to tell me what’s been going on for the past week and how Joe has been upset that he can’t explain things to me. Apparently, the girl came on to him, and he couldn’t push her away in time. I’m not sure how much I buy his story, but Bethany seems to.

She keeps telling me how sorry he is and how much he wants to talk to me. Maybe some of the incoming messages are from him. We talk for a few more minutes, and when Mom and Dad are out of ear shot, I tell her all about Tristan.

“You really like this guy, don’t you?” she asks.

“Yeah. I do. He’s really great.” I blush as I speak the words.

“What about Joe? I thought you liked him.”

“What about him? I did. Tristan is just different,” I say wistfully. I look at Mom, who’s asking me to wrap it up. “Listen, I gotta go. I’ll see you next week when I’m back.”

I hang up and scroll through some of the messages. Most are from Bethany and another friend, Amanda. There’s one from Joe asking for us to talk when I get back home. I’m not sure I’m ready for that conversation, so I ignore it for now.

I open up messenger and see a few messages from Tristan. I smile as I read them.

Tristan:I hope you're having a good time in the city. I've been having a lazy day here. Miss you.

My heart soars. He misses me.

Me:I miss you, too. It's been boring, but I got cell service and could call home for a few. Lazy day, huh? Send me a picture.

Within seconds, a picture starts downloading, and I suck in a breath when I see it. He's taken a picture of the crotch of his blue bathing suit, and I can clearly see the outline of his dick through his shorts. I swallow, suddenly in need of water.

"Come on, Lana. We've gotta go," Mom calls.

I fumble with my phone as I close the app and pocket my phone again. Now more than ever, I need to be back at the ranch hanging out with Tristan. I wonder if any of the new people are going to be around my age.

"Pumpkin, did you have fun today?" Dad asks from the driver's seat.

I'd be lying if I said no, so I tell him the truth, that I did indeed have fun. I assume we're going to another museum, but he surprises me by heading back to the ranch earlier than expected. We drive down the familiar dirt road, and I'm buzzing with the anticipation of seeing Tristan.

When we pull in and park, Mr. Ellis greets us, but I don't see Tristan around. There are some new families mulling around, and I see another girl a little younger than me sitting at one of the picnic tables. I start to head to her, and a boy sits down next to her. They both look up at me, and I blush. He's cute... like really cute.

Holden sidles up to me. “How was your day, Lana?”

I break eye contact with the boy and look at him. “Fine. A bit boring. I did get service though in one part of town, and I could call home, so that was a bonus. How are you doing?”

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He shrugs. “Eh. Whatever. I’m fine. I have stall duty for a while for my fuck up, but it could be worse. We messaged back and forth last night.”

I nod and look around. “Where’s Tristan?”

“Last I saw, he was by the pond. He might still be there, but dinner will be soon, so he might be coming back now.”

I incline my chin to the cute boy with blond hair at the table who’s still looking at me. “Who’s that?”

“Russ or something, and his sister is Reina. They flew in from England.”

That piques my interest. “England, huh? That’s cool.”

Wet, strong arms wrap around my waist and pull me close to him. Tristan. I sigh in relief, but he lets me go all too soon. I want to kiss him, but I know my dad is probably watching, and I don’t want to get him in trouble.

“I missed you today,” he says, keeping his voice low.

“I missed you, too.” I tuck some loose hair behind my ear.

“Did you have fun?”

I smile up at him. “I did, actually. I’ll have to tell you about it tonight while we look at the stars.”

“It’s a date.”

* * *

Dinner is simple, burgers and hot dogs, and the ride out to the field is easy. Tristan sits next to me in the back, along with the rest of the guests. We carry on a quiet conversation together, and he promises me we’ll find a dark corner to be alone for a few minutes.

A few minutes later, we make it to the open area. A fire is already going, and ingredients for s’mores are laid out on a large table. It’s amazing how this family is able to do all this and make it seem effortless. Tristan holds my waist, and I rest my hands on his shoulders as I slide down his body out of the back of the truck. He moans quietly.

“Thanks for the help, cowboy.”

He helps the rest of the guests out, and we all mill around. He takes my hand and pulls me with him away from the crowd. The sun is still above the horizon, but it’s getting darker by the minute, and I’m dying for him to kiss me. We stop by a large tree and sit down, hidden by the wide trunk.

My lips are on his in an instant. The kiss is desperate and needy, and the way he kisses me back displays the same need. His hands roam over my curves as I thread my fingers in his hair and pull him closer to me. I need more than he’s giving me—more than we can give each other in this moment.

I moan into his kiss and rub against him. Someone clears their throat, and I jump out of my skin. We break apart, and I wipe my mouth. My heart pounds loud, expecting to see my dad. When I look up, I see the boy from today. The one from England.

“I didn’t mean to interrupt.” He smirks. Yes, he did. He totally meant to interrupt. “I wanted to introduce myself to you. My name is Russell Carrington. Russ for short.” His accent is thick and envelops me like a blanket. I’ve always been a sucker for accents.

Tristan looks irritated at the interruption, but I stand and extend my hand to him for a shake. “Lana Robinson. I’m sure you’ve already met Tristan Ellis. His family owns the ranch.”

“Yes, we’ve met. I saw you when you came in today.”

I nod as Tristan stands beside me, taking my hand in his. Both men stare at one another, and when Russ glances down at our conjoined hands, he sighs.

“I’ll see you later. Maybe we can get to know one another while I’m here.”

I smile and nod then he walks away, leaving the two of us alone. I want to continue kissing Tristan. The air around us has changed though, and I feel the tension rolling off him. I sigh and lead us back to the group of people for s’mores.

Chapter 22

Tristan

She’s mine, asshole. That’s what I wanted to yell at Russ and his stupid British accent. I saw the way she smiled at him, but I won’t let her go without a fight.

Fucking A. She’s not mine! The realization hits, and I feel like such an idiot. I’m supposed to be showing her how to mess around with someone. That’s it. We aren’t dating. We aren’t a couple. Hell, there aren’t supposed to be feelings involved with this.

But there are.

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She leaves in six days, and that's that. I'll go off to school, and so will she. We will live our separate lives and remember this summer fling for what it is—a fling. I'm preoccupied and don't realize when Holden comes up behind me and starts talking. I jump out of my boots and spin around to face him.

“Jesus Christ, Holden.”

He gives me a full belly laugh and puts his hand over his flat stomach. “I figured you heard me. Sorry, man. I'm coming to saddle up Duke. The Carringtons want a guide for some horse riding.”

“All of them are going?”

“Yup. The four of them. Wanna help me?”

We work together to get the five horses saddled up, and as I pull the strap tight on Daisy, the family walks into the barn.

“Good morning, how did you all sleep?” I ask, helping Holden walk the horses out of the barn.

“Very well, thank you,” Mrs. Carrington replies in her British lilt.

All four of them have very similar features—blonde hair, fair skin, and strong jaws. Mrs. Carrington and Reina both have green eyes, while Russ and Mr. Carrington have blue eyes. Both mother and daughter are petite, with a rosy tint on their cheeks. Russ looks like an ass with his polo shirt and khaki pants, but their dad looks like a nice

man. He is tall and slender, and the longer I look at him, the more I see where Russ got his looks.

Okay, so maybe Russ doesn't look like an ass. I'm pissed off he interrupted us last night and seemed to eye fuck my girl in the process.

Not my girl.

I rub my forehead and help get them settled on their horses before waving bye to everyone. Lana peeks around the corner, and I smile when I see her. She's in a pair of shorts and a tank top with a pair of flip flops. Her hair is done in braided pigtails, and I want to give them each a little tug. I reach for her, and she shakes her head.

"Come to my cabin in ten minutes. I have a surprise for you."

"No good morning kiss? No, hey Tristan, how are you today?" I tilt my head to the side and smile.

"No time. Do as I ask and don't question it."

She runs away, and I fight the urge to run after her. I finish picking up as Mr. and Mrs. Robinson walk by, talking about taking a boat out for fishing. I stay out of sight until they pass and hurry down to Lana's cabin. I knock on the door and wait patiently for her to answer.

She cracks the door and pulls me in. When my eyes adjust to the dim light, she's standing there, wrapped in a towel.

"What are you doing, Lana?" I ask, frozen in my spot.

"Come with me." She walks to her bedroom, and I follow. When I walk through the

archway, she closes the door and locks it. “Mom and Dad should be gone for about an hour.” Suddenly, she seems nervous. She pulls her towel closer around her body and looks at her feet. “Tristan? Do you have condoms with you?”

I swallow hard. Fuck. She wants to do this now? I open my mouth to speak, but she cuts me off.

Her face drops. “Shit. You don’t, do you? I should have told you, so you could prepare. I just figured you carried them with you.”

I place my hands on her cheeks and make her look at me. “I have them with me. Are you sure this is what you want? We don’t have to. There are other things I can teach you.”

Her hazel eyes are wide, and her pink lips are slightly parted. Her tongue pokes out as she wets her lips and nods slowly. She drops the towel and stands before me—naked. I take a step back to fully take her in and lower my eyes over her curves, taking each of them in.

“Lie on the bed.”

She sits and scoots her body up, placing her head on the pillows. I kneel at the end of the bed and wrap my arms around her thighs, pulling her to me. I place kisses up the side of her legs and graze my fingers down her skin, goosebumps rising in the path. She lets out a contented sigh, and as I reach the apex of her legs, she opens her legs wider for me. I nudge her clit with my nose, hesitating, and smell her arousal permeating the air around us.

“Lana, have you been reading dirty books? Is that why you’re so turned on and wet?” My breath caresses her folds, and she shivers.

“Yes,” she practically whispers. “Please, Tristan. We don’t have a lot of time.”

I lick her from ass to clit with a flat, firm tongue, and she wiggles her hips in pleasure. She tugs my hair, pulling me closer to her, and I dig in like a man gone mad. Her scent fills me completely as I fuck her with my tongue and add a finger, pumping it in and out of her. My dick is so hard against my jeans it almost hurts.

“More, Tristan,” she moans, lost in her pleasure. She grinds her hips on me, putting my tongue where she needs it most. Her grip on my hair borders on being painful, and I hiss when she pulls exceptionally hard.

“Let go,” I moan against her. I replace my tongue with my thumb and kiss up her body as my fingers continue to stroke her most intimate parts. I pull her rose-colored nipple into my mouth and suck on it like my life depends on it.

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She pulls me off her nipple and down to her lips. The kiss is frenzied as she moves her hips in tune to my thrusts, whimpering moans escaping and filling the air between us. She's close, her core squeezing my fingers, and I'd give anything to be balls deep right now, feeling her pulse around my cock.

"Oh, oh, oh," she pants, and then she tenses up. Her eyes roll back in her head, and she shakes around me, under me. Fuck, it's the hottest thing I've ever experienced. She lays still, and I slide off the bed, pushing my pants down my legs and tossing my shirt on the floor. I pull a condom out and rip the foil, rolling it down my hard length.

She blinks at me through hooded eyes. When I crawl over her, I shift so my legs are between hers and place my arms on either side of her face. There's fear and unease behind her darkened eyes.

"Lana, if you're not ready, we don't have to do this. There's no pressure to do anything." My dick brushes against her curls and she gasps.

She gathers her wits and speaks. "N-no. I want this. Just... go slow."

I nod and run the top of my dick up and down through her slick heat. The bulbous tip finds her entrance, and I push gently until the head slips past her opening. She's so tight and warm. I imagine this is what heaven is like. She gasps and locks her legs against my sides, squeezing her eyes shut, holding her breath.

"Lana, you have to relax. Breathe." I pull my hips back and push forward again, torturously inching my way inside her.

“You’re too big,” she cries out. I still and reach my fingers between us to rub her clit. I want this too damn much, but I’m not going to force her to do anything. If she could just relax, I know she’d enjoy it.

“Focus on my fingers. Focus on the pleasure building in the pit of your stomach.” I press a little harder and circle my fingers a little faster.

She moans, and when I push this time, sinking deep enough to break through her barrier of innocence, her body accepts me. When she clenches around me, it takes everything in me not to come. She digs her nails into my back, and I hold still, giving her the time she needs to adjust to me. Her muscles clench around me as she gets used to me deep inside her.

“I’m okay. Please, move,” she says, releasing the death grip with her legs.

I give her a few shallow thrusts, letting her get used to the feeling of me inside her. She pulls my lips to hers and lifts her hips up, allowing me even deeper. We move as one, perfectly in sync.

“Touch yourself,” I groan, increasing my speed.

She does as I ask and reaches her fingers between us, playing with herself. It doesn’t take long before I feel her clenching around me, her orgasm on the precipice.

“Come on me,” I groan. My thrusts get sloppy as I work hard to hold back. She locks her legs around my waist, and I know the moment she comes. It sets off my own orgasm, and I thrust a few times, extending my own euphoria. I pant her name as I empty everything I have into her. I lay on top of her, the two of us still connected below the waist as she rubs my back.

I pull out and discard the condom in the bathroom, coming back with a wet washcloth

to help her clean up. There is a small amount of blood on the sheets, and she looks ashamed. I pull her to me and kiss her.

“It’s fine. I’ll get new sheets sent over. Are you okay?”

She nods. “I’m a little sore, but I’m fine.” A giggle erupts from her, and before I know it, she’s full on belly laughing. “Holy crap. I can’t believe I did that. Is that how sex always is?”

“Not always. I didn’t want to hurt you.”

When she smiles, there are tears in her eyes. I wipe the water from under her lids and kiss her cheeks. I wish I could wrap my arms around her and hold her close, but we don’t have the time. I don’t know when her parents are going to be back, and I don’t want to get either of us in trouble. I’m already screwed with my dad’s ‘no sleeping with the guests’ rule.

Let’s just hope we don’t have another situation like Molly on our hands. I promised Lana’s dad I wouldn’t hurt her. Good thing I always keep my promises.

Chapter 23

Lana

Holy. Shit!

I’m not a virgin anymore.

I knew I wouldn’t be a virgin forever, but I never thought it would happen while I’m still in high school. He was so big, and it hurt, but then he started rubbing me and that pain transformed into pleasure. I wanted him deeper—harder. I wanted to feel him in

my soul. Now, with him not in me, I feel empty. I want the feeling back.

When he pulled out and I saw the small amount of blood, I started to panic, but he was there to calm me down and bring me back to the here and now. I knew there was a possibility it would happen, but seeing it solidified what we'd done.

I pull on my skirt and a tank top. I'm afraid to have the extra friction from my shorts between my legs. I have stars in my eyes as I watch him pull his shirt over his muscular form and ruff his hair into a perfect bedhead style.

It's really not fair. I find Mr. Book Boyfriend, but I can't keep him. He's mine for another week, and then I have to toss him back to the sea.

He's not mine though, not really. This is a no strings attached arrangement. I'm not supposed to have feelings for him. Does he have feelings for me? I want to ask him so badly, but I fear the answer and what it might do to me if he doesn't like me back.

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So, I do the one thing I think he wants, and pretend what we did was no big deal. After my small display of water works, I don't need him thinking I'm crazy. Stiff upper lip and all that.

“Wanna go sit by the pond, or go for a hike? I can change into hiking clothes.”

He pinches his brows together. “Um, sure. We can sit by the pond. Want to get into your suit, and I'll meet you there?”

Perfect. I need a little time alone. “Awesome, see you in a few minutes.”

He leaves, mumbling something under his breath, and I breathe a big sigh of relief. It's going to be fine. I can do this. The pep talk I give myself is going to have to work if I want to keep seeing him and getting lessons from him.

I change into my bikini and throw my cover up on. I grab a towel and walk to the pond. There are a few people around, including my parents. Mom looks at me with a smile on her face and waves. She knows, doesn't she? There's no way she knows I just popped my cherry with the hot cowboy. The memory of what I did twenty minutes prior has me practically panting with need.

Sex isn't supposed to be good the first time around, but this was amazing. Bethany told me her first time wasn't great, so I expected the same. I know one thing. I won't settle for anyone that gives me less than he's given me. How long has he been having sex that he's learned this?

I make a mental note to ask him when he comes down to the water.

I walk to my parents and sit down next to them. I'm a little sore and wince when I sit.

"You okay?" Mom asks as she kicks the water with her feet.

"Yeah. I must have slept funny." That's good. A believable lie. I feel like I'm starting to sweat. I'm suffering from massive guilt for giving up my virginity. I shouldn't. It's my choice when I lose it. But here I am.

My mom raises her eyebrow but doesn't say anything more.

"Hi, Lana," Russ says from behind me, his British accent sending a spike of happiness through me. That damned accent!

"Hi, Russ. Enjoying your time so far?"

He shrugs and sits next to me. Mom discreetly stands up and leaves the two of us alone to carry on a conversation.

"Western riding is different than English, but I caught on pretty quick. So far, it seems nice. We're planning on going for a hike tomorrow. Would you like to join us?"

I look back and notice my dad speaking with his. "Sure. Where are you going hiking? I've been here for a week, so I've done some of them."

His eyebrows shoot up. I guess he didn't know I've been here for some time now. "I'm not sure. My dad said there were a lot of hikes in the area, and he wants to venture out on one. It would be nice to have someone else to hang out with besides my parents and sister."

Tristan sits next to me and takes my hand. I smile at him and knock my shoulder into

his.

“Hey, man, what’s going on?” Tristan asks.

“Aren’t you supposed to be working?” Russ asks in a condescending tone.

Tristan tightens his grip as his jaw tenses. “My parents own the ranch, and I help where I can, but I’m allowed to have some fun. This is my last summer before college. Gotta make the most of it.”

Russ leans back on his hands and closes his eyes, letting the sun warm his face. “I see. Well, could I get your help then? My family is going for a hike tomorrow. Since you work here,” he opens his eyes and glares at him, “part time, would you show us your favorite hike?”

“Sure, I’d love to take you all out tomorrow.” His voice is strained with fake enthusiasm.

“Russ invited me to go, too. I thought it could be fun. You’re the best guide there is.” I give his hand a little squeeze, hoping he understands I’ll be with him the whole time.

“It’s settled then. Dad,” he calls behind us, “Tristan is going to be our guide tomorrow, and Lana wants to come. Is that all right?”

He agrees, telling Tristan to pick the best trail, and my dad smiles at us.

“Lana, do you want to go for a walk with me?” Tristan asks. He stands and extends his hand for mine. I look at my dad, and his stern look tells me I better not.

“I don’t think now’s a good time, Tristan.” I give him a subtle incline of my head

back to where my dad is chatting. “He doesn’t look too happy.”

What I really want to say is, “Screw you, Dad. I can hang out with anyone I want to, and you can’t stop me,” but I’m too scared to do that. I don’t like disappointing my parents, and now that I’m no longer a virgin, I want to try extra hard to stay on their good side.

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His phone rings, and he walks out of ear shot as he talks to his mom. I don't want to leave things like this. I don't want him to think I'm giving him the brush off; I just don't want to start anything with my parents around. When he returns, he tells me he needs to help his mom with something and he'll save me a seat at dinner.

I want to kiss him, let him know he has nothing to worry about, but he walks away with his head down. I jump up, startling Russ, and rush after Tristan. I catch him when we're out of view from the pond.

"Hey, Tristan, wait." He slows and turns to look at me, and his eyes are dark. "I want to make sure you're okay."

"Why wouldn't I be?" His response is clipped.

"I'd really like more lessons, if you're willing to. Maybe early in the morning tomorrow before the hike? We could sneak off somewhere like you wanted to the other day?" I'm grasping at straws here, trying anything to bring a smile to his face. I touch his cheek, and he leans his head in my hand, a hint of a smile playing on his lips. There it is!

"Sure. I'll figure something out, and we'll talk tonight at dinner. It's my favorite night again." He plants a kiss to my lips and leaves just as quickly.

"Thanks for today," I call after him, my face burning.

Do people actually thank others for having sex with them? Is that normal? Hey, thanks for putting your penis in me and making me feel good. It got better after the initial

shock of something foreign in there. I'm being ridiculous and know I'm about fifty shades of red.

He turns and smiles at me. "Glad I made your day."

The pond without Tristan is no longer interesting, so I gather my belongings and walk back to the cabin instead. I have a few hours before dinner, and I'm really tired. I decide the best thing to do is to take a nap. Mom and Dad are still at the pond, so I know I won't have to worry about them for a while.

I look at the bed, and my face burns. I'm still waiting for someone to come by with new sheets, so I don't want to lay down yet. I wonder if he forgot about it? I'm contemplating calling the house when there's a knock on the door. I open it and come face to face with Mrs. Ellis.

"Hi, Lana, dear. Tristan told me you needed some new sheets for your bed?"

Could this get any worse? "Um, y-yeah. I do." I hold my arms out to take them from her, and she holds them against her.

"I can change it, dear. Then I can get the other ones sent out to wash."

I let her pass me and look to the ground, my heart racing and sweat forming on my brow. My hands are clammy, and I ball them into fists by my side, closing the door behind me. I follow her into the room, and she starts stripping the bottom sheet.

The blood stain is bright—like a beacon telling the world what we did today.

"I started my period overnight," I blurt out, a bit louder than I intended it to. I groan inwardly. Great, now she's going to think I'm crazy! What person yells that out that loud.

She finishes changing the sheets quickly and turns to me, the dirty linens crumpled in her hands.

“It’s all right, dear. It happens to us all at some point. Can I get you anything? Motrin? Tylenol?”

My heart beat slows down. She bought it. She doesn’t suspect anything. I decline and tell her I’m fine, and when she leaves, I plop down on the bed to stare at the ceiling. I take a deep breath and lay my hands over my stomach. My thoughts wander to today and what we did together, and I can’t help the tinge of arousal that pricks between my legs.

I want Tristan back here doing it all over again. This time would be better. It won’t be as painful, and I’ll be able to relax more now I know what to expect. I smile thinking about it and fight the urge to get up and do a happy dance.

Maybe I can convince him to take me behind the house, where I saw him and Kasey talking the other night. The thought of her brings me down from my high, and I frown. I’m so different than her. She’s all red hair and a sexy body, but I’m... me. There is nothing special about me. I’m average all around.

Suddenly, my high from today has morphed into doubt. It shouldn’t matter though; we aren’t a couple and never will be. This is supposed to be no strings attached. Yet I feel like a puppet, and he has control over everything.

Chapter 24

Tristan

I’m up early and sitting on the rocker on the front porch, sipping some coffee. The Carringtons and Lana should be here in an hour so we can start the hike. I don’t want

to have to drive us out anywhere, so we are doing some of the smaller trails close by. Plus, I don't think Lana has seen these ones, and they offer a great view of the ranch.

The thought of having to spend the day with Russ is irritating though. I don't know what it is about that guy, but he makes me want to choke him. Don't lie. You don't like him because he's trying to hit on Lana. That's also true. Mom comes out and looks at the gear I have packed.

"Hiking today?"

"Yeah. The Carringtons want a guide, and Russ invited Lana to go."

She smiles. "Lana, huh?"

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I roll my eyes. “We’re just friends, Mom. Nothing is going on.” Lies. So much has happened between us, and fast. I’m really falling for this girl, and she’s leaving in a couple of days. It can’t work out between us—we’re too different. I should really end it now while I still have a chance of keeping our friendship.

Then I think about how she felt under me—her nails and heels digging into me as I pushed into her the first time. It was like pure heaven—or hell, knowing I can’t keep her. It felt so different with her than with Kasey. Maybe that’s because we were both inexperienced, and this time I could take control, but I doubt it. It was her.

Kasey has sent me a few texts, apologizing for the way she acted at the dance, and while I’m pissed she did it, I’m inclined to accept her apology. Honestly, I want to see her happy. I’m not that person for her anymore, and I’ve accepted it. She needs to as well. No matter what, we’ll always have a tie to one another. I can thank our parents for that. We need to find a way to move past whatever animosity it is we harbor toward one another.

Mom says something I don’t catch and walks away to help a family with small children. The Carringtons come into view then, and Russ and Lana are trailing a few paces behind, carrying on a conversation. I put my empty mug down with a little too much force; I’m surprised I didn’t crack it. Chill, man.

“Morning. How’s everyone feeling?” I ask, stepping off the porch, forcing a smile to my face. When I look into Lana’s eyes, my expression softens and I smile for real.

“A little tired, but nothing a little hike won’t fix,” Mr. Carrington states.

“Great, well, the trail we’re going to hike this morning is about two miles round trip and offers a great view of the ranch and pond. Do you want to grab a few snacks before we head out?”

They agree and walk over to the table with snacks laid out, Lana joining them. Russ stops next to me though, so I wait for him to speak.

“What’s going on with you and Lana?” he asks, keeping his gaze on her.

I glance over, and it’s like she knows I’m looking at her. Almost like she can feel it. I smile and she smiles back, waving at me. “We’re just friends. She’s a great girl.”

“She seems pretty amazing. If there’s nothing going on between you two, I’d like the chance to get to know her better while I’m here.”

I clench my teeth. I have a big fucking problem with that. She’s mine. Not yours. Except I don’t say any of that. Instead, I tell him, “Like I said, just friends.”

He claps me on my shoulder and gives it a squeeze before striding over to load up his bag with snacks. It kills me a little to tell him that lie. I want to be so much more than friends with her, but now’s not the right time. I watch the two of them interact as she grabs a few items, laughing as he tells her a joke.

Her laugh is so wonderful. It sends a warm tingle down my spine to settle in the pit of my stomach. I want to make her laugh like that. I want to be the one to put a smile on her face. Did I mess it all up by saying that to Russ? I sure as hell hope not.

* * *

The hike has been easy so far. I lead the way, and while Lana started off walking beside me, after a few minutes, she fell behind and is now walking with Russ. I’m not

sure if it's because she wants to hang with him, or if it's because of the cold shoulder I've given her. Okay, fine. It's the cold shoulder. I know I'm creating my own misery here.

When we reach the top, we take a breather as the guests take pictures and look around, spending some time asking me questions about the ranch and land. I usually love talking about the ranch, but today, my heart isn't in it. I give my standard answers but don't share any additional information.

"Take a few more minutes to look around and snap some pictures, and then we'll head back. There should be some snacks available when we get there. There's also some lawn games set up if you're interested in getting to know some of the other guests," I say.

Lana excuses herself from Russ and comes up to me, a smile on her face. "Hey, cowboy, what's wrong? You okay today?"

I want to take her hand and drag her somewhere secluded to have my way with her. At this point, I'd settle for some cuddling time and kisses. Yesterday wasn't enough. I wanted to have the time to lay with her, make sure she was okay, but we couldn't.

"Hey, beautiful," I whisper to her. "Yeah, I'm all right. Just wish I could spend more time with you alone."

Her face softens. "I really wish we could, too. It drove me crazy last night that I couldn't do anything but sit next to you."

I jut my chin toward Russ. "What do you think of him?"

"Russ?" I nod. "He's all right. Seems to be trying too hard to get me to like him. He has a sexy accent though." She blushes and looks to her feet.

I feign hurt and put my hand over my heart. “Sexier than mine?”

She pulls me down, her lips grazing my ear. “He may have the sexier accent, but he can’t make me feel the way you do.”

“And how’s that?” I ask, a smile bright on my face.

“Needy and wanted, all at the same time.”

She pulls back to look at me, and it takes everything in me not to pull her to me and crash my lips down on hers. For being inexperienced, she’s sinful. I swallow hard and look at the other four people we’re with. Russ is watching with a curious expression. He’s trying to make heads or tails of us.

“Lana, what if I want more with you? What if I don’t want this time between us to end?”

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She takes a step back and watches me. Her hazel eyes staring into the depths of my soul. I'm trying to put all my thoughts and feelings about her on the line. Let her see I'm open to whatever she's willing to give to me.

"We're ready to hike back. It's getting hot up here, and I wouldn't mind a dip in the pond," Mrs. Carrington states.

Lana looks away from me, her bottom lip worrying between her teeth. What's going on in that pretty little head of yours, Lana?

"Please, talk to me, Lana." My words come out as a plea.

She looks back at me and takes another step away. "I need some time to think."

Russ cozies up next to her, and she takes off, leading us down the trail. I catch up to her and Russ, and he's telling her all about his schooling and how he's the best of his football team. Sure you are, buddy. She watches the ground in front of her with heavy concentration. When my fingers brush against hers, she pulls her hand away.

Shit! I fucked that whole thing up, didn't I? I need to talk to her privately. Let her know, whatever her decision, I'll be fine with it. It may kill me, but I'll figure out how to move past it—eventually.

The hike down takes us about an hour, and the Carringtons ask questions about the wildlife and the town the entire way. Reina sidles up next to me and starts asking about some of my favorite things to do here. Why is it always the young ones that want to flirt with me?

“Reina, stop flirting. He’s too old for you,” Russ chastises his sister.

She turns bright red and glares at him. “I-I wasn’t flirting with him. I was just asking questions. I could say the same about you and Lana. Stop flirting with her. She’s clearly not interested in you, brother.”

Lana looks to the ground and smirks, enjoying the fight between brother and sister. Eventually, Mr. Carrington breaks up the bickering, but not before Russ lets Lana know I said we were just friends. She snaps her head up and looks deep into my eyes. She’s hurt. Her brows pinching together and her lips turn down. I need to explain it to her, but now isn’t the time.

We get back to the house, and Dad is outside with Mr. Robinson having a discussion of sorts. They look over at us when we all come into view, and Lana walks over, giving him a kiss on his cheek. He asks her about the hike, and she tells him it was good, but she wants to relax for a bit. I offer to walk with her since I want to check in on Holden.

We fall in step with one another, the silence thick between us.

“I meant what I said. I want more with you, Lana. I know it’ll be difficult, but it’s not impossible. I told him we’re only friends so he didn’t tip off my dad. I don’t want either of us to end up in trouble.”

She crosses her arms and keeps her distance, her silence deafening.

“Please, say something,” I beg, my voice barely above a whisper. I’m falling too hard, too fast for this girl. The one who makes me believe so much more is possible, who understands and doesn’t judge me. I know I shouldn’t have sprung this on her, but she needs to understand that I need more.

I'm only eighteen, but I've always known what I want in life. Mom has always told me I have an old soul. Well, right now, my old soul is clinging to hers. Begging her to understand how I feel—what I need.

"It's not fair." I glance at her as she wipes tears from her cheeks. "It's not fair I can't keep you, Tristan. Mom and Dad would never allow me to come to school out here."

Taking her hand in mine, I pull her in the direction of the barn, and Holden is there when we arrive. I give him a look, letting him know to get lost, and he leaves, winking in my direction before he goes. I back her against the door and cage her in.

"Lana, everything's happening so fast. I feel like a whole different guy when I'm with you, and I like that. You make me feel excited and like I can do anything I want."

"I don't know what to do, Tristan. I'm only eighteen. I still have another year of school left before I go to college. It's not like I can fly out here whenever I want."

"What do you want, Lana? Do you want me?"

She swallows hard and nods her head, the tears staining her cheeks. "Yes, Tristan. No one else I've met compares to you."

I smile a cocky grin. "Even better than that asshole who forgot about you when you left?"

She rolls her eyes and laughs. "Yes, even better than Joe." Then she mutters so quietly, I almost don't hear it. "Not sure what I saw in him anyway."

I let my body take over. I'm so sick of thinking and overanalyzing everything. My lips graze hers, and when she gasps, I seal my lips over hers and explore her familiar

mouth with my tongue. When she nips my bottom lip, it sends a shot straight to my dick. I rut into her, my growing length rubbing against her stomach.

She hooks her right leg over my hip, and I grab it, holding her against me as I kiss her harder and deeper. Someone bangs on the side of the barn, and we jump apart. It's what we needed to cool down; otherwise, I'm sure I would have done what Holden and Molly did.

Lana's chest is heaving with her deep breaths. Her normally bright eyes are dark green, and her dark pink lips are swollen from our kissing.

"I gotta go." She darts out of the barn, and when I step out into the sun to stop her, she's almost out of sight.

Great. That's not how I wanted our talk to end.

Chapter 25

Lana

My head swims with so many thoughts I feel as if I could drown. Things between us have gotten too far out of hand. This was supposed to be a learning experience.

No. Feelings. Involved.

But I fucked that one up, too. Or rather, we fucked it up. It seems we're both deeply invested in this, and it can't continue. Why not? Aren't you the one who said there are ways to stay in touch now? Ugh, I really need to stop being smart sometimes.

Do I want to go through senior year not dating because I'm holding out hope for a guy two thousand miles away? Who's to say, as soon as I leave, he doesn't forget about me? He's going to college. There are so many girls; he doesn't need me. I'm not worth the trouble.

I need to avoid him for the last few days. When I'm close to him, I lose my mind and forget about everything else. There are so many hopes and dreams I have, and a boy who wants to take over his family's ranch in Wyoming doesn't fit in my plans. I want to fight to get into Cornell. To get the degree I want.

It's such a hard area of study with so few people getting to actually do exactly what they want. I'm going to study business as well, so hopefully I can open my own business and be able to sell my designs to people who will actually find joy in them—not some overpaid corporate jerk who doesn't care.

I can do this. I can avoid Tristan, even if it kills me to do so.

* * *

It's Wednesday morning, and I have successfully avoided Tristan for a day and a half. The real challenge has been meal times because he's around for those. I've made notes as to which family he's helping and what the activity is. Then, I make sure to stay far away from him. He sent me a few messages on messenger that came through my phone, but I logged off, choosing to ignore him.

At lunch and dinner, my family sits with the Carringtons, and Russ insists I sit next to him. I know how much he annoys Tristan, so I've taken the seat at each meal, hoping to avoid him coming over. It seems to be working, but every time I glance his way, he tenses his jaw and stares a hole through me. I'm pretty sure Russ thinks I want to kiss him now or something, but I'll deal with him later.

Mom and Dad brought me out in a small boat yesterday, so that ate up a few hours as well. Dad seemed happy to get some quality time with me, but Mom seemed confused by my avoidance of Tristan. She asked me about it when we had a few moments away from Dad, and I told her it's no big deal. The vacation is almost over, and I want to spend some time with them. She seemed to buy it.

I'm sitting in a shady spot close to the barn, reading yet another book I brought. It's a good thing I brought five books with me. I'm almost through all of them, and that is more so in the past two days!

"Don't you get headaches from reading so much?" Holden asks, exiting the barn.

I smile up at him and shake my head. "No, never. Do you?"

He shrugs and takes a seat next to me. "Sometimes. I'm not much of a reader outside

of school. Never found the fun in it. Sports and outdoor activities are more my thing.” He smells like the horses, and I scoot away a little. Smelling like a barn is never a good thing. He chuckles and shakes his head. “Come on. Go change and let’s go for a ride. I want to talk to you anyway.”

He wants to talk to me? Did Tristan ask him to do it since I’ve been avoiding him? “About what?”

“Our boy. Go get changed. I’ll saddle Clementine for you. Meet me back here in ten minutes.” He stands and walks away, leaving no room for discussion.

I change and make it back with two minutes to spare. He pulls Clementine out and helps me mount her before doing the same for Duke. We meander down the familiar path that leads to the huge open field—the same field where I sixty-nined with Tristan a few days ago. My face warms at the thought, and I try to suppress the smile tugging at my lips.

Holden doesn’t say much, and when I glance over at him, I can see the wheels turning in his head. His eyes are trained on the trail ahead of him, but I can tell he’s not focusing. I really don’t want to have a conversation about Tristan, so I’m happy to ride in silence. There is a slight breeze, so I close my eyes for a moment and feel the wind on my face.

I only have two more days here before we leave early Saturday morning, and I’m not ready for this time to end. I’m not ready to leave Tristan or this place. It’s been so nice to get away from my normal life and relax on the ranch. It’s so quiet out here, and I love how I can see the stars at night. I’ve never realized how much I hate not being able to stare at them like I can here.

“I really like him, Holden,” I blurt out as my eyes glaze over with unshed tears. I’ve spent too much time trying to deny it from myself. I’ve known I’ve liked him since

the first moment he tossed me in the pond. There was something so different about him. I mean, I was pissed, but thinking back on it, I could tell there was something special.

“I know you do. If you like him, why have you been avoiding him? He’s hurt by that, you know.”

“He is?” I wipe my eyes on my sleeve.

“Yup. Plus, you’ve been spending time with Russ. Man, that guy’s a tool.” He says the last part to himself, but it’s loud enough for me to hear and makes me chuckle. He looks at me and smiles. “You know I’m right.”

I nod. Yeah, he’s right, but Russ is growing on me. “He’s not that bad once you get to know him.”

“Well, he treats me like I’m the hired help and Tristan even worse. I think he has a thing for you, but he sees that Tristan does, too, so he’s trying to stake his claim.”

I blush but don’t respond. We come into the clearing, and there is a blanket laid out under a tree. My heart soars—Tristan did this. I look around for Gage or an ATV or anything and come up short. Holden notices my confusion and chuckles.

“He’s not here. You and I need to finish having a conversation first.” He ties Clementine to a tree and helps me slide off her, then walks with me to the shady tree. I sit down and cross my legs as he sits next to me, stretching out. He pushes the brim of his hat further up to get a good look at me, and I look anywhere but at him.

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He finally starts to speak. I'm too afraid to look at him, so I pick at blades of grass and shred them between my fingers, hoping to give my nervousness an outlet.

"Tristan is like a brother to me. We look out for one another, and I've got his back—no matter what. He's been through enough shit with his ex. He's still healing from her, and I don't want to see him torn apart. She's still playing these mind fuck games with him."

I glance at him from the corner of my eye and see he's looking out into the field as he speaks. "Lana, he's fallen hard for you. I see it in the way he looks at you, and I know you've been avoiding him the past few days. I'm not sure what the reason is, and I don't need to know, but he doesn't need another girl fucking with his mind. Now, I know you already said you like him, and I believe you're telling the truth. So, why avoid him?"

I suck in a deep breath, my chin quivering with the urge to cry. I clamp my teeth together to get a hold of the emotions that want to spill out of me. "I'm scared," I say on a whisper.

"Of what?"

I shake my head and look up to the sky, trying to keep the tears from falling. I swallow, my throat burning with the need to hold everything inside. "Losing him. Keeping him. All of it."

He scoots over and rubs small circles on my back as I tuck my knees to my chest and place my head down on them. My shoulders shake with my silent sobs. I wish Tristan

were here. I wish he would pull me into his chest, circling his arms around me, giving me the time I need to cry it out.

“Lana, you’ve gotta tell him. He’s going crazy not knowing what’s going on and why you’re avoiding him. He doesn’t know I’m here with you, by the way.” He chuckles, and I glance at him, my crying starting to subside. “He’d kill me if he knew I was with his girl—alone. We think of each other like brothers, but that doesn’t mean he trusts me with his girl.”

His girl. How badly do I want to hear that in Tristan’s voice? I focus on the words and try to imagine it coming from him. It’s what I need. I need his silky voice to wash over me, wash away my fears. I need him to tell me he likes me, that I’m not the only one who was crazy enough to fall for him. I need—

“Lana?” I pop my eyes open and look at the man who has been haunting my dreams day and night. The one I’ve been longing for. My pulse quickens, and it’s hard to take in a deep enough breath.

He kneels in front of me and wipes the tears from under my eyes. “What’s wrong? Why are you crying?” He looks over at Holden and practically growls at him. “What did you say to her?”

I watch the exchange between them. Holden is so relaxed in his posture, a small smirk pulling at the corners of his lips. “Just trying to get you two idiots to admit your feelings for one another. No offense, Lana.”

Tristan sits, leaning against the tree and pulling me into his lap, wrapping his arms around me in a protective gesture. He rocks back and forth, his sway slow and gentle. I relax my head on his chest and listen for the sound of his heartbeat. It slows down, and my own heart beats in time with his.

I hear the rustling of clothes and know Holden is leaving the two of us alone, and I couldn't be more grateful for the one on one time with Tristan. There is so much I want to tell him, but I can't find the words. So, I let him rock me and kiss the top of my head.

I'm not sure how long we stay like this. It could be minutes, or it could be hours. When I finally feel strong enough to look up at him, his eyes are closed and his head is resting against the tree. I shift my weight, and he opens his eyes to look at me, a smile forming on his lips.

"I've missed you, beautiful."

"I've missed you, too. I'm sorry I've been avoiding you." I climb off his lap and sit next to him, curling my legs under me. It's now or never to tell him. I'm running out of time, and I know I'll be kicking myself if I don't tell him how I feel before I head back to Connecticut. I take a deep breath and continue. "I know we agreed to sex lessons with no strings attached, but I'm falling for you. I'm scared, Tristan. I'm only eighteen, and you're going off to college."

He gives me a soft smile. "Lana, I've already fallen for you. I've wanted you since the moment I walked into you on your first night here. I didn't want to get involved, but then you made it too damn tempting not to."

I pull my lip between my teeth and look down as he takes my hand in his. I follow his movement as he lifts my hand to his lips and kisses the back of it. I whimper, wanting to feel his lips on mine. It's been too long since I've seen him, and my body is begging for more.

I push into him, my lips sealing against his as he pushes his fingers through my loose strands. I climb onto his lap, straddling him, and place my hands on either side of his face as he coaxes me to open for him. His tongue slides across mine, and it's like I'm

home. Sitting here, kissing Tristan is exactly where I'm supposed to be.

Holden clears his throat, and we pull apart in a daze. "If you guys are going to continue to suck face, might I suggest going someplace a little more secluded? I heard Billy say something about bringing some folks for a ride when I was saddling Clementine and Duke."

"Let's get back." He stands and helps me to my feet, pulling me flush against his body to give me another searing kiss that I can feel down to my toes. I wish we were already somewhere private. I have such a strong urge to sink to my knees and take him between my lips. As if he can read my thoughts, he says, "Not here, naughty girl."

The three of us ride back and pass Billy with one of the families riding out to the field. I'm glad Holden had the good sense to stop us when he did. Tristan helps me down, and Holden takes the three horses to put them away as Tristan leads me away from the barn.

He keeps looking around as he tugs me in the direction of the shack that we first fooled around in. My nerves are taking over, and my mind is running wild. We've already had sex, but is he going to be gentle this time? Is he going to be like the guys in my books? Domineering and ruthless?

We make it to the shack, both a little out of breath with the speed to get here. I need him. I need to feel him on me, in me, taking my breath away. He opens the door, ushering me inside, then closes it tight behind him.

We attach ourselves to one another. His lips come down on my neck, and I pull him closer, exploring his body with my fingertips. He sucks my nipple through my shirt, and wetness pools between my legs. I want this man so much.

“Do you have a condom?” I ask, breathless.

He pulls one out of his pocket and holds it between his two fingers. I tug on the bottom of his shirt, and he pulls it over his head. Before he can reach for mine, I’m doing the same, tossing it in a corner somewhere. I undo my jeans, sliding them down my legs as I kick my boots off. I have never been so anxious to get out of my clothing before.

I stand back up in just my light pink bra and underwear. He’s still standing there in his jeans, but his eyes are glued to me.

“Hey there, cowboy. How about I help you out of these?” I rub my hand up and down his bulge, and he hisses at the contact.

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I drop to my knees and focus on unbuttoning and unzipping his pants. I reach my hand under the waistband of his boxers and pull him out, salivating as I look at the size of him in my small hand. I look up into his eyes as I close my lips around his girth and bob my head up and down on him. I keep my eyes planted on him until he drops his head back, his hands going to my head to help move me how he likes best.

“Fuck, Lana. You feel amazing.”

I don't want to stop. I know I could bring him to his knees if I continue to do this, but he has other plans. He pulls me off him and helps me stand. His fingers find their way into my panties as he runs his finger up and down my slit and kisses my neck and around my breasts. I reach out for his cock and take him firmly in my hand, slowly rubbing him up and down.

He circles my clit with his thumb, and I moan for him. Then, when he inserts a finger in me, I gyrate my hips, trying desperately to find the release my body is craving. I'm getting close. His scent, his breathing, and his touches bring me closer and closer to the edge.

“I'm going to come,” I moan as I grab his shoulders to keep from falling over.

He spins me around, pulls my underwear down, and positions my hands on the wall in front of me. He leans his weight into me as he calls me a good girl and nips at my ear. He kicks my feet out a little wider and holds on to my hips. I arch my back, pressing my ass out to him. My mind is fuzzy as everything inside me pulses with a need to feel him. I'm strung so tight.

“No condom, just for a minute,” I blurt out. I want to feel him inside me without anything between us. I want to know he’s the first one that took me this way. I’m out of my mind horny, and the thought of him taking me bareback is adding to the heightened sensation. “I’m on birth control. Just for a second,” I try to rationalize.

He lines himself up with me and pushes just the tip inside. My body grips him, holding him in place as I pant. He’s still too big for me, but I will myself to relax. I thrust back, taking him all the way in, and the two of us groan in unison. I pull forward and thrust back a few times, controlling the depth and speed, on the verge of my orgasm, lost in my own pleasure. He grips my hips tight and holds me still.

“Lana, we can’t stay like this.” The words are tight, and I know he’s trying to hold back. He pulls out, and I’m bereft. I want him back in me. I look over my shoulder and watch as he rolls the condom over his length and presses back into me. I arch my back to accommodate him as he finds his own rhythm. “Touch yourself.”

I reach my hand between my legs and move my fingers how I like best. My legs begin to shake, and I struggle to keep the momentum of my fingers as I hold myself up. He snakes his hand around my waist and presses his fingers against mine, the added pressure sending me over the edge. My knees feel like Jell-O, and I’m glad he’s helping me stand. I would have sunk to the ground if not.

He comes a few moments later, my name a groan on his lips. What we just did was irresponsible, and it can’t happen again. But that doesn’t mean I don’t want to.

Chapter 26

Tristan

Holy fuck. I’ve never been inside a woman without a condom, and I can see why it’s addictive. I was planning on teasing her with just the tip, but when she thrust all the

way back on me, I was done for. I wanted to shoot everything into her, make her keep it for me. I run my fingers down my face. I'm fucking eighteen years old; I shouldn't be thinking like that.

She traces a pattern with her finger over my pectoral, and I pull her a little closer to my chest to kiss her forehead. She looks up at me, giving me a lazy smile. It's getting hot laying in the shack, but I don't want to move yet because I know, when we do, she's going to remember she's leaving in two days, just like I'm thinking it now.

"No more ignoring me, got it?" I push hair out of her face and look down at her.

"Got it," she replies quietly.

"No more hanging out with Russ either. He's a dick." I add the last part for good measure.

She sits up and glares at me, her mouth popped open. "You haven't right to tell me who I can and cannot hang out with, Tristan."

I groan. I shouldn't have said that. She doesn't like being told what to do unless it's sex related. "All I'm saying is he likes you more than he's letting on, and I'm sure he's going to try something before you both leave."

She starts tugging her clothes on and huffs as she hops on one foot while trying to shove the other through her pant leg. "I tell you I'm falling for you, you tell me the same, and you start trying to control me right off the bat. What the hell is wrong with you?"

The beast of anger is getting riled up, and I'm trying to tame him so I don't fuck this up more than I seem to be already. "Lana, stop. Look at me, please." My voice is calm and even.

She huffs as her eyes land on me, resting her hands on her hips. She reminds me of Peter Pan the way she's standing, except Peter isn't as tempting in a pair of skinny jeans and a light pink bra.

"I'm not trying to keep you for anyone. When you hang out with him, he stops me from getting to see you. He makes sure he is always around and doesn't give us any privacy. I'm not asking for you; I'm asking forme,so I can actually spend time with you these last few days."

She drops her arms to her sides and hunches her shoulders. "Sorry. I thought it was because you were just being jealous."

I shake my head but grin anyway. "Well, I mean, there's always that bit. You already told me you think his accent is sexy."

She smirks and kneels next to me. "Yeah, but his body is nothing compared to yours. Plus, you have calloused hands from ranch work, and his hands might as well be manicured. He's never had to work a day in his life. You're a much better choice for the future." Her eyes go wide, and she blushes from the top of her head down to where her jeans sit on her hips.

When I crawl over her, she leans back until I'm straddling her waist. "Thinking of a future with me, Ms. Robinson?" My emotions soar. Could I possibly have a chance at being with this girl? My mind starts reeling with possibilities on how we could make it work and if she would even want to.

She sputters until I finally let her off the hook by telling her I'm teasing and that we should get back to the house. I'm not, though. I want to know what she sees when she pictures me. I don't want to leave our little cocoon, but I don't want Dad or Mom to come looking for me. I intertwine our fingers as we walk in the direction of the house for some lunch. As we approach, I see her dad talking with mine.They sure are

talking a lot.

Henry turns to look at us as we approach, and instead of dropping her hand, I bring it to my mouth to kiss the back of it. I don't want to spend any more time being scared to show my affection for her. She smiles up at me, and I fight the urge to kiss her lips.

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We gather some plates with food and sit to enjoy each other's company. Her mom looks at us and smiles, then goes back to talking to my mom. Seriously, I have never seen her so chummy with the guests before. Holden joins us at the table, and the three of us talk and laugh. It feels right having her with Holden and me. It's like she should have always been part of our group of friends.

Kasey used to try to get me away from Holden and my friends. She never wanted us to hang out with them. I guess that's what's different about Lana though. She likes Holden and all the crazy stories he tells her. The thought of that makes me smile.

* * *

Wednesday night. I have two more nights with my girl, and then she's leaving. I don't want to say goodbye to her. We spent the rest of the day sitting by the pond, enjoying each other until Russ and his sister came over. Reina tried to show off in front of me, and Russ was trying to do the same to Lana. Can he not take a hint?

She only left my side an hour ago to get ready for the evening event—a movie under the stars—and I'm itching to have her close to me. We have the projector set up out in the field where we were earlier today, and the truck is filling up with everyone. Lana is walking by herself, and I jog up to her.

“Hey, beautiful. Your parents aren't coming?”

She shakes her head and holds the bottom of her skater skirt out. “They're tired. Like my skirt?”

I hadn't even noticed, too excited to just see her beautiful face. I smirk and raise my eyebrow. "Not that I'm complaining, but what's with the skirt? You're going to be a little cold watching the movie, don't you think?"

She steps into my space, and her scent surrounds me. "It makes for easier access. Thought we could find some shadows to hide in."

My dick stiffens in my pants at the thought of getting to mess around with her. She takes another step closer and grazes her fingers down the front of my pants, eliciting a quiet moan from my lips. She's playing with fire, and she doesn't care.

"You're going to be the death of me, beautiful. You can't tease me like that."

"Who said I'm teasing?" She pulls me down so she can whisper in my ear, "I'm not wearing anything under this."

Yup, I'm fully hard now, and when she rests her hands over my bulge, it twitches under her touch. I look around, making sure no one is close to us, then reach my hand under the front of her skirt and come in contact with her soft curls. She whimpers under my touch, and I slide further down, applying a small amount of pressure to her clit with my index finger

I pull my hand away and suck the tip of my finger into my mouth. "Tastes good." I press her hand down on me, holding her in place as I whisper, "Wish I could tie you down. I can tease just as well as you can. You'd sound good begging me to make it end."

She sucks in a deep breath as Russ approaches. She drops her hand, and I tell her I'll meet her in the field. Russ saddles up next to her on the truck bed, and I try my best to hide my displeasure. She keeps her eyes on me. Even though he's talking about something, she's not paying attention at all. I readjust myself, and she bites her lip,

blushing.

The opening credits to *City Slickers* start rolling when I pull up with Holden. It was a joke made once when asked what movie to play, but it's a classic and a hit. People seem to like it. There are only about ten people sitting in the chairs we set up to watch the movie. Lana leans against a tree behind everyone, her eyes fixed on me as I approach.

"Don't want to watch the movie with everyone?" I tease.

"Not when I have the chance to hang out with you tonight." She twists her body side to side as her smile takes over.

She's so pretty when she smiles. "Come on." I reach my hand out, and she laces her fingers with mine. I tug her close to my body and plant a gentle kiss on her lips. She pouts when I pull back too soon, and I want to nibble on her bottom lip and turn that frown into a smile.

We walk far enough into the woods to not be caught. I can still see the projector and movie when I stop and pull her behind a tree. I have a blanket laid out over the dirt ground and pull her down with me and lie back. She lies on her side and tosses her leg over my hip. Where we are, we can still see the movie, but we're away from prying eyes in case things get hot.

I hope things heat up.

She's curls into my side, her breathing deep and even. I rub her shoulder, and she snuggles tighter into my embrace. I glance down. Her eyes are closed, and her lips are parted. So much for things getting hot.

"Please, no," she mumbles and pulls me tighter. Her forehead is creased and pulled

tight. She's in distress, having a nightmare.

"Shh, beautiful. I've got you. You're safe." I kiss the top of her forehead, and her eyes flutter open to look at me.

"Sorry, must have dozed off there." She sits up, looking at the screen.

I sit up and place my hands on her shoulders, planting a light kiss on one. "What were you dreaming about?"

She frowns and looks at me. "I don't remember." She shrugs and looks out at the movie. It's about halfway through at this point, so we have about forty-five minutes until we start packing everything up and bring everyone back for the night.

She pushes me down and places a knee on either side of me, her hands resting on my chest as she straddles my waist. I can feel her warmth through my pants. My dick presses against my zipper, trying to find its way out and into her.

"Whatcha doing up there?" I tease, resting my hands on her hips.

"Driving you crazy." She smirks and slides her hips forward and backward on me.

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“Yes, you are.” I reach under her dress and press my thumb against her bundle of nerves. Her fingernails bite into the skin under my shirt. I’m sure I’ll have marks when I check later. She moans, and I twitch under her. Jesus, this girl is going to kill me. She sounds as sweet as she tastes.

She moves her hands and fumbles to get my pants undone. She looks at me through hooded eyes as she slips her hand past the opening. I moan with her touch as she pulls me out, keeping my dick hidden under her skirt. Her fingers feel too good, and before I know it, she slides down on me, filling herself up.

I breathe in and out through my nose in fast pants, trying to keep my load. “Lana, we can’t fuck without a condom.”

“I just want to feel you for a minute. You feel so good—so much better this way.” Her head is tossed back as she grinds down on me. I feel the beginning stages of her orgasm forming, and I pull her up and off me. My dick twitches, missing her warm center. I reach for the condom in my pocket when I hear Russ calling for Lana.

She widens her eyes and scrambles off me, fixing her skirt. I tuck myself back in and zip my pants as Russ comes around the tree.

“There you are, Lana.” He smirks when he sees me lying down and her sitting next to me. She tucks some hair behind her ear, avoiding looking at me as I sit up.

“What’s up, Russ?”

“The movie is boring. Thought you might want to go for a walk with me?”

She shakes her head. “No, thanks. I’m going to stay here with Tristan. We’re having a good time.”

He raises his eyebrow, and I swear to God, if he says anything else, I’m going to punch him in his fucking face. I snarl in his direction, and when Lana puts her hand on my leg, I cover her hand with mine in a possessive gesture. He walks away without saying anything else, and I’m thankful for it.

“Maybe we should join everyone else and watch the movie.”

Even though I don’t like it, I agree with her, so we make our way out to the field. If we keep this up, we’re going to do something we’ll both regret.

Although, would it really be that bad?

Chapter 27

Lana

Thursday. Only one more day after today until I’m gone, never to return. Okay, well, that might be a little dramatic. It’s not like I’m in outer space out here. I can return at any point if I choose. It’s just a few hours on a plane, but that doesn’t stop the pain in my chest when I think about leaving Tristan and this place.

I jump out of bed and toss some clothes on to go grab breakfast with my man. My man. I know he’s not mine, but I can’t stop thinking like that. I check my phone and see, for the time being, I have Wi-Fi, so I open a new message to him. I’m in a flirty mood and type the first thing that comes to mind.

Me: Morning, cowboy. Are you teaching dancing classes again today? You’re my favorite instructor. Maybe I can get a private lesson?

Tristan: Morning, beautiful. Are you coming to the lesson today? I'm sure we can find someplace to sneak off to.

Me: I was planning on coming by. Although, I've already suffered through a class. I'm sure I'm an expert now, even with my two left feet!

Tristan: I'm sure you are. Come to breakfast. See you soon.

I try to rush out of the cabin, but Mom stops me and insists on walking with me. My plan was to run to get food, but she is taking her time, and I know better than to try to make her work on my time.

She takes a deep breath, and I'm not sure what I was expecting her to say, but this definitely isn't it. "Lana, are you being safe?"

I slowly turn my head to the side to look at her. "Yes?" It comes out more of a question than I mean it to.

"I see the way you are with Tristan. It's your life, and I'm not going to stand in your way, I just want to make sure you are being smart about things. Your future is important, and I want you to follow your dreams—whatever they may be."

"Mom, I promise I'm not going to give up on my dreams because I met some boy, and I promise I'm being safe." My face feels hot as I talk to her. If she knows we've been messing around, does Dad know? "Mom, does dad know?"

She smiles sweetly at me. "He's choosing not to think about it, but I think he sees what's going on between you two."

I play with the bottom of my shirt, avoiding her gaze. "I promise we're being safe." Except for the two out of three times I had him in me without a barrier between us.

My skin flushes as I think about how full I felt with him nestled between my legs. Then, I think of what I just told my mom; I basically admitted to having sex with the guy. I want to die from embarrassment.

Mom pats my arm and kisses my cheek before sending me along to go have breakfast with Tristan. Russ jogs up beside me when I'm almost to the house, and I roll my eyes when he starts talking to me. He's trying to convince me to go out in one of the boats with him.

"Russ. You know I'm dating Tristan, right?" The annoyance is evident in my voice.

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“I know. Doesn’t mean I don’t want to hang out with you. All I’ve got is my annoying little sister, and I’m stuck away from friends for another two weeks. We’re here in the States for almost a month, and I’m going insane.” He puts his fingers in his pockets and looks at the ground in front of him.

I soften. He’s not trying to hit on me. Tristan was wrong. “Oh. So, you haven’t been trying to hit on me?”

He smiles wide, but I see the mischief in his eyes. “Oh, I never said that.”

I roll my own and knock my shoulder into his, causing him to lose his balance for a second before he regains it quickly. “Jerk.”

“Hang with me today. I promise to be an upstanding gentleman for the day. I just really need a break from my family. They’re driving me nuts.”

“Let me see what Tristan’s doing today, and if he’s busy, we can hang out. Maybe you can be my first international friend.”

He smiles, and we reach the house as we finish our conversation. Tristan’s jaw ticks when he sees us but relaxes when I stand next to him and kiss him on the cheek. The four of us—Holden is never far—get breakfast, and we sit together to eat. Tristan tells me his plans for the day, and since it includes a hike with one of the families, I decide to take Russ up on his offer for a boat ride.

Of course, I don’t tell Tristan this part. I tell him I’m thinking of heading out on a boat and to float around for a while, getting lost in a good book.

He leans close so only I can hear him. “Going to read some smut and get turned on for me? I still have enough time to give you a few more lessons.”

I swallow hard, and from the sly smirk on Holden’s face, I’m pretty sure he knows what’s going on. “O-okay.” It’s the only thing I can manage to stammer out.

He gives me a hard kiss on the lips before turning to leave with Holden. I smile to myself and run my fingers along my lips, committing the feeling to memory. Russ and I finish breakfast in relative silence, then walk back to our cabins to change into bathing suits.

We meet up by the small row boats, and Russ already has one half in the water, waiting for me to join him. He holds his hand out for me, and I take it as I step into the boat and sit at the front. He shoves off and jumps in, water from his feet splashing me. I laugh and wipe it from my legs and watch as he rows us away.

I offer to help him, but he swats at my outstretched hand and tells me he can do it himself—Mr. Independent over here. He rows us into the middle of the water and pulls the oars into the boat, letting the current pull us farther from shore. The sun reflects off the top of the water, dancing in front of my eyes. I lean over and let my fingers trail through the small waves the boat creates as we glide around.

My skin prickles as I feel his eyes on me, and I glance up at him. He doesn’t even try to hide the fact that he’s watching me. Instead, he shifts his eyes lower, over my body. I still have on my cover up, but it’s getting warmer the longer I sit here, and it won’t be long before I take it off. He smiles as I shift in my seat, trying to get comfortable under his intense gaze.

“Why do you keep staring at me?” I play with some loose hair as I wait for his response. My stomach flutters waiting for him to answer.

“No reason. You’re pretty. Different than the girls in England.” His voice has a warm quality to it, and I can’t help the blush that rises to my cheeks. “Wish I’d met you first,” he says. It’s quiet, and I almost didn’t hear it so I pretend I didn’t.

What would it be like if I had met Russ instead of Tristan? I ponder this as we float aimlessly across the pond. He’s cute, and his accent is to die for. I could listen to him talk about anything—even paint drying—and I’d be infatuated. But I don’t have the same connection I do with Tristan.

From the moment I laid eyes on Tristan, I knew he was different. Then I got the opportunity to know him, and I knew my life was never going to be the same. He was meant to come into my life, and I know without a doubt he was meant to be my first. It was perfect. He was gentle and caring. He knew what to do and say to make it enjoyable for both of us.

“What’s going on in that head of yours, Lana?” Russ’s voice cuts through my thoughts.

“Nothing much. Just thinking.”

“Wanna go for a swim?” He’s stripping out of his clothes as he asks, and I get a good look at his toned stomach as he pulls his shirt off, tossing it on the seat next to me. He’s not as muscular as Tristan. His physique is lean, but I have no doubt he’s strong.

I bite my lip. Do I want to get in the water with him? It is getting warm out here, and I wouldn’t mind getting wet to cool down. I look out to the shore, avoiding his gaze. “I, um... I’m not a good swimmer, and I don’t like going in the water when I can’t touch.”

“That’s all right. I’ll keep you above water. Trust me.”

I blink at him and bite my lip. “You promise to not let me go?”

He draws an ‘X’ over his heart with his index finger. “Promise.”

I nod and he smiles before diving into the murky water head first. He emerges moments later and shakes the water from his blond locks before wiping the water from his face. “It’s bloody freezing in here!”

He splashes some water at me, and I shriek when the cold droplets hit my sun-warmed skin. “You’re not helping to get me in there if it’s freezing.” I dry my leg with a towel and smile when he drapes his arms over the side of the boat.

“Don’t make me pull you in, Lana. Get your arse in here.”

It’s fine. He’s going to keep you safe. Don’t be a baby, Lana! The pep talk I give myself doesn’t have the exact effect I want, but it’s enough for me to pull my cover up over my head and put it on Russ’s shirt. I stand and wobble as the boat moves. I look over the edge into the dark water, hold my nose, and jump feet first.

My head breaks through the surface only a few seconds later, but I’m flailing my arms, looking for something to grab on to. Russ reaches out and pulls me close to him, his hands resting on my waist. The two of us kick slow and steady, keeping ourselves above water. My body acclimates to the temperature quickly, and it almost feels warm after being in it for a few minutes.

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Very few words are passed between us. Something slimy hits my foot, and I scream. He's the closest thing to me, so I wrap my legs around his waist, trying to pull myself farther out of the water. He smirks, holding on to the side of the boat with one hand and my waist with his other.

"I could get used to this," he whispers. Our faces are inches apart and his body feels solid under mine. His muscles flex every time he kicks his legs to keep us afloat. It's reminiscent of when Tristan pushed me in, and I clung to him for dear life, and I feel his warm breath as he continues. "Lana, I'd really like to kiss you."

My heart hammers in my chest, and I pull away from him, clinging to the side of the boat instead. My eyes are wide, and I shake my head. "I'm seeing Tristan, Russ. I won't do that to him."

I pull myself up and kick frantically to pull myself over the side of the boat. Damn ab muscles! After what feels like doing sit ups forever, I manage to fling myself over the side and almost land on my head in the boat.

"I want to go back."

Chapter 28

Tristan

The lesson for the dance tonight has come and gone, and Lana never showed up. I try sending her a message, but I know, unless she's in her cabin with Wi-Fi, it will go unanswered. She said she was going out on a boat. Maybe she fell asleep out there

and lost track of time.

I walk down to the water, fully planning on teasing her for falling asleep, and see her sitting in the middle of the water, on a boat—with Russ. I immediately see red. She said she was going out on a boat to read, not that she was going out with Russ. She leans in and kisses him. I ball my fists by my sides, shaking as anger ripples through my muscles. It takes everything in me to walk away and not swim out to them.

How could I have been so fucking stupid? She's here on vacation and probably thought it would be a fun story to share with her friends back home. She can tell them how she slept with some cowboy, and they can all get a laugh. You know that's not true. I lock my jaw as my brain tries to talk some sense into my heart.

Holden is walking my way and falls in line when he sees the pissed off expression on my face. "What's wrong? You were all smiles a few minutes ago."

"Russ and Lana are hooking up behind my back." I clench and relax my fists, trying to talk myself out of punching the fucker in his face.

He grabs my arm, and I spin to him, jerking my arm from his grasp. "Hold on, Tristan. Are you sure? What did you see?"

"She didn't come to the dance lesson, so I thought maybe she fell asleep in a boat, but when I got to the water, I saw her kissing Russ. Plain as fucking day. I never should have gotten involved with her. It was a huge mistake. She was a mistake." I push the words past my lips, but even I don't fully believe them.

Holden is at a loss for words. This may be one of the only times my best friend hasn't known what to say. He's always ready with some kind of remark or idea. When he doesn't offer any advice, I turn back to the house. The dance starts in just over an hour, and I need to shower and change clothes. My phone rings, and I pull it out,

opening the incoming message.

Kasey: Can we please talk? I want to clear the air. I don't like the bad blood between us, especially since our parents are good friends.

I know I'm not in the right frame of mind to do this—not after seeing Russ and Lana—but I would like things to not be awkward between us.

Me: Fine. Come by tonight and we can talk.

* * *

Most of the guests are outside listening to the band and grabbing food, including Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. Lana isn't with them, though. I look down from my bedroom window, waiting in the shadows for her to come around.

The entire Carrington family arrives together, and Russ has a big smile plastered to his face. Fuck! I storm down the stairs and push the screen door open with so much force it snaps against the side of the house. Dad glares at me, and I have the good grace to flinch.

I'm focused in on Russ and putting my fist in his face when Kasey catches my attention. I shake my head, clearing thoughts of Russ on the ground with a bloody nose for kissing my girl, and walk to Kasey instead.

"Hey, Tristan." She waves, and I think this is the first time I have ever seen her look shy. It's a good look on her, makes her seem humble.

"Hi." I want to get this over with, so she better get used to curt answers.

"Can we go somewhere private to talk?" She peeks up at me from under her lashes.

“Please,” she adds at the end in a soft tone.

I jerk my head to the side toward the house, and she knows where to go. I start walking, and she follows closely behind me. I lead her to the back, and when I glance over my shoulder to see if she’s following, she smirks.

“Get your mind out of the gutter, Kasey. I just don’t want anyone to hear us.” I stop beside the house and lean against the siding. She stops in front of me.

“You mean you don’t want Lanato hear.” She crosses her arms over her chest, pressing her cleavage up out of her top.

I roll my eyes. Typical. Trying to win me over by showing too much. It worked at one time, the thought of getting to fuck her. Now, it seems desperate.

“You said you wanted to talk, so talk.”

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Her smile fades, and she drops her arms to her sides. She then drones on about how she needed some space, and she's too young to settle down. She promises she never meant to hurt me, though, and wishes she had told me about applying to UCLA so we could have celebrated together when she was accepted.

She wipes under her eyes after finishing her heartfelt speech, and I feel bad for her. She's so caught up in her own world, she doesn't see what's going on around her. Because of this, I decide to be the bigger person and say something I never thought I would.

"I forgive you, Kasey."

Her face lights up. "Really? Tristan, I really never meant to hurt you. I want to try something new, get away from this small town for a while."

I smirk. "I know. You weren't meant to stay here for the rest of your life. This town, this ranch is my dream. Not yours."

"I really am sorry." Tears fall down her cheeks, and I know she means it.

I pull her into my arms and kiss the top of her head. She's comfortable, and she calms me. I'm still angry about Lana and Russ, but holding her like this is keeping me calm.

She leans up and kisses me on the lips, and it's so familiar that I return the gesture. It's nothing more than a simple kiss—no tongue, no passion. It's her way of saying goodbye to me. The only thing I don't count on is the quiet gasp of surprise that comes from someone behind me. I peek my head around the corner and see Lana

there. Her hand is up by her lips, and she's backing away slowly. Her eyes are wide and shimmering as she shakes her head.

"Fuck." I push Kasey away and call out, "Lana, this isn't what it looks like." She's in a full-on sprint, running away from me.

"Tristian, I didn't know she was there. I promise." Kasey looks as worried as I feel, and I know she's telling the truth.

"I know. I'll talk to you later." I run past her, hoping to catch up to Lana before she gets too far. I whip my head from side to side, scanning the crowd of familiar faces, but I don't see her. Holden is chatting with Kasey's parents, and I run up to him.

"Holden, where is she?" My voice is higher than usual as panic begins to set in.

"I haven't seen her." I grab a fistful of my hair and spin in a circle, my eyes scanning the small crowd again.

Russ. I spot him a few yards away and make a mad dash for him. "Russ, where's Lana?"

He furrows his brows and shrugs his shoulders. "How should I know? She said she was looking for you."

"You didn't see her run by a minute ago?" Someone has to have seen her. She couldn't have just disappeared.

I hear one of the horses neighing in the distance and don't even wait for his response as I run in the direction of the barn. I'm almost there when I see Lana come out on Clementine's back, fully saddled up.

“Lana, wait!” I yell out, but she takes off in a full gallop on the horse’s back.

Who the fuck saddled her horse? I run inside, but no one is there. “Billy!” I yell out, but the only response is Gage snorting in my direction. My heart hammers in my chest. She’s riding on the back of a horse that’s not saddled properly, and she doesn’t have anyone with her.

I’m wasting time standing here, so I grab a blanket and saddle, getting Gage ready in record time. I climb on his back, kick his flanks, and take off out of the barn in the same direction as Lana. Please, don’t let her be hurt. I repeat the phrase like a mantra as I race into the woods. Gage snorts and his breathing is hard as I push him even faster.

“Lana!” I yell out, hoping she’ll respond to me. “Lana!”

I catch a glimpse of Clemetine’s tail and urge Gage faster to catch up with them. I’m really pushing his speed, but I know he can take it. He’s enjoying every minute of it. His ears flatten down and he pulls his head forward, striving for more speed. When I hear Lana scream, my heart plummets in my chest.

“Tristan!” she screams out.

We make it through the trees into the open field and I see she’s still on Clementine’s back, but the saddle is slipping to the side. She didn’t make it tight enough and now she’s trying to hold on with all her strength.

“Pull back on the reins,” I yell. She pulls back, and Clementine slows to a stop. Her body slips to the side more, and Clementine rears up on her hind legs. Lana screams again, holding on to the brown leather reins with all her might. I’m close enough I can see her white knuckles.

I jump off Gage’s saddle and grab Clementine’s bridle. “Whoa, girl, calm down.

You're okay." I reach my hand up and pet her snout and the side of her neck. She's breathing hard from the exertion, and she snorts a few times. I pull her face down to mine and put my forehead between her eyes.

Lana! I jump away from Clementine to see Lana clinging on for dear life. Her saddle has slipped to the side of the horse, and she's clinging on with her arms and legs. Her eyes are squeezed shut, and her whole body is shaking. Tears stream down her cheeks as she takes deep, ragged breaths.

"Shh, Lana." I reach up and place my hands on her waist. "Let go, I've got you." She loosens her grip, and I pull her off the horse like a rag doll. I place her on her feet and pull her to my chest, my hands resting on the back of her head and her lower back. She grips my shirt in her tiny fists but, after only a moment, pushes me away from her.

She tries to walk, and her knees give out. I saw it happening before she did and managed to reach out in time to keep her from dropping to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Her hands fly to her calves as she rubs the muscles.

"You're not used to riding like that. Are your legs cramping?"

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“Yes.” She doesn’t look at me as she continues to rub at the cramp. I grab her right leg and straighten it out, my fingers kneading into the tight muscles. She winces and pulls her leg from my grasp before standing and storming off.

“Stay away from me, Tristan. Go back to Kasey,” she yells out.

I jump up but stand my ground. “I guess I could say the same to you. Have fun with Russ!”

When she turns back to face me, I see the unbridled hate in her features. She narrows her darkened eyes and points her index finger at me. I fully expect her to storm back over and jab her finger in my chest. I’m surprised when she stands in her spot and lowers her hands to her hips. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“The boat. I saw the two of you kissing.” I don’t want to be mad at her. I don’t want her last few nights here to be miserable.

She snorts and shakes her head in disbelief. “You mean today, after I reminded him that I’m with you and don’t see him that way? After I turned down his advances because I’m head over heels for you? That boat ride?”

I grind my teeth, knowing what I saw. “You kissed him.”

She throws her hands up and groans. “I kissed his cheek after he told me what a lucky guy you are, asshole.”

Fuck. I replay what I saw over and over. She leaned forward and brushed her lips

against him, but the more I think about it, the more I realize he had his head turned and she was indeed kissing his cheek.

Every emotion displays over my features—anger, disgust, fear, and finally apologetic. And she catches them all the moment I realize my error. “Yeah, asshole. Unlike you, I didn’t forget about you the moment you were out of my sight.”

I wince. Her words hurt, and I know she chose them specifically to dig the dagger in a little deeper. It’s what I told her when she was upset over that scumbag Joe.

“She kissed me,” I blurt out, trying to regain my footing in this argument.

“Yes, and you kissed her back,” she spits. She wipes her fingers over her cheeks and flings her tears to the earth below us. “Leave me alone, Tristan.” She turns and walks into the woods back to the house.

“She was kissing me goodbye. It meant nothing!” I call out after her, but she either doesn’t hear me or doesn’t care. I want to chase after her. I want to make her see that she’s wrong, but first, I need to get the horses back in the barn and give her a chance to cool off.

Chapter 29

Lana

My legs still hurt as I walk my sorry ass back to the dance. At least, the walk is helping to ease the tension there, although it does nothing to quell the ache in my heart. My vision is bleary, and I keep wiping my hands under my tear-soaked eyes so I can make my way back. Tristan hasn’t come out to follow me, and I can’t decide if I’m happy about that or upset.

Bullshit, you're pissed off he hasn't run after you! Yeah, I guess I am. I thought he might have been mad at me for missing the dance lesson and maybe would have given me a few spanks for being naughty. Don't judge me; it happens in the books I read and seems fun. Instead, I find him sucking face with his ex-girlfriend.

Okay, so sucking face isn't accurate. He did kiss her back though. I know they dated for a long time and those feelings are hard to ignore, but come on! He gave me that whole spiel about liking me and wanting to make things work with me, and then he's kissing her behind my back. The only reason I caught his cheating ass is because Holden told me where he was.

I'd put on a cute pair of shorts, a flowy shirt, and my cowboy boots for the night. I even put my hair in braided pigtails because I know it drives him crazy. My thought was to dance with him for a few minutes, and then come clean about being in the boat all day with Russ.

Except for him admitting he wanted to kiss me, the day with Russ was fine. He didn't try anything, and when I explained again how this thing with Tristan wasn't a fling and I wanted to make it work, he backed down and agreed to being friends. We had a great rest of the day, and we learned a lot about each other. I'm hoping I can remain friends with him and figure we can stay in touch with social media.

It's almost completely dark when I make it back to the barn, and I run as fast as my sore, tired feet will take me so I can get back to the dance. I don't want anyone to come looking for me. The first person I see is Holden, and he looks pissed.

"What the fuck happened? Where's Tristan?" He grabs my upper arm when I try to ignore his questions and squeezes tighter. I wince but glare at him and yank my arm from his grasp.

"Don't know, don't care. We had a fight. He kissed his ex and I saw it. At least, he

admitted doing it.” I try to walk away, but he reaches out for me again.

“Hold on. What? He said he caught you kissing Russ.”

I snort. “No. He thought he saw me kissing Russ, but it was just on the cheek. Get out of my way, Holden,” I say through clenched teeth.

I lock eyes with Russ, and he notices my distress. He makes his way over to us as Tristan comes into view. I step away from him and take Russ’s hand, the two of us walking into the crowd of people dancing and laughing.

I explain why I don’t want to see Tristan, and every time Tristan tries to approach us, Russ shields me with his body and shakes his head in warning. I’m thankful I don’t have to do it. If I did, I’m sure I would buckle under the pressure and I just want to be mad for awhile. I’m hurt.

“I just want to talk to her for a few minutes,” Tristan says for the tenth time tonight. Russ looks at me, and I shake my head.

“Sorry, man, she doesn’t want to talk to you. Why don’t you give her some space?” I place my hand on Russ’s back as a way of saying thank you, and he pulls me onto the dance floor into the middle of the line dance. “You’re going to dance with me, and you’re going to have a good time.”

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We watch the couples around us and jump in somewhere in the middle. I miss a few of the steps and laugh when I try and almost fall over. I'm just not meant to be a dancer. Russ puts his hands on my hips as he kicks his leg out behind me, keeping up with everyone around us.

Even though I want to avoid him and I definitely don't want to talk to Tristan, my eyes seem to seek him out at every turn. It's like I'm being drawn to him, and no matter how hard I try, I can't stop. His eyes bore into mine every time I meet his gaze. It's like he's beckoning me to him, and my body wants to go. My heart, on the other hand, wants nothing to do with the cheater.

My smile is wide, clapping as the band finishes their song. "Russ, I'm a bit tired. Can we get a drink, maybe sit for a few?"

He takes my hand in his, but the band starts playing a slow song. "One more dance?" He pleads with his eyes and holds his hand up, his index finger raised up. "Please?"

I roll my eyes, but I can't help but smile and nod. He pulls me into his arms, and I lay my head on his shoulder. I close my eyes, not wanting to see how this is affecting Tristan. We move in a slow circle, listening to the twang of the guitar and the husky crooning of the lead singer.

"Mind if I cut in?" Tristan asks. I lift my head and lock eyes with him.

Russ looks to me, and I keep my eyes trained on Tristan. "Yes, I mind. I'm trying to enjoy my evening. Why don't you run along to Kasey? I'm sure she'd be happy to dance with you."

“Kasey left after we talked and cleared the air. Please, Lana. I’m asking for a chance to explain.”

The tears start to form again, and I look at the sky, trying to stop them. “I don’t want to talk to you. Please, leave me alone.” I grab Russ’s hand and lead him away. Holden walks up to Tristan and clasps his hand on his shoulder, stopping him from running after me.

“Russ, can you walk me back to my cabin?”

* * *

Friday. The last day I’m here. I wish it were Saturday already. I could be home and forget all of this happened. Russ walked me back to the cabin last night after I said I wasn’t feeling well, and Tristan wasn’t far behind. He must have hidden behind a tree or something because, once Russ left, he started calling for me. When I didn’t answer him, he resorted to sending me phone messages. Joke’s on him though. I blocked his ass after the first five came through.

I imagine this is what being hungover feels like. I’ve never tried alcohol, but my mouth feels like it’s full of cotton, my head is throbbing, and my eyelids feel heavy. The light rasp of knuckles on my door makes me groan, but I tell the person on the other side to come in.

“Hey, honey. You feeling okay? It’s ten. You’re not usually in bed this late.” Mom sits on the edge of my bed and puts her wrist to my forehead, feeling my temperature.

“I’ve been better.” I sit up and pull my knees to my chest. “Mom, have you ever had a broken heart?” I lay my cheek on my knee as I wait for her to respond.

“Oh, sweetie.” She wraps her arms around me and kisses the top of my head. “Yes.

And it's not fun. Want to tell me what happened?"

I give her the cliff notes version. She listens quietly as I tell her my story and how, in two weeks, I've fallen head over heels for this guy. When I finish and she hands me a tissue to wipe my tears, she kisses my cheek and tells me about her first heartbreak. She tells me about Ronnie, and from the far-off look in her eyes, I can tell that not all memories with him were that bad.

"Did you love him?" I ask when she finishes.

"Yes, very much, but we weren't meant to be together. We both had so much growing up we needed to do. I was lucky. I went to college and met your father. I've seen Ronnie a few times over the years. He has a lovely wife and two kids."

"Are you still mad at him?"

"For breaking my heart?" she asks, surprised. I nod, and her smile grows. "No. I had to experience heartache so I could know what true love was. You can't have all pleasure and no pain; it's not balanced."

I feel a little better after our talk, and I give her a hug and a kiss. She stops at the door and turns to look at me. "Give him a chance to explain. It might make you feel better."

"I'm not sure I'm ready to."

She shrugs. "Well, that's entirely up to you, but I can tell from watching the both of you that he's just as upset about this as you are. He really likes you, Lana." She says her piece and then she's gone, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

I'm not ready to see Tristan, but I think she's right. I leave tomorrow. The

opportunities to explain are running out, and I don't want to leave wondering what if. I get dressed and head out for the house. I see Liz putting food away, and she gives me a warm smile when she sees me.

“Good morning, Lana. I'm putting breakfast away. Do you want something to eat?”

I'm not hungry, but I know I should eat something. I take a banana out of a bowl and split the peel open. “Is Tristan around?”

“No, he took off riding this morning.” Holden's voice comes from behind me, and I spin to face him.

“I'll leave you two to talk.” Liz gathers the rest of the stuff and leaves the two of us.

“Holden, where is he?” I don't bother to hide the pleading in my voice.

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“Like I said, he’s out riding. Wanted some time to clear his head, but he wanted me to give you a message.” He digs the folded, blue-lined sheet of paper out of his back pocket and hand the slightly crumpled page to me, our fingers brushing as I take it from him. “I was rooting for you two.” He walks away and is out of sight within moments.

I sit down at one of the picnic tables and open the letter. His handwriting is like chicken scratch, and I realize this is the first time I’m seeing it.

Lana,

Kasey asked to come by and speak with me, to clear the air. I didn’t want to see her, but I figured it was best for her to say whatever she had to and leave me alone. I forgave her for everything, and she was giving me a kiss goodbye. It was so normal to kiss her back, and I didn’t think twice about it, but I promise you there were no feelings involved.

Seeing your face after you saw our kiss will be burned in my mind for the rest of my life. The hurt... the betrayal. I know exactly how it feels because I felt the same when I thought I saw you kissing Russ.

It’s been made clear to stay away from you, and I promise I will. I wish you the best of luck in your future. You’re amazing, smart, and beautiful. You’re going to do just fine without me. I hope you get everything you want out of life, and over all, I wish you happiness.

I’m sorry I can’t keep my promise to you. You deserve better.

XX

Tristan

I crumple the paper in my hands and run as fast as my legs will take me in Holden's direction. He walked in the direction of the barn and I figure that's my best bet. I stop outside the doors, sucking in air, trying to slow my heart beat.

I walk through the entrance, but no one is there. Gage is gone, but so is Duke. Holden must have saddled him before he found me, so he could get out of sight quickly. Well, I'm not going to give up so easily. No one is around, and I don't dare hop on Clementine after the fiasco last night, so I take to jogging to the open field.

Twenty minutes later, I'm huffing and puffing, but I come to the open clearing and look around. The field is empty. No sign of Tristan, Holden, or the horses. I sit my ass in the dirt and pull the letter out to read again. I try to mask the uncontrollable sobs from bubbling out, but it's no use. I wail like I'm in physical pain, suffering turmoil at the loss of something that was doomed from the start.

I lay on my side, the water from my eyes hitting the soft earth beneath my face. I pull my legs up to my chest and let everything out—the fear, the hurt, the anger. I'm not sure how long I lay there, but at some point, I must have fallen asleep because the sun is dipping low in the sky.

"Lana!" Someone yells my name. I ignore it. I don't want to be bothered. I close my eyes again, hoping to return to the sweet dreams I was having of Tristan.

"Lana! Jesus!" It's Holden. He blocks the sun from my eyes as he dips down and picks me up bridal style. "Are you hurt?"

I rest my head on his chest but don't say anything. The note from Tristan slips from

my dirty fingers, and I let it go. Just like our relationship.

“Lana, talk to me!” he demands.

“He doesn’t want me,” I mumble, and the tears start again. I heave in deep breaths as I bury my face in Holden’s chest.

“That’s not true.” He puts me on my feet to open the truck door and then scoops me up to put me on the seat. If it’s not true, how come he’s not the one here saving me?

I don’t have the energy to fight. I want to shower, pack my shit, and get the hell away from this place. I’m never coming back here—ever.

Tristan Ellis is dead to me. I never want to see him again.

Epilogue

Tristan

Holden drives up in the truck and parks it in front of the house. I look down from my bedroom window, and relief washes over me when I see Lana push open the door and slide out of her seat. Her parents run up to her and envelop her in a tight hug. They’ve been worried sick about her. I’ve been worried sick about her. Holden glances up at my window, and I back away, not wanting her to see me.

In a few more hours, she’ll be gone, and we’ll never have to see each other again. It’s what’s best for the both of us. It never would have worked out anyway. Chasing after her last night was a mistake. She wouldn’t even give me the time of day to explain. I sat there like an idiot until her parents came by the cabin a few hours later. I held my phone tightly in my hands, praying for her to respond to my messages.

Her mom gave me a sympathetic look and told me to give her some time.

I don't have time. That's the problem. I knew that was it. My chance was over.

I watch as Lana walks back to her cabin, out of sight, her parents flanking her sides. The screen door to the house slams shut. Heavy footsteps land on the stairs, and Holden barges into my room. I don't have the energy to deal with him—with this.

“Found her in the field, clutching your fucking letter,” he seethes. There are very few times in my years of friendship with Holden that he's ever been mad at me. This is definitely one of those times.

I keep my eyes to the ground, staring at my feet. “I thought she might be there. She likes that spot. That's where she rode last night. I'm glad she didn't take a horse, though, because I don't want her getting hurt. Last night was close enough.” My voice is distant. Almost like I'm talking outside myself.

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Holden takes a seat on the edge of my bed and puts his face in his hands. Rubbing them over it, he sighs and looks at me again. “What was in the letter, Tristan?”

“I told her goodbye. She deserves to be happy, and I’m not that person.” I look out the window to see Russ looking up at me, a scowl on his face. Yeah, I’m pissed at me, too, buddy. I never thought she would run like that—looking for me. I figured she would go back to her cabin and spend the day there. Maybe try to send me some messages that I would then have to ignore.

“You’re like a brother to me, and I’ll support you, but fuck, man. That’s messed up. At least have the balls to tell her to her face.”

I turn away from the window and take a seat on the beanbag in the corner of my room. I tilt my head back and stare at the ceiling. “I can’t. I was told to stay away from her last night.”

“Since when do you listen when someone tell you to do something you don’t want to do?” Holden walks over to me and kicks my leg with his foot, trying to get me to look at him.

“Since this is something that’s going to be best for her. She needs to forget about me and move on with her life. Mine is here, and hers is back in Connecticut.”

I grab my phone and pull up the messages from her. I want to tell her what a fuck up I am, but I can’t. Not unless I want her parents—and mine—to find out that I took the last thing that made Lana innocent.

Her virginity.