



*A Cowboy's
Easter*



SIERRA GAMBLE


A SMALL TOWN EASTER ROMANCE

A COWBOY'S EASTER

SIERRA GAMBLE

Copyright 2023 by Sierra Gamble
Cover Artist: Angela Horning-Archer
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

 Created with Vellum

To Pop-Pop

CONTENTS

[Get Free Books](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Other Books By Sierra Gamble](#)

[About Sierra Gamble](#)

GET FREE BOOKS

Join Sierra's [newsletter](#) to stay updated with new books, get access to exclusive bonus content, giveaways, and more!

[Join Sierra's newsletter here.](#)

[Tap here to see all of Sierra's books.](#)

CHAPTER ONE

Some people knew from a very young age what they wanted to do with their life.

That had been the case with Roy Griffin.

Honestly, that had been the case for his brothers too—Jack, Parker, and Ronald.

Working at Hidden Creek Orchard was perfect for the four of them. For the most part, the brothers got along well, and they worked with three other brothers—the Spanglers. Colton Spangler was the new owner, and then there was Lawrence and Myles.

And yet, for whatever reason, while he knew this was his team job, he also couldn't help the feeling that something was missing.

Or maybe he needed something more.

Roy whistled to himself as he drove to the orchard that early morning. It was dark this morning, darker than normal for early spring.

As soon as he parked, the first fat raindrops descended, pounding on his windshield. He reached over in his truck to grab his umbrella and tried to open his truck door. The wind was so fierce that he had to really shove to open the door, and as soon as he opened his umbrella, it flipped inside out. As he struggled to try to salvage it, the wind and the rain beat at him.

A bolt of lightning flashed in the sky, followed by an immense thunderclap. He could see the trees bending and

swaying with the wind, and he knew that this storm was not going to be good for them. He had to get inside and help his brothers—it wouldn't do any good to be standing out in a storm like this!

He began running toward the orchard, but as he did, a loud clap of thunder sounded and the heavens opened up. Rain pelted him in sheets as he ran, and soon he was drenched. He got to the nearest building, Colton's office, just in time to see a white-hot flash of lightning illuminate the sky.

The storm was unrelenting, bringing hail with it that pelted the trees viciously. Roy heard branches breaking and cracking with each gust of wind and lightning strike.

Considering that no one else was in the office with him, Roy tried to call his brothers and the Spanglers, but the his calls kept calling, and none of his texts went through. Colton normally was the first one here every morning, so that he wasn't here already was a bit of a surprise. Then again, Roy had woken earlier today because of a dream he couldn't remember, so he had figured he would head to work early.

As more time passed and the storm didn't relent, Roy began to grow more and more worried. Colton had to be here somewhere, and Roy risked going back out into the storm. He quickly ran towards the barn on the far side of the orchard, figuring that might be where Colton had gone. Even if Colton wasn't there, Roy figured he should at least keep an eye out for the farm animals to see how they were faring.

The storm began to rage in full force now, and it didn't look like it was going to let up anytime soon. The powerful winds howled as it ripped through the trees, uprooting many of them with enormous crashes while others were bent over so far they looked like they had been snapped in half. Branches were shredded from other trees that looked like they were barely able to remain rooted to the ground.

As he neared the barn, he could see a few individuals inside. Colton and Lawrence. The brothers looked worried as they rolled out tarps and blankets. They were talking to each other, their voices barely audible over the loud crashing of

thunder. The two men looked up as Roy came in, obviously relieved to see him.

“Thank goodness you’re here!” Colton said. “We need all hands on deck if we’re gonna make it through this one!”

“What do you need me to do?” Roy asked.

“We need to move quickly and efficiently to protect the orchard, its crops, and the animals. If we can... It won’t be easy with that wind, but we need to cover vulnerable trees with tarps and blankets. If we set up support columns for the ones that are leaning, we might be able to prevent any more from being uprooted entirely. We also need rope, lots of it, so we can tie down anything that could be blown away by the wind, but before all of that, we need to start moving the animals into sheltered areas.”

“Are my brothers here, do you know?” Roy asked.

“I think it’s just the three of us,” Lawrence said. “I hope the others aren’t on the road, that they’re not trying to reach the orchard.”

“I can’t imagine driving in all of this,” Roy murmured.

He quickly sent up a pray that anyone on the roads was safe. While he knew this kind of storm wouldn’t last forever, it would still take a lot of hard work to ensure that the orchard survived this one intact, and he prayed for the safety of the cowboys already here too.

Roy nodded in agreement as Colton outlined their plan of action. They would also need to find ways to reduce water runoff, so that when the storm finally passed, there wouldn’t be too much erosion and runoff entering the river. Additionally, they needed to be prepared for flooding in case that happened as well.

“If you two can tackle the tree and the crops, I’ll make sure the farm animals are all safe,” Roy offered.

“Thanks,” Colton said gratefully.

Roy nodded to them both and quickly ran around the barn, gathering some hay bales and a few extra tarps for makeshift

shelters for the animals. Then, he rounded up some of the cows and horses, leading them out of their pens into more secure areas.

It took time, and the animals were scared, but he managed to secure all of the animals into small stalls or shelters. Even though his brothers weren't present, he felt a sense of unity by working together with Lawrence and Colton. Despite the unpredictability of the weather, there was something reassuring about being surrounded by people who were willing to work together in order to protect what they valued most—their land and livestock. As they continued their efforts, Roy vowed to do whatever necessary to protect their livelihoods in these trying times.

By now, the rain was so heavy that it seemed like one giant blanket draped over everything in sight, obscuring any view beyond a few feet away. Trying to fight against the storm was starting to feel like a futile effort despite their best efforts, so the three cowboys huddled together inside the barn and waited for it to pass. Unfortunately, it took several more hours for the storm to abate.

The three of them left the shelter the barn afford and walked around the orchard to see what damage had been done. The trunks of the trees they'd worked so hard to protect were warped and bent in unnatural ways. Fences had been blown down, leaving gaping holes where livestock could escape. Broken buildings slumped in the mud, and chunks of wood littered the ground as if a giant monster had come through to wreak havoc. In short, the orchard was in ruins. The terrible storm had devastated the orchard.

The orchard seemed unrecognizable from what it had been just yesterday. All that remained were drenched and ruined crops and uprooted trees, the soil churned up and muddy. They found broken buildings, destroyed fences, and more. What once seemed so peaceful had been transformed into a scene of destruction. Roy stopped for a moment to take it all in and wished that he could have done more to prevent this from happening.

But Roy knew that no matter how hard they tried, nature had its own way of taking its course. He looked back at his two companions who were surveying the damage as well with a mix of admiration and fear. Though the storm had caused considerable destruction, these three cowboys still stood strong, determined to move forward and rebuild what was lost.

“We will get through this,” Lawrence told his brother, clasping his hand onto Colton’s shoulder.

The owner nodded, but he appeared so lost that Roy’s heart skipped a beat.

“Let’s worry about the animals first,” Roy murmured.

“The buildings... the roofs, the windows... I...” Colton ran a hand down his face.

“Roy’s right,” Lawrence said. “The animals first.”

The trio made sure that all of the animals were tended to before allowing them back into their pens, making sure none were injured from the storm. They removed any debris from pathways so animals wouldn’t trip. They had just secured away the pigs when the rest of the cowboys all raced up to them.

“This... Wow,” Myles murmured.

“I’ve never seen a storm cause so much damage,” Ronald said.

“How were the roads?” Lawrence asked.

“A lot of downed trees,” Jack said.

Parker nodded. “We had to take so many detours to get here. I’m sorry we weren’t here earlier.”

“It is what it is,” Colton said wearily. “We didn’t lose any of the animals, so there’s that, but the amount of work to be done... It’ll take weeks to handle it all. Longer. Months maybe.”

“It’ll be done by Easter,” Roy cut in.

They all stared at him.

“Easter’s only six weeks away,” Colton said. “I know there are seven of us, but—”

“No buts,” Roy insisted, “and none of you have to deal with the construction issues.”

Colton furrowed his brow. His jaw dropped, but before he could say anything, Roy held up a hand.

“If the lot of you handle the ground, the soil, the plants and crops... I can tackle the construction.”

“By yourself?” Ronald wrinkled his nose. “Are you sure your eyes aren’t bigger than your stomach?”

Roy laughed. Their mom would say that all the time to them.

“I know what I can handle,” Roy said confidently.

Hadn’t he just been thinking to himself that he needed something more? Maybe this was it. Maybe as the second oldest cowboy and the oldest of the Griffins, Roy felt the need to prove himself. What better way could he do that than to help with this? He had always been a handyman of sorts when it came to the fences, and he could help with shingles and the rest. It wasn’t as if he had a girlfriend or wife and kids. If it required more hours than normal, he was willing to do whatever he had to.

“If you’re sure...” Colton said slowly.

“I’m positive,” Roy said.

“Uh oh,” Parker teased. “I see that look in his eye. Just let him do it. He won’t take no for an answer, and if he wants to handle it, why not? There’s more than enough work elsewhere.”

“Yes, but...” Colton gave Roy a look.

Roy beamed. “I mean it. Let me do this.”

“All right,” Colton said, clapping his back. “If you need any help at all, you let us know. Don’t be afraid to ask, you hear?”

“I hear,” Roy said. “We have a lot of work ahead of ourselves, so how about we all get to it?”

Jack laughed. “Acting like you’re the one in charge, aren’t you, Roy?”

Roy flushed, embarrassed. “Not at all,” he protested.

“Nah, he’s just actin like an annoying big brother telling everyone what to do,” Ronald, the youngest Griffin, joked.

“I know all about that,” Myles, the youngest Spangler, chimed in, and they all managed to laugh despite everything that had transpired that day.

CHAPTER TWO

For years and years, Beverly Young had worked with her father at his construction business, Nails R Us. She knew it wasn't a profession many girls enjoyed, but for her, it was perfect. Her mom worked as a traveling nurse, so at times, she would be gone from home for weeks or even months. Beverly and her father had become so very close because of this.

During the summers, she would tag along with her father when he would work instead of hanging out with friends. She had been using a hammer from a very young age. If her mom ever learned how young, it would not have been good, but Beverly loved that her father let her help, even if only with teeny tiny jobs at first.

For the past three years, she had been his partner.

And then, three weeks ago, he had died suddenly. He had a massive heart attack on the ride home from seeing a friend. Thankfully, he must have realized something was wrong because he had pulled over, so no one else had been hurt, and there hadn't been a crash.

But losing her father... Beverly had taken off the past two weeks off to try to deal with her grief. All last week, she had finished up the last two jobs they had on their docket.

And now, this morning, the day after that terrible freak storm, she had a meeting to try to land what could be a large enough job to cover her expenses for three months.

Beverly rose early as the sun slowly crept up over the horizon. She took a moment to compose herself, taking a few

deep breaths and running her fingers through her hair. She was nervous about facing this client, a man she had never met before. Her father's business thrived on word of mouth, and most of their clients hired them for repeat jobs, but this potential client had called after hearing one of their ads on the radio. If she wanted to keep Nails R Us going, she had to prove that she could handle any job thrown at her.

Beverly took a quick shower and debated what to wear. In the end, changed into an outfit that would make both her father proud but also be business appropriate—dark blue jeans, a crisp white blouse, and a gray blazer with silver buttons down the front. She finished off the look with black boots and simple jewelry.

Normally, she dressed in a navy blue skirt suit for business meetings with her father, but she could hardly bring herself to even look at that outfit right now. Her fingers did brush against the material, though, and a wave of sadness washed over her. How many meetings had she worn that suit to with her father?

Back in the bathroom again, she took a deep breath as she looked in the mirror, her green eyes still puffy from lack of sleep and grief. Taking a few more moments to compose herself, she then carefully applied her makeup, making sure not to apply too much since this meeting was strictly professional. Puffy eyes would hardly make a good first impression.

Her father had taught her to always come prepared for business, so she grabbed her portfolio from on top of her dresser before heading to the kitchen for breakfast. Her stomach was too tight for anything more than coffee and toast, but still, it was something.

As soon as she finished eating, she grabbed her keys and headed out the door.

The sky was an angry gray that matched how she felt inside, but she pushed forward. As Beverly walked down the street to her car, the wind picked up and blew strands of her strawberry blond hair across her face. She picked up her pace,

hurried inside her car, and programmed the address into her GPS.

As soon as Beverly arrived at the meeting site, she could already feel tension in the air from all who were gathered there. She shook hands with those around her and nodded politely while studying each person. They all seemed to work for the company, and none of them knew she would be coming.

Confused, she asked to be brought to the boss. An older gentleman strolled forward. He gave her a kind smile.

“Hello, I am Mr. Davis,” he said. “I’m the owner of the property. You are...”

“I’m Beverly Young.”

“Ah, yes. Nails R Us, is that right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. I spoke with a...”

“Brandon,” she supplied.

“Yes, a Brandon Young. Where is? I hoped to meet the one who would be doing the construction work, not his secretary. Why are you here?”

She blinked a few times. “Ah, sir, I’m afraid to say...”

“He’s too busy to come in, hmm? Well, that isn’t a good sign. I can’t abide people who can’t be bothered meet their employers.” He tsked with his tongue.

“Actually, Mr. Davis, I regret to inform you that my father has passed away. That said, Nails R Us remains in full operation, and I can assure you that I will be able to handle the construction of this magnitude.”

“You. You alone? Or do you mean you and your team?”

“I, ah, do have a small team,” she said.

A bit of a stretch. There had been, over the years, some high school boys who would help with manual labor at times, but there wasn’t anyone strictly on the books as a formal team.

“Who is in charge?”

“The business is now mine,” Beverly said, lifting her chin.

He grunted.

“If you would be willing to give me a tour of what needs to be done,” she said, “I would love to hear it. I have my father’s notes from when he spoke with you, but—”

Mr. Davis cut her off with a wave of his hand. “I’m sorry, Miss Young, but I’m afraid this is not the right fit for us. What with your father just recently passing away and all, it would be too much of a strain for a young girl like you to deal with such a large-scale project, especially without an experienced team to back you up.” He gave her an apologetic smile before he turned to walk away, leaving Beverly stunned in the middle of the room as she watched him go.

Beverly’s heart sank. She had hoped that she could prove herself capable of handling the project, despite being new to handling the entire business all by herself, but instead it seemed she was doomed from the start before she even stepped foot in the door.

Truly, she had been so sure that she could prove herself and show just how capable she was of managing things, but it seemed like Mr. Davis wouldn’t even give her a chance.

She nodded in understanding. “Very well. Have a good day, Mr. Davis,” she said.

Beverly turned around and left the building as quickly as possible with what little pride she had left intact.

She shut her car door and let out a scream of frustration that did little to make her feel any better.

Naturally, she had turned her phone on silent before she had entered the building for the meeting. She grabbed it and spied two missed calls. Neither had left voicemails.

Beverly called the first number. “Hello, this is Beverly Young of Nails R Us. This number called me earlier?”

“Oh, hi, yes. I’m trying to reach Brandon Young.”

Beverly squeezed her eyes shut. Maybe she should make some kind of announcement, but she didn't know if she could handle that emotionally.

"I'm afraid Brandon Young has passed away," she murmured, "but I am his daughter, Beverly, and I can assure you that Nails R Us is still in operation for all of your construction needs. What precisely do you need?"

"This is Gus Grantler."

She sucked in a breath. Her father had worked for Gus before, back when Beverly had been in high school. It had been a job during the school year, so Beverly hadn't been able to help very much.

"Sir, let me assure you that I—"

"Your father must have passed recently."

She winced. "Yes, Sir. A few weeks ago."

"I'm sorry for your loss, but I cannot hire you for this project."

She blinked solemnly and held as still as a statue.

"Your father was very highly respected in this community, and I hate to say no to his daughter, but I have to be sure that whoever is doing this job can get it done right without any issues or delays. Maybe come back when you're a bit more established."

"Mr. Grantler, perhaps you don't realize this, but I have been an equal partner with my father in this business for years. I am more than capable of handling any job without issue or delay."

"The scope of this job requires more than one person."

"I can find others—"

"I would rather not high schoolers," he said not unkindly. "I understand that is how you started, and I know that Brandon liked to give kids a chance, but I need someone with more experience and a larger team behind them."

“I see,” she said quietly. “I am sorry for wasting your time.”

“You didn’t. I truly am sorry for your loss.”

Beverly nodded even though he couldn’t see her and hung up. At this point, she didn’t even know if she should bother to return the other phone call, but she did with the hope that she wouldn’t be a glutton for punishment.

The other caller was a businessman who, after learning Beverly’s father had passed away, began to ask her all sorts of questions from the nature of her business to what kind of knowledge she had about the construction industry. She answered them all honestly and concisely, some of the answers very similar to what she had overheard her father say to other potential clients, but she could tell he was skeptical and unimpressed with her answers.

In the back of her mind, she couldn’t stop herself from wondering if the gentleman would think differently if she were a man giving these answers.

Finally, after an eternity of uncomfortable silence on the other end of the line, he spoke again. “Look,” he said gruffly, “I’m not one to hire a woman for this job. I’m sure your father was capable and competent, but his death leaves me in a difficult position.” He sighed heavily. “I wish you luck finding someone else who’ll hire you.”

Beverly thanked him halfheartedly before ending the call and slumping against the car seat in defeat. No matter how hard she tried or how much she believed in herself, it seemed that people still refused to take her seriously as a businesswoman of a construction enterprise.

Her head spun. Three potential jobs. Not a single job offer. She sat there, stunned. She knew her father had created a great legacy with his business, but it seemed like it would come to an abrupt stop due to his sudden passing. His death was a reminder of how fragile life could be and how easily opportunities can be taken away from you in an instant, and that was a difficult lesson for Beverly to digest.

She sighed and shut off her phone, feeling completely deflated. Everything she had worked so hard... it felt like it was all gone in an instant. She knew that she needed to find some way to prove herself and continue her father's legacy, but with Mr. Davis's and Mr. Grantler's refusals and now this businessman's as well, it seemed unlikely that anyone else would take a chance on her either. For whatever reason, it seemed that many people were still skeptical of women stepping into positions traditionally filled by men and saw them as weak or unintelligent when compared to their male counterparts.

Beverly knew that she could be successful despite these preconceived notions.

But only if someone were to give her a chance.

The business had flourished under her father. No matter what, she would not let it go under.

CHAPTER THREE

It didn't take Roy long at all to realize that he was in over his head. Many roofs needed to be repaired, but the storm had left everything drenched, and he didn't feel confident stepping on the roofs for fear of falling. All he could do was to put up tarps to keep the interior dry.

Perhaps it would be best for him to take a more systematic and organized approach. He decided to begin assessing the damage to the farm buildings and making a list of needed repairs.

The hay barn had taken a hit, part of its roof caved in, and it would need an entire reconstruction. A few planks from the nearby fences were scattered around. The chicken coop had fared better, but he'd have to replace some parts that were blown away by the wind. Then, there were all the windows. Some were smashed, and others were just broken. They needed to be replaced so that no wild animals could get into the premises.

Roy sighed as he surveyed the destruction around him. He knew it was going to take a long time for them to fix everything. But fix it they will, he told himself sternly. Before Easter came rolling in, this farm would be back on its feet again. Colton had already made some major changes to the orchard in the few months he had been the owner, and they wanted to open it up to more people to come and see. Plus, he had wanted Susan, his girlfriend, to start a flower garden here. It was just as well that Susan hadn't started that yet, though.

But this was a daunting task for Roy, and maybe he had bitten off more than he could chew. It was very daunting to realize that every barn, shed and outbuilding had been damaged in some way. It would require hours of work to make sure that each opening was secure and weatherproof.

Roy assessed the damage with a critical eye, making lists of what needed to be done and coming up with creative solutions for things like replacing missing shingles or fixing broken windows. He tried his best to salvage whatever materials were left so that he could still use them in some form or fashion. He scavenged from the surrounding area—an old piece of wood here, an extra windowpane there—anything he could find to help him patch together whatever was left standing after the storm.

Then, he set about making a list of all the necessary repairs and went building by building evaluating what needed to be done before he could start on anything else. For every new roof that needed replacing or shingles that had to be replaced, Roy meticulously made notes in his book so he wouldn't forget any details when he eventually started work.

He spent hours assessing each structure from top to bottom, noting down everything from the type of wood used in the walls, ceilings and floors to which sections needed to be replaced versus what could be salvaged.

But what was most worrisome to Roy was the fact that the wind of the storm had been powerful enough to uproot so many old, strong, deeply rooted trees. How was he supposed to know if any of the foundations of the buildings had been compromised?

Rubbing his temple, wishing he didn't have a headache, he headed over to the shed where they kept their tools. Even that was in terrible shape. Honestly, It looked like he could push it over with his finger.

At least the tools were all in waterproof cases, so they had been protected.

While they had a decent amount of tools and supplies in the shed, there wasn't nearly enough for the amount of work

this job was going to require. He needed more tools and materials to properly repair the damage done by the storm, and it would be costly, too. Thankfully, Colton had saved some money for such a situation, so with Colton's approval, Roy decided to invest in some new tools and materials to help with the repairs. Roy could now purchase whatever was necessary for the job, from hammers and nails to saws and screws. He also bought some news tarps which would be useful in keeping the interior of each building dry while they worked on it. A lot of the tarps used during the storm had been ruined or ripped.

He took a deep breath as he surveyed everything around him. One thing was certain. This project was going to take a lot of time and effort, but Roy was determined that by Easter, this place would be restored to its former glory.

Somehow, the day got away from him, just by making notes of what needed to be done and the shopping. He hadn't done much aside from laying out the tarp where needed. If his self-imposed deadline was going to be met, he was going to have to work hard and long hours.

He was debating staying later that night to keep working when Parker approached.

"You didn't forget, did you?" his brother asked.

Roy sighed and rubbed his head. His headache had gone away with medicine, but it was starting to come back. Maybe it was from stress.

"What might I have forgotten?" Roy asked.

"Dinner with Mom tonight."

"That's right," Roy said.

Their father had to go away for a business trip this week, so their mom thought it would be nice to have her boys all home again for a meal.

Just then, Ronald and Jack came over, and the four of them decided to all fit into Ronald's car so they didn't all have to drive over and waste gas.

Roy's brothers talked about their chores and the animals and how some of them were still clearly scared yet from the storm, but Roy didn't say much of anything. He hugged his mom once they arrived, and she bid them to sit at the table.

"It's so nice to have you home again," she said warmly.

Ronald laughed. "As if you and Dad don't have us over once a month every month."

"At least," Parker added.

"That storm... It was a doozy, wasn't it?" their mom asked.

"It sure was," Jack said. "It did a real number on the orchard. Just ask Roy."

"Ask Roy?" His mom looked at him. "Why should I ask you about the damage to the orchard?"

"You eldest son decided he can fix up all of the damaged buildings himself," Parker explained before Roy could say anything.

"Is this true?" his mom asked.

Roy nodded.

"Well, I'm sure you can use some help," she said. "Your brothers could spare some time from their chores to assist you."

Roy shook his head. He knew his brothers were all busy with their own responsibilities and he didn't want to add any extra burden on them.

"No, it's all right," he said firmly. "I can handle this myself. It'll be better if I can do most of the work by myself."

His mom smiled, but he could tell she wasn't quite convinced. Still, she turned her attention to Jack, who was talking about a puppy he was thinking about rescuing.

"We have offered to help," Parker said, "but he's determined to take this on for himself."

“Makes me wonder who he’s trying to impress,” Ronald added.

“No one,” Roy said with a laugh. “Just know that I got this.”

“If you say so,” Parker said.

Roy smiled, knowing he had the support of his brothers even if they didn’t agree with his decision. “I know what I’m doing,” he reassured them all. “I can handle it, and I’ll get it done fast.”

“Just don’t overwork yourself,” his mom said, “and a puppy is a lot of work, Jack. You might want to start with a slightly older dog who is already trained. You will be away at the orchard for long hours every day after all.”

“That’s true,” Jack mused.

As dinner progressed, they talked more about the orchard and how they could all chip in to help out where needed. Roy thanked them for their offers of help but insisted that this project was something he wanted to do himself and that he could manage it without any outside assistance, no matter how much his brothers wanted to lend a hand. He knew they would have helped if asked, but he needed to prove to himself that he could do this alone.

Once they finished eating, Roy helped to load the dishes. His mom approached and rubbed his back.

“What’s going on?” she murmured. “Why aren’t you willing to let your brothers help you?”

Roy sighed and looked up at her. “I need to prove to myself that I can do this, Mom,” he said softly. “It’s not about anyone else. It’s something I need to do for me.”

His mom hugged him tightly and held him for a moment before pulling away.

“I know you can do this,” she said encouragingly, “but don’t forget that you don’t have to do everything alone, Roy. You will always have us here if you ever need help or support. I’ll pray for you.”

“Thank you.” Roy smiled, feeling a warmth in his heart from his mother’s words of encouragement and reassurance.

“Your brothers might be busy, but they’re never too busy for you. It sounds like a big project.”

“It is, and it’s up to me to make sure it gets done right and on time. I asked for his, and I won’t let anyone down.”

“It’s okay,” she said softly. “No matter how much you try to handle by yourself, you can never do it all alone. I’m not saying you won’t be able to do this alone, but your brothers do love helping out at the orchard as much as you do.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Just promise me that if you can’t handle it, you’ll ask for help, whether your brothers or someone else, okay?”

“I will,” he promised.

He hugged her and finished loading up the dishes with her help. Then, he and his brothers left to return to the orchards to get into their trucks and go their separate ways.

Roy knew that no matter what happened, he could trust in the knowledge that he wasn’t alone, even if it felt like it sometimes, and that he had people who were willing to help if he ever could bring himself to ask. Maybe it was because he was the oldest of four brothers, but Roy had always felt the need and drive to be the best, to do the most, and all of that.

But this was so important to not only Roy but everyone at the orchard, and Roy couldn’t stop thinking about the toolshed. It clearly needed to be torn down and rebuilt. The other buildings should all be checked to make sure they were structurally sound, and if they weren’t...

The project was bigger than Roy initially thought, but he still didn’t want to ask his brothers for help.

Maybe he should, though. Pride came before a fall, right?

Maybe there was another way, one where he wouldn’t impose on his brothers but still get the work done before Easter. Hiring someone to take a walk through the orchard

shouldn't be too much, and then he could decide from there what would be the best course of action.

Yes, that might be the best way to go about things.

That night, Roy slept soundly, and when he woke, he had a smile on his face. Somehow, he just knew that everything was going to be just perfect, and he had God to thank for that. God was already giving him peace of mind, and that alone was an answer to Roy's prayers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Beverly eyed her phone. Her mom's name lit up the screen, and Beverly sighed, blasted a fake smile on her face, and answered the call.

"Hi, Mom."

"Hi, honey. I'll be home soon."

Home. Shooting Star Canyon. Beverly used to love living here, but she had never realized just how lonesome it could be. Her mom would return to the canyon as much as she could, but the life of a traveling nurse isn't an easy one. It was some of the reason why Beverly had clung to her father so much.

Her mom had been able to come home for an entire week after her husband passed, and she had taken the reins as far as all of the funeral arrangements. Beverly had wanted to give the eulogy, but she hadn't been able to. She had cried so many tears, and she still missed her father. She always would, but now, she realized she missed her mom in a way she hadn't ever before.

Naturally, each time her mom would visit and then leave again, it hurt. Beverly had understood, but now... now Beverly found herself wishing her mom would just work at the hospital here in the canyon.

Not that she would mention that to her mom. Her mom loved her job. Why would Beverly take that away from her? Besides, Beverly was twenty-four. She wasn't a teenager. She could get by.

"Home again?" Beverly asked.

“Yes.”

“For how long?” Beverly turned her heart to stone. She wasn’t about to get her hopes up.

“I had to finish the last two weeks at the job in Maine, but now... I thought I would just come home for a while. I... There’s money from the life insurance, and... I...”

Beverly blinked back tears. She knew that her parents had made the distance work. They would FaceTime every chance they could, and sometimes, after they completed a job, especially the bigger ones, her father would fly out and spend a day or two with his wife before coming home. Once, he even flew out just so he could fly back with his wife. Beverly didn’t think she could ever deal with a relationship like that, but they had made it work, and no one could ever question how much they loved one another.

So as much as she was grieving, she knew that her mom was too.

“That would be great, Mom,” Beverly murmured. “I would love that.”

“Good. I... I know we haven’t... We aren’t as close as you and your father, but... I love you. I’ve always loved you, and I will be there for you.”

“I know, Mom.”

“So... tell me about Nails R Us. Have you started that up again or...”

Beverly sighed heavily. She didn’t want to admit that things were going poorly, but there was no point in hiding the truth.

“No, not really. Business has been slow. I’ve been trying to get it back on track, but... while I’ve had some inquiries, no one is interested in taking a chance on me. It’s like they think I won’t be able to handle the business the way my father did.”

“Oh, honey...”

Beverly started to bite her lip before she forced her hand away from her face. She couldn’t let herself start to cry right

now. Not now.

Beverly could almost hear her mom frowning. “I know your father, and he would have believed in you. You need to have faith. You can make a success of it. He knows it, and I do too. You just need to believe in yourself.”

“I know,” Beverly replied, and she smiled slightly. Her father had always trusted her, and now she was going to make sure he was proud of her.

“We’ll brainstorm some ideas together,” her mom said with a determined air. “Something will come up that will get Nails R Us back on track.”

Beverly agreed with a soft chuckle. Despite how down she felt about not getting any leads for the business, she appreciated that her mom was so willing to help out. She knew that between the two of them, they were sure to come up with something creative and successful.

“I know your father ran some ads. We could invest more money into advertising,” her mom said.

It warmed Beverly’s heart that her mom said “we.”

“I don’t know if any of my clients will need a new job anytime soon,” Beverly said slowly, “but I could let them all know that I’m adding a special discount for all loyal patrons.”

“That’s a great idea.”

“Father was never too big on having an website, so I just slapped something together so we would have at least a small online presence, but I could update that and maybe try some social media platforms too.”

“Yes, and when you call your previous clients, you could ask them for testimonials that you can quote on the website!”

“I love how enthusiastic you sound now,” her mom said.

“I feel a lot better.”

“Good! I’ll keep brainstorming ideas. I’ll be flying in tonight, around eight or so.”

“I’ll wait to eat dinner with you.”

“Are you sure?” her mom asked.

“Definitely.”

“Well, if I don’t sleep on the flight, I’ll try to come up with some more ideas,” her mom said. “I should probably finish packing up.”

“I can’t wait to see you,” Beverly said.

“Me too.”



Beverly and her father had a small office building downtown. For the most part, they didn’t do much at all there except to house their tools and the occasional meeting with potential clients. Typically, though, clients would rather Beverly and her father travel to them and their offices to be on site and see the project or at least the plans for it.

Maybe she could spruce up the office too. It would be nice to have some pictures that showed before and afters of their handiwork. That would look great on brochures too.

She powered up her laptop and tried to get started on some of the pictures, figuring she could also post them on the website. In no time at all, she was lost in her work, and she didn’t realize someone had entered her office until someone cleared their throat.

She jumped, her hand flying to her chest. “I’m so sorry, Sir,” she said. “I hadn’t realized anyone had come in.”

Beverly shut her laptop and stood from behind her desk. She held out her hand.

The man, tall and handsome with brown hair beneath his cowboy hat, smiled at her real wide. “Howdy, ma’am,” he said.

She returned his smile as they shook hands. His grip was firm, and she made sure that her grip was equally firm. Her father used to say you could learn a lot about a person based on their handshake.

“I’m Beverly Young,” she said, “co...” She briefly shut her eyes and then opened them, forcing her smile to widen. “I’m the owner of Nails R Us.”

“I assume you don’t have any openings in the next few days, do you?” he asked desperately. “Forgive me. I’m Roy Griffin. I work at Hidden Creek Orchard, and what with that storm we just had... I’m sure you’re inundated with work.”

“Actually, no, I’m not,” she said, trying hard to ignore the swell of hope welling within her chest. “I might have an opening. What precisely do you need?”

“At least for now... I’m just looking for a consult to see if the storm damaged any of the buildings structurally. From there... worst case scenario, I might need help with that. We can see how it goes.”

Beverly nodded. “I can do a consultation like that. Not a problem.”

She reached for her car keys next to her purse.

“You’re ready now?” Roy grinned at her.

“If that doesn’t work for you—”

“Trust me. That’s perfect,” he assured her. “Would you want me to drive us over? I don’t mind.”

“I don’t normally do that,” she said. “I can follow behind you.”

“Oh, sure. Of course. I didn’t mean to put you on the spot.”

Beverly laughed. “You’re fine,” she said.

Thankfully, Roy had turned to the door because her cheeks had to be pink. Roy was a very good-looking man. He really was fine, but she was going to be as professional as ever.

The best part? He hadn’t asked about her father.

But what would happen if the project was large enough for him to want to hire her? Would he be willing to let her help with it being just her? Or if she put out the word to high schoolers? He was clearly strong and capable, based on the

way his flannel shirt fit over his biceps. No doubt there were other strong cowboys who worked at the orchard. This might only be a consultation, but that would be better than nothing. That he hadn't batted an eye about her being the owner and a female was a blessing, especially after how those other men had treated her. That still smarted.

Beverly climbed into her car and nodded to Roy, who had started up his truck. He nodded to her and pulled out of the lot, her right behind him.

The orchard was only fifteen minutes away, and she marveled at the sight of the place. Sure, there was signs of the storm's damage everywhere, but she could see that the place was beautiful.

She parked next to Roy's truck. There were several other trucks and one car in the lot as well.

"If you will follow me," Roy said. "I'll walk you through the entire place, and you can make notes. There's one building, a shed for our tools, that I'm sure is kaput."

She laughed and then winced. "I'm sorry. My father used to say kaput all the time because it made me laugh since I was... I don't know. For forever."

He laughed too. "It is a fun word, even if it means more work for me."

Roy led her through the orchard, showing her the damage from the storm. Trees had been uprooted, and torn branches littered the ground. The shed where they kept their tools had been completely destroyed, its roofing ripped apart by strong winds. He pointed out a few other buildings that were damaged but still standing, and he showed her a barn that was still in good condition, and then the hay barn that needed an entirely new roof. Actually, on second thought, it would need a new reconstruction.

The two of them walked deeper into the orchard, stepping over broken twigs and leaves as they went. Roy explained how he and his team worked hard to keep Hidden Creek Orchard

running smoothly. Beverly marveled at how well-maintained the place was despite its current state of disarray.

The air smelled sweet with ripening fruit, and she found herself reaching toward a blackberry bush.

“They’ll be ready to be picked in April,” he said.

Above them, the sky was darkening again, but it wasn’t too bad. It looked like they would have plenty of time to tour the place before it rained again.

Roy showed her where other buildings had taken a hit from fallen branches or wind-blown debris and explained how he was going to need to do some major repair work soon if he wanted to keep his crops safe from any more damage. He pointed out broken gutters and shards of glass that were scattered about, which would all need cleaning up as soon as possible. Several other buildings had sustained damage to their roofs, walls, and windows. She pulled out her camera to capture images of each building before they continued on with their tour.

They made their way further into the orchard, Beverly stopping to marvel at the rows of apple trees stretching off into the distance as far as she could see. Roy explained how he and his team assess the damage done to each one; some were uprooted entirely, while others simply needed pruning back since they were still standing but damaged beyond repair. Every so often Roy would stop her to point out a particularly wonderful view of a meadow blanketed in wildflowers or a gorgeous pond surrounded by willow trees and framed by mountains in the background.

“So,” he said once she had seen it all. “What’s the verdict?”

“I’m afraid it’s not good,” she said.

Roy looked a bit disappointed, but he quickly put on a smile and said, “I knew it would be a lot of work, but structurally...”

“There are more buildings than just that one that has been damaged beyond an easy repair, I’m afraid.”

He sighed. “The ones with the cracks in the basement.”

“Yes. That’s never a good sign. Actually, some cracks are just because of settling and age. Settlement cracks tend to be vertical, and they’re easy enough to fix. Other cracks, though, the ones that are horizontal, those are the ones that are worrisome. They can be caused by poor soil or, in this case, water damage.”

“That makes sense.” He nodded. “Do you think you could handle the repairs to the ones that need to be broken down and started anew? I’m sure we can manage what you don’t think needs to be completely overhauled.”

She smiled back at him, feeling energized by his determination. “You want to hire me, just like that?”

“You seem to know what you’re talking about, and we can talk about the plans for restoring the orchard. Oh, and the price of the consultation.”

Beverly winced. “We can work that into the final bill,” she said sheepishly. “I sort of jumped the gun by not discussing the payment for it before we set out here.”

“No need to apologize! I was just so eager to get you out here.”

For a long while, they continued to talk about the orchard. She loved how much Roy paid attention to detail but also to what she had to say. She appreciated that so very much.

Once he drove her back to her office, she spent another few hours making lists of what she would need. Oh, and she didn’t know if they had a generator at the orchard, but given that storm, they might want to consider getting one. She hadn’t seen one during the tour.

Finally, she was nodding, her head almost dropping down. It had been a long time since she had almost fallen asleep at the desk. Not wanting to risk driving home when she was so tired, she pulled out the pillow and blanket from the back that her father had used a few times when he had been too tired. The blanket still smelled of him, but despite the sorrow the

scent brought, she fell sleep quickly, hopeful for what tomorrow might bring.

CHAPTER FIVE

The next morning, Roy couldn't get to the orchard fast enough. To his surprise, a car was already there, the same one he had seen outside of Nails R Us. He had been listening to the radio as he had worked yesterday, mainly picking up glass and clearing away debris from the storm, when he heard an advertising for the business that claimed to not say a job was finished until the client was one hundred and ten percent happy with the finished project from roof repairs to constructing new buildings to much, much more.

It sounded like an answer to his prayers, so shortly after he would have then his lunch break, he had looked up the company and met Beverly. He honestly didn't know how large her team was, but he almost hoped it was small.

Mostly because he hadn't told Colton about this expense.

Roy was possibly willing to even foot the bill. Honestly, he felt like he should. It had been his idea, and he had already hired her without talking to Colton first. Why should Colton be forced to pay the bill? Besides, all of this was on Roy because he had opened his big mouth in the first place.

If pressed, Roy wasn't entirely certain that he could explain why it was that he was willing to hire outside help instead of accepting the help of the other cowboys, but it felt different, hiring outside help. Having his brothers or the Spanglers help most felt like cheating, whereas hiring help was merely. way to ensure that the repairs were done properly and also that the work was done before Easter, as Roy had promised.

That Beverly was already here and working, clearly, since she isn't still in her car had Roy grinning. He had absolutely zero regrets about hiring her.

Roy got out of the truck. It didn't take him long to find Beverly. She was dressed in jeans and boots, a hard hat on her head. The belt around her waist had all kinds of tools on it, but she wasn't using any of them as she cared at the notebook in her hand.

Beverly glanced over as he approached, and she smiled.

Roy could've been knocked off by a leaf. She had a truly lovely smile He hadn't expected that from her.

Why not? She was a beautiful young woman, maybe a few years younger than his twenty-eight years.

But he had hired her, and she had been nothing but professional, and that was all their relationship was. This was business.

Roy walked up to Beverly and extended his hand. "I'm glad you made it," he said with a smile as they shook hands. "Let's talk about your plans. If you have any new ones, I mean. Your notebook made me wonder if you have something new to suggest. I could be wrong."

"You aren't wrong," she said. "I know you're working on a tight timeline, so I've already got some ideas for how we can prioritize the work so that you can get everything done in time for Easter." She opened her notebook, gesturing for him to take a look.

The notes were detailed and included timelines of when certain tasks should be completed if they wanted to meet their deadline. Roy was impressed with the level of detail and organization she had put into her plan.

He glanced up at her in surprise before asking, "Do you think all of this is possible?"

"I do," she replied confidently. "I just have to stay on top of things, and the hours will be long, but I'm willing to do the work. Don't you worry."

“And your... Do you plan on doing all of this alone?”

She nodded. “Unless you want me to ask... There are some high schoolers—”

“If you think you can do it yourself...” He laughed and shook his head. “That is not happening. “I know I hired you, but I don’t want you to do it all yourself. If we need help, then we can ask the high schoolers. I think it’s a great idea to use them. Have you done that before?”

“Oh, yes. It was my father’s idea, a way to give back to the community and teach them. We would pay them, of course, but I think the knowledge my father shared would have been worth it alone.”

“I love that, but seriously, let me help. I want to. I have to. And please, it’s not because you’re a woman. I don’t want you to think that because it’s not the case at all. It’s just that I can’t hire someone and then sit back and watch them do all the work while I work on my tan.”

Beverly laughed and pointed to his cowboy hat. “I don’t think you’re going to tan very much with that on your head.”

He laughed too and shrugged. “You don’t mind, do you? That I want to do the work with you? I told the others that I would do the work, but I needed your expert opinion on the work, and I’m so pleased with your knowledge.”

“That is completely fine, but...”

“But?” he repeated, lifting his eyebrows.

She ducked her head. “I don’t know what gave me the impression that the orchard is yours.”

“Oh, no. Colton Spangler is the owner.”

“And... does he know about me?”

“He will,” Roy said.

She winced. “I, ah, think he should know before I get started.”

“Yes, of course. You’re right. First, though, do you mind...”

He gestured to her notebook, and she handed it to him. Roy was thrilled she was willing to work with him on this project. Yesterday, she had already given him ideas on how they could get things done quickly without sacrificing quality, and she had come up with a few more after they had parted ways. Roy wasn't sure he would have come up with any of them himself.

He turned back to the timeline, since there seemed to be so much happening all at once, from clearing debris to replacing rotted wood, rebuilding fences, putting up new sections, as well as building an entirely new toolshed and the second barn.

“The other cowboys, I'll be able to introduce you to them at some point, will have already started to clear away more of the debris.”

“More?”

“Yes,” he said ruefully. “We've already cleared away a lot.”

She glanced around, and he sighed.

“I know it doesn't look like we have.”

“It's a tremendous undertaking you've taken on,” she remarked.

“And that's where you come in.” He grinned at her. “I'm off to tell Colton about the hire now. Might you come with me? I could make the first introduction.”

She hesitated. “I could get started already.”

“I insist.”

Beverly nodded slowly, but she did not look the happiest. “If you think there is any chance in which he will be displeased... I don't know if this best to tell him while I'm there.”

“Well, then, I'll tell him with you outside his office, and then I'll bring you in. How does that sound?”

She laughed. “Honestly? It sounds like you tend to get your way.”

“I am the oldest of four brothers, so, yes, I do like to give orders, I suppose.” He rubbed the back of his neck and laughed. “Do you have any siblings?”

“No. I’s just me and my mom.”

Roy’s expression altered some. “Your father... Did you speak about him in the past tense? I hadn’t realized at first.”

“It’s all right,” she murmured.

“I’m so sorry.”

Her smile turned pained, and she wrinkled her nose. “Maybe we should go and talk to Colton now.”

“Yes, of course. Right this way.”

Roy offered her his arm, and she accepted, though he noticed that she had a sad sort of look in her eyes. They walked slowly to the office. He wanted to give Beverly time to take in the sights. The trees seemed to stretch on forever, and he watched as a soft breeze ruffled their leaves and also her hair peeking out from beneath her hard hat. She smiled at him, and he found himself wondering if this place was starting to grow on her. There was a peaceful kind of beauty here that Roy felt lucky enough to be able to experience every day.

When they arrived at Colton’s office, Beverly disengaged from him and even took a step back.

“It’ll be all right,” he hurried to assure her.

“I...”

He hated that she looked so nervous. Honestly, he couldn’t blame her. No one knew she was here, not even Colton, and as she didn’t know Colton, she had no idea how he would react to the news that Roy had hired her.

“You already have the job,” Roy reminded her softly.

She nodded at him, her lips curling into a smile again.

“I won’t be long,” Roy said, and he entered the office, shutting the door behind him.

“Who is... Roy.” Colton wearily rubbed a hand down his face. “I have to order some more food for the animals and then get back to work. Do you need something? More money for the repairs?”

“Actually...” Roy cleared his throat and rubbed his hands together. “I just wanted to let you know that there’s a female construction worker who is helping me with the repairs. The hay barn... I was afraid it would need more than just a new roof, and I was right. The toolshed... And there’s two other buildings that also need foundational work done. Potentially rebuilt too.”

“That’s a tall order.”

“And why we need Beverly.”

Colton slowly nodded. “Once she gives you the bill, give it to me.”

“But—”

“It’s my orchard,” Colton said firmly.

“I hired her,” Roy argued, “and you haven’t even met her.”

“I trust your judgment,” Colton said seriously, “but if you would feel better if I see her, bring her in.”

“She’s going to do great work for us,” Roy said eagerly. “You won’t be disappointed.”

Colton nodded, and Roy’s chest swelled. He couldn’t quite put his finger on why precisely he knew that everything would work out, but he had complete faith in Beverly.

CHAPTER SIX

Beverly stayed outside the door, watching the sun set over the horizon and enjoying the sweet scent of apple blossoms which filled the air. This orchard really was beautiful, and she couldn't wait to get started on the work. If everything was to be done before Easter... She and Roy were going to have their work cut out for them. They might have to recruit some high schoolers, or else that deadline would be really tight. Six weeks to do a barn was doable, but all the rest? She had to admit that she had been a bit surprised that the completely enclosed barn had been filled with only hay. If she could convince Roy to have a pole barn instead, that would take half the time to build. She could make certain it was reinforced with metal, at least at the corners, to ensure that it wouldn't collapse with another freak storm.

Impatient, Beverly turned back to the office building, one of the only buildings to not have structural damage. Obviously Colton hadn't been inside when Roy had brought her over to the office to check on the place.

The door opened, and Roy stood there with a smile on his face. "Colton would like to meet our construction worker."

She grinned back at him before entering the office.

Colton was tall, a little older than Roy, and he seemed a bit frazzled, not that Beverly could blame him, what with everything he had on his plate.

"Beverly, right?" Colton asked as they shook hands. "It's nice to meet you."

“Very nice to meet you,” she said with a nod.

“How long have you been in construction?”

“I’ve been working with my father for well over ten years,” she said. “The company was his, and once I graduated high school, I worked for him full time until he made me his partner. He...”

She swallowed hard and willed herself not to cry. Beverly glanced over at Roy.

“He’s no longer with us,” Roy murmured for her.

“But I can handle the work, not a problem at all,” Beverly said in a rush. “You can count on me, and the deadline of Easter will be met. You don’t have to worry.”

Colton laughed. “The Easter deadline is Roy’s doing. If it takes you longer, that’s fine by me. How much do you think the cost will be?”

“Well, that depends,” Beverly said slowly. “The hay barn, I was wondering if there was a specific reason why it wasn’t a pole barn. The construction of a pole barn would be so much cheaper and quicker, even with the metal I’m thinking to make sure it would survive another freak storm.”

“God willing,” Roy said, pressing his hands together in prayer form as he looked skyward, “that freak storm was an anomaly.”

“Most likely,” Colton said, “but it doesn’t hurt to take precautions. A pole barn would suffice for now, but most likely, I would want another second barn. If everything goes well, we would hire you of that as well.”

“Perfect.”

She did some quick calculations and gave him a rough estimate. Before adding the charge for labor on top of the material, she had hesitated before putting in the amount her father would’ve charged. She didn’t have as much experience as her father, but she still had worked in the field for well over a decade, so her experience counted for something. If Colton

balked, though, she would let him haggle her down but only to a certain extent.

“If Roy truly wants that deadline, and we encroach on it, then I can hire some high schoolers to help. The students would get paid out of my earnings, so it’s no charge to you. We... The company has insurance that covers all employees, so the high schoolers would be covered should something happen, which never has in all the years my father has used students. Plus, the students get credit toward their school too.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Colton said.

“So you don’t mind if they might have to be used?” she asked. “Some people don’t prefer teenagers to work on the sites.”

“I leave that to your judgment,” Colton said, looking first at her and then Roy. “This strikes me as... a little low.”

“Low?” She blinked in surprise.

“You don’t have a charge for a rush job.”

“Oh. Well, yes, the deadline... It’s fine. I don’t need to charge for that. Especially since Roy here is insisting on help me.”

Colton nodded. “I see. All right. If you discover you need more materials than what we already have and the price of the project changes drastically, please let me know.”

“I will. I don’t foresee that, but if anything changes, I’ll let you know. I’ll keep you abreast of everything at the end of the day, if you would like.”

“That would be great.” Colton nodded, a clear dismissal, and Beverly followed Roy out.

He beamed at her. “See? Colton says you are more than welcome here.”

“Thank you.”

“For introducing you to my boss? He’s a great guy and a good friend. You don’t need to feel intimidated by him at all.”

“I hate to break it to you, but cowboys don’t intimidate me.”

He slapped his thigh and laughed. “Good. Glad to hear that. I’m not a scary guy. I’ve never been the boss of anyone before, though.”

“Well, what do you want to do first, boss man?”

Roy chuckled. “You should tell me.”

“First things first, clearing out the toolshed. We’ll work on that first and then move onto the hay barn.”

They trudged over to the toolshed, and Roy opened the door. As they stepped inside, Beverly was overwhelmed by the scent of wet wood and soil. She took a deep breath as her eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, taking in all that was around her. The shelves were lined with every tool imaginable. Boxes held hammers, saws, wrenches, and screwdrivers.

“There might be some long forgotten items in here,” Roy said. “I started to go through everything, but there was so much to do, and...” He shrugged.

They got to work emptying out the toolshed. There were a few old pieces of wood that had gotten wet and weren’t all that useful unless dried out and scrap metal that could be repurposed in some manner or another. Beverly was grateful when she spotted some dry extra planks of wood toward the back. There was plenty of rope and wire, and Roy discovered a box of spare parts of machinery.

Once the toolshed was completely empty, Beverly put on gloves, grabbed her hammer, and eyed Roy.

“You might want to step back,” she said.

The first blow didn’t do much, but the second punched a head-sized hole into the wall. Roy stood back and watched as she quickly brought the entire toolshed down.

“We’ll have to clear all of this away. Posts next and then plywood.”

“I did buy some items,” Roy said. “If none of them will work for your purposes, I should be able to exchange them and

get what you prefer.”

“Perfect.”

They worked for hours. Some of what Roy got was usable, but they did head over to the store to exchange the posts.

Beverly did her measurements and once Roy approved the size of the toolshed she had planned, one large enough to house a table and a sawhorse with room to work at both locations with room to spare, she got to work digging for the first posts.

Once all four posts were up, Roy approached. He had handled digging two of the spots for her. She appreciated that although she teasingly called him boss man, he listened to her directions.

“We should break for lunch,” he said.

“Oh, no. I’m good. I really want to keep working.”

“A short break to eat and fuel up and drink some water...”

She just laughed. “You go ahead and refuel. I’m going to keep going.”

Roy sighed. He lingered for a moment, watching her, but eventually, he wandered away. About twenty minutes later, he returned, carrying a bag.

“I bought us lunch,” he said.

She leaned the piece of plywood against the post. One wall had already been completed solar, and she was making decent progress.

“Hot meatball subs,” he said. “I hope you like that, but they taste best when hot, so... You coming?”

“Where are we going?” she asked curiously.

“Well, I can take you to the bathroom so you can wash your hands, but then... you’ll just have to follow me.”

He had a mischievous grin on his face that made her laugh, and she followed him to the closest bathroom, in one of the buildings that had cracks in the basement. This particular one,

she was hoping she might be able to repair the horizontal cracks. While they were much more worrisome than the vertical kinds, it was possible to fix them in some cases.

Once she finished washing her hands and her face, she left the bathroom.

Roy still had that same smile on his face as he brought her over to the waterfall. There wasn't a blanket, but that didn't bother her any. These were her work clothes after all.

He handed her a sandwich, and she took a bite and moaned.

"This is really good."

"Isn't it?" He grinned. "I'm glad you like it."

She nodded, her mouth already full from another bite.

They ate about half of their sandwiches before she paused to say, "The waterfall is so beautiful."

"Isn't it? It took a bit for Colton to get it right."

"Really? He didn't like how it looked at first?"

"Oh, it had nothing to do with looks." Roy started to laugh. "The first rocks Colton picked? Once he started the water, well, the rocks washed away!"

She laughed too. "Oh, no! Must have been one powerful waterfall."

"No, the rocks just didn't set well on each other. He needed heavier ones for the water pressure."

"Gotcha. Still, it lead to this, and this is beautiful, so..." She eyed him. "Do you often eat here?"

"No. Normally, we eat in the main barn. We sometimes take turns bringing in food for everyone."

"Oh, that's generous."

Roy nodded. "We're a family here. Two families, actually. Colton's the oldest of his brothers. The other two work here, and my three brothers and I are the rest of the workers."

"Oh, wow. It really is a family affair."

“Family’s important, and working with them every day...
It’s a blessing.”

Beverly lowered her head and shut her eyes. She knew exactly the blessing he was talking about, and she missed it terribly.

CHAPTER
SEVEN

Roy winced. He could tell that Beverly dearly missed her father, and his rubbing that he worked with his brothers had to hurt her.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured. “I didn’t mean...”

“It’s fine,” she said. “Working with family is wonderful. I’m grateful that I did for as long as I did. Do I miss him? Yes! This... This job is the first one I’m doing all by myself. It was... three weeks ago.”

“That recently?”

She nodded. “I took two weeks off and then finished up two jobs that my father and I started together. I... I really can’t thank you enough for hiring me for this job.”

“It’s not too big for us?”

“Oh, no! Not at all! Ah... you’re being willing to help... It might help.”

“Might help?” He laughed. “Your dad was stronger than I am, huh?”

“I don’t mean your strength. I mean...” She glanced at him and then away.

He knew. He wouldn’t press anymore, but he knew that she didn’t want to have to do all of the work alone, not on the first job that she had to do without her father.

“I’ll help as much as I’m able,” he said. “No matter what you need from me. I’ll do my best.”

Beverly's eyes glistened with tears, and she bit her lip, though a small smile tugged at the corners of her lips. "Thank you," she said softly.

The thing was... Roy had other chores he had to attend to. He couldn't only work on the construction projects. That wouldn't be fair to the others.

Still, he hadn't even finished his sandwich yet, and he made sure to chew each bite a hundred times before swallowing to prolong the inevitable.

"Tell me about yourself, Beverly," he said eventually.

She smiled at him. "My mom works far and wide, so my father and I would do everything together. One time, when he deemed I was old enough, he took me out of the canyon. I didn't know where we were going or wide, and I must have asked him a hundred thousand times, but he never answered. You know how kids are."

Roy laughed. "My mom always hated that question. 'Are we there yet?'"

"Well, I didn't ask that. I just asked where we were going." She made a face. "The thing is, I can't tell you where we ended up! But my father took me to this massive wooden building. Inside, everything was wooden. Everything! All of it so ornate and intricately carved. It was there that my father taught me the basics of carpentry and then each month after, he would teach me more and more about his work, about construction. For the most part, we only did jobs in the canyon, but there were a few that we had to travel a bit more for. Nothing more than an hour away. We would talk the entire trek out, and most of the times, I would sleep on the drive back."

"You wouldn't get a hotel room?"

"No. It would have cut into our profits if we had."

"Oh, of course."

"My father... He was the most patient man in the world. He would be so humble too. I think he might have been a teacher in another life."

Roy bristled. “You don’t believe in reincarnation, do you?”

“I... No, not really. I just... I was only...” Her shoulders slumped. “My parents weren’t overly religious, so I’m not either.”

“Do you believe in God?”

“Yes, I believe in a higher power.”

“Do you believe in Heaven?”

“I want to,” she whispered.

Roy nodded, understanding the sentiment. He had grown up in a religious household, and he was still deeply spiritual to this day. His parents instilled in him and his brothers their faith from a young age.

“I don’t want to overstep,” Roy said slowly, “so if you don’t want to talk about this, I completely understand. Just tell me to stop, and I won’t say anything else on this topic, but...”

She nodded for him to go ahead.

“I attended church regularly with my family and learned the importance of putting others first and living life with purpose and intention. Have you ever been to Grace Community Church?”

“For the funeral. The service was there. A mass. Before that, though... not since I was a little girl.”

“It’s a beautiful church. Remember looking at the stained-glass windows with awe. At the time I had to have been maybe five or six, and I wanted to be a painter. I just wanted to paint glass, nothing else.”

She laughed.

He grinned and leaned back. “The way the light used to shine inside the church as we would learn about Jesus’ miracles and the stories of God’s love... I always felt like that church is a second home.”

“That must be nice,” she murmured.

“I know it’s not the same for everyone, but for me, reading the Bible is like discovering a secret world where all that matters is peace and understanding.”

“Right because that makes sense with the flood and Jesus dying.”

“Jesus died for us, though, for our sins. So we can go to Heaven and be with Him.”

She averted her gaze, and he feared she wasn’t ready to hear all of this, so he changed the topic but only slightly.

“Have you ever listened to Pastor Abernathy? One homily he shared that really spoke to me was about how it wasn’t just about what you said or did that matter but how you said it and why you did it. There’s meaning behind every action and thought, and for me, I try to make each decision be rooted in faith-based values. If I can. I’m not perfect. I fight with my brothers still. You never really outgrow that desire to one-up your siblings, but...” He shrugged.

“I used to pretend I had a sister growing up,” Beverly said. She covered her face with her hand. “I don’t know why I’m telling you this! I was, oh, maybe three, four. By the time I started school and made friends, I just let her go.”

“You didn’t need her anymore,” he said.

“Exactly.”

He smiled at her. “You always need God,” he said quietly. “Everyone does.”

“Maybe,” she whispered. “When... When my father made the decision that I was ready to be his partner and not just his only employee, he told me about how proud he was of me, how I knew everything that he had, that he wanted to me to let me know if I wanted out, if I wanted to do something else with his life. He didn’t want to dictate my life for me, and he... I guess he was worried that I did the work to be close to him because my mom travels so much, but... Construction isn’t just his thing. It was our thing, and even with him gone, it’s still my thing.”

“I think it’s really special that the two of you shared that,” Roy said.

She smiled sadly at him. “It’s all right,” she said softly. “I have the job now, right? That means I won’t have to worry so much. Oh, actually...” She glanced at her watch. “There are only so many hours of daylight, and I need to get back to work.”

“You didn’t finish your sub,” he said. “I can put it in the fridge in the office for you.”

“Thanks. That would be great.”

“And then... just for a bit... I do have some other chores to work on. Just real quick. I’ll be back to help you as soon as I can.”

“Oh, yeah, of course. I know what I’m doing with the toolshed.”

“Of course you do. You’re the boss.” His laugh sounded forced.

Why? Why was he acting like a fool? He was already trying to befriend Beverly, which didn’t seem to be an altogether terrible idea, but the side she would give him when she let down her guard... the fierce sadness in her eyes when she thought of her father’s passing... the sparkle in her eyes when she spoke of the love she had for him...

Roy knew he had to be careful. He had a plan to get the orchard back to rights, and he had hired Beverly to help him achieve the goal. He would have to ask his brothers to help with some of his chores so that he could work with her. The construction would never be finished before Easter otherwise.

But that meant he would have to work with her. Not talk to her constantly.

Not flirt with her.

Getting the meal? Roy could have just as easily brought her over to the barn to see if there was any food, or else he could have brought over a plate to her of whatever food there was. Instead, he decided to go out and buy them lunch, and

although he didn't want to examine why he did that, he already knew the answer.

So far, only Colton had met Beverly.

Roy didn't want to share her.

Which was completely and utterly absurd. He knew it was. She was going to meet the other cowboys eventually. During the tour, though, he had found himself even then avoiding the others. He had told himself that it was because he didn't want to disturb them while they were working since there was so much to be done, but now he wondered...

"Are you okay?" Beverly asked.

He winced as he realized she was holding out her wrapped meatball sub for him to take. Roy took it.

"I'll be back as quick as I can."

"There's no rush," she said. "The hard part will come later."

"Why do you sound so excited?" he asked suspiciously.

"Maybe I relish the idea of having someone to give orders to."

"Ah, like your father would you?"

"My father would ask me or the high schoolers to do this or that, but I think I might need a firmer..." She trailed off. "Thank you for hiring me."

He nodded. "Of course," he said. "I'm so glad I heard the radio ad."

"Oh, good! I was wondering how you heard about the company."

"Yes. Well, if you want to order someone around, I'll be your man as soon as I get my other chores done."

"Goodbye," she said with a wave and a laugh.

He was dawdling. His mom always hated when he dawdled, but he didn't want to leave Beverly's side. Still, they

walked together a little bit before she broke off for the toolshed and he went to the office.

Thankfully, Colton wasn't inside because Roy didn't want to have to answer any questions about Beverly. Not that he thought Colton would ask any personal questions or assume anything was going on between Roy and Beverly. Not that anything was. But that didn't mean that maybe one day once the project was finished...

Then again, Roy and the others had all teased Colton when he had reconnected with his high school sweetheart, Susan. Colton might want payback.

Roy shook his head as he shut the fridge. He hadn't eaten all of his sub either, mostly because he had been so busy talking to Beverly. She was just easy to talk to, and he enjoyed getting to know her more.

Still, it was well past time to get to work.

He strode out of the office with a purpose and was soon heading to the fields, knowing that he had to get his chores finished as quickly and efficiently as possible. Still, his mind wandered back to her every now and then.

He grabbed the hoe from the shed and began weeding near the fruit bushes. Thoughts of Beverly stayed with him every step of the way.

He completed each chore with precision, though not without daydreaming about what it would be like if they spent more time together working on the orchard.

His brothers noticed how quick he was finishing tasks but could only laugh at his speed. None knew why he was so motivated today.

Roy tried to concentrate on his work, but it was hard not to stop and take a few seconds here or there to think about Beverly. He pushed himself faster and harder than usual so that he could finish up sooner and he could get back to working with Beverly again.

Finally, he finished feeding the pigs. He would wash his hands and head on over and—

“I don’t think you’ve ever worked so fast in your entire life,” Jack said. “Does it have anything to do with the female construction worker doing the work you said you would do and refused to let any of us help you with? Are we not good enough or something?”

Despite Jack’s teasing tone, Roy gulped.

The jig was up.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Beverly took a second to wipe the sweat from her brow. The skeletal bones of the toolshed were already in place, and so far, she couldn't be happier with how it was turning out. She still had to figure out which material would be best for the roof, but the progress she was making, between earlier with Roy's help and now by herself, she was pleased.

Even though she knew that, with future jobs, she would either have to work alone entirely or else try to expand the company and maybe even hire someone else to work with her full-time, she found herself wishing Roy would hurry up and return. The cowboy was fun and helped to make the time pass by so very quickly, but even more than that, when he was around, she just simply didn't feel as lonely.

It was when she was lonely that she missed her father the most.

Roy bringing up his faith and God... Beverly hadn't known what to think. He had been so earnest but not pushy about it, and honestly, even before Beverly had lost her father, her life had felt like she was missing something.

Or maybe someone.

Someone? As in Someone? God? She did pray from time to time, but mostly it was because she needed something, especially if something was lost. Somehow, she knew that shouldn't be the case. Even giving thanks to God probably wasn't enough.

But she had no idea where to start.

Maybe she could talk to her father, though? As if he were still here with her? Or would his lack of ability to talk back to her only make her grief and sorrow worse?

She glanced around to see if anyone was close enough that if she chose to speak to her deceased father aloud, they would overhear, and it was a good thing she had checked because Roy and two other cowboys were heading straight for her.

She waved and waited for them to approach.

“Beverly, this is Jack and Parker,” Roy said, pointing to the cowboys in turn. “Two of my brothers.”

“Ronald’s around here somewhere, but I’m the handsome one,” Jack joked.

“Is that right?” Beverly glanced at Roy, who groaned and ran a hand down his face.

“Come on now,” Roy admonished. “Be professional. Or at least pretend to be. Beverly doesn’t have any siblings, so she doesn’t understand the whole teasing and tormenting thing as a form of love.”

“You don’t have any siblings?” Parker asked. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s all right,” Beverly said. “It’s not like I had a choice in the matter. So there are four of you?”

“Yes,” Roy said.

“And all boys. God bless your parents.”

They all laughed, including Roy, but he gave her a very telling look.

He appreciated that she had mentioned God, and it hadn’t been just a saying. She really hoped God did bless Roy’s parents.

“All of you cowboys too,” Beverly continued. “None of you thought about anything else?”

“It just sort of came to be,” Parker said.

“When you find your way, you just have to take that path,” Roy said softly.

She nodded and swallowed past a lump in her throat. “Yeah, I think I know all about that.”

“But construction,” Jack said, lifting his cowboy hat. “Props to you. The can’t be an easy field.”

She waited to see if he would add something about *for a woman*, but when he didn’t, she realized he truly meant that it wasn’t easy for men or women. For anyone.

It was so refreshing to realize that not only did Roy not judge her based on her sex but neither did his siblings.

Their parents really had done an amazing job raising them all.

Just then, another cowboy came barreling around the corner. He looked so much like his brothers that she knew immediately this had to be Ronald. Like the other cowboys, this one was tall and broad, with a close crop goatee that seemed to fit him perfectly. Without having to ask, it was clearly evident that Ronald was the youngest.

“Hey, who’s this?” he asked with a grin.

The others laughed good-naturedly and glanced toward Roy.

“Beverly, this is Ronald. Ronald, this is Beverly.”

“Love the hat,” Ronald said.

“He used to have one just like it when he was maybe eight,” Jack cut in.

“He decided to be a construction worker for Halloween one year, and he wore that costume around the house for months,” Parker added.

“He didn’t even want Mom to wash it,” Roy said, “so he started to smell.”

“I didn’t smell!” Ronald protested. “The costume might’ve but not me!”

“When you lived in that costume outside of school and the costume smelled... Smell is transferable,” Jack pointed out with a laugh.

“If you liked construction so much, did you think about getting into it?” Beverly asked him.

Ronald shook his head. “Not seriously, no.”

“Why not?” she asked, genuinely curious.

“Mostly because what one Griffin does, we all do.”

“But you are all four different people. You don’t all have to be cowboys because Roy is.”

“Oh, for sure,” Jack said, “but being a cowboy, it’s what we all are.”

“We definitely all want to be here,” Ronald assured her, “but you’re here... Did you do all of this already?” He gaped, looking from her to the newly constructed frame of the toolshed.

“With a little help from Roy, yes,” she said.

“Emphasis on the little,” Roy said. “Doesn’t she do amazing work?”

Ronald especially seemed impressed by her skills. “Do you work alone?”

She nodded and tried not to let sadness wash over her.

“Wow, that’s commendable,” Ronald said. “It must be so hard for you to do all of this work alone. It blows my mind. Seriously.”

Beverly smiled, loving that she felt so appreciated already.

“But...” Ronald turned to Roy. “Seriously?”

“Seriously, what?” Roy asked.

“You know what,” Parker said.

“No, I don’t,” Roy said.

“We thought we’d help out with the construction,” Jack said, “but Roy just went to town and hired an extra hand.”

“Clearly he doesn’t trust us or our abilities enough,” Parker added.

“It’s not as if Roy is some Construction King,” Ronald added.

Roy sputtered, “You know I couldn’t ask y’all to drop what you were doing. We all have so much to do on the orchard already, and there’s plenty of other areas where you guys can help after that storm, so...”

But the brothers continued to tease Roy even as he continued to try to defend himself. The atmosphere was one of genuine brotherly love, and Beverly was glad she was there to witness it.

She shook her head in disbelief and amusement before she heard Ronald begin to lecture Roy, saying, “Family should always come first. You know full well there’s no one more important than us.”

“Is that so? I’m not so sure anymore,” Roy teased right back.

“Yes, that’s so! Including any hired hand for a construction project.” Ronald glanced at Beverly. “No offense. Just ribbing my brother here.”

“It doesn’t meant anything,” Parker rushed to say.

“We just like to have a little fun with him,” Jack added with a laugh. He gave Roy an exaggerated wink. “Teasing is how we show our love, after all.”

Ronald nudged Roy playfully and flashed him a mischievous smile before turning back to Beverly with a shrug. “I just really can’t get over my big brother here hiring someone instead of letting us help out,” he said, elbowing Roy again for good measure.

The whole scene was absurd, yet somehow heartwarming at the same time. She realized then that even though these men loved each other so fiercely the they would never hurt one another. Their bond was as tight as could be.

Just like the bond she had shared with her father.

Roy just laughed and shook his head, but there was a hint of amusement in his eyes. “They know I’m not going to turn

them away if it turns out that we might actually need their help. Not saying we will. I hope we don't in fact, but..."

"But you hired her," Jack said playfully.

"I did," Roy admitted, smiling slightly at Beverly. "But it doesn't mean I don't appreciate my brothers' hard work and dedication when it comes to building something together."

Roy's words were met with unanimous nodding from all four Griffin brothers, making Beverly feel oddly special for being included in such an intimate moment between them all.

It was clear that these men had grown up doing the same things together—working on projects, maybe even a little building here and there, at the very least fences here on the orchard, and being a true family unit. They had each other's backs no matter what, which was something that Beverly could really appreciate.

"Praise God," Jack said. "I don't mind having you around the orchard at all, Beverly, especially because I was more than a little worried about Roy trying to tackle everything all by himself."

"Sometimes he gets egg on his face when he dies off more than he can chew," Ronald said.

"That's rich, coming from you," Roy retorted. He reached over and brushed at his youngest brother's goatee. "You have crumbs from lunch in your beard!"

"I did not!" Ronald exclaimed. He glanced around wildly. "Did I?"

They all laughed, including Beverly.

"Well, *boys*," Roy said emphatically, "the lot of you should be getting back to work, don't you think?"

"You too." Ronald fist-bumped him and tipped his hat to Beverly before walking off.

"You keep Roy in line," Jack said with a wink. "If you need help with that, I'll be more than happy to oblige."

"I'll keep that in mind," Beverly said, laughing.

“Be sure to let him help as much as you need,” Parker said, sounding serious for once.

The two of them headed off, and Beverly turned back to Roy.

“At this point, you might as well meet the last two cowboys, Colton’s young brothers, Lawrence and Myles,” Roy said. “Then we can get back to it.”

“Lead the way,” she said, taking off her gloves so she could shake hands if someone offered.

Roy gestured for Beverly to follow him, and together, they made their way to the other side of the orchard.

“Myles is twenty-three, a year older than Ronald. He’s a bit gregarious but can sometimes get himself into one kind of trouble or another. He’s known to be quite a charmer and has never been able to pass up an opportunity for an adventure. Lawrence, though, is a little more like Colton. They’re both quieter and more introverted, although he has plenty of friends. He’s a volunteer firefighter.”

“Wow,” she murmured. “Good for him.”

Roy led Beverly to a nearby stable where two young men were leading horses for a walk for some exercise. They looked to be in their early to mid-twenties. The older one had hair as dark as Colton’s and a five o’clock shadow compared to the oldest with his full beard and mustache. The youngest was clean-shaven, and his hair was a lighter shade of brown. Both seemed to possess a youthful exuberance that was endearing. They wore matching plaid shirts, denim overalls and leather boots that were caked with mud from working in the fields all morning.

“They’re just like the rest of us,” Roy commented before the cowboys noticed them. “They’re hardworking young men who don’t mind getting their hands dirty. Lawrence, Myles,” Roy said as he approached them, motioning for Beverly to come closer as well. “This is Beverly Young. She’s helping with the construction.”

“Is that so?” Lawrence patted his horse’s neck before ducking under the horse’s neck to cross over and shake her head. “Glad to have you on board.”

“Thank you,” she said.

“It’s about time this place had a feminine presence,” Myles declared. “I’ve been saying we should hire a cowgirl, but there’s enough work for us all. We don’t need another hire, so I’ve been ignored... but I do know how to wear down Colton, so we’ll see.”

Beverly laughed. “I take it you three have the same relationship as Roy and his brothers do.”

“That depends,” Lawrence drawled, “by what you mean by that.”

“Loving but teasing terribly,” she said.

“Not terribly,” Myles said. “not us. Never.”

“The Griffins were giving Roy a hard time?” Lawrence asked dryly. “That is such a surprise!”

Beverly laughed. She could tell that working at the ranch must be a blast, and the orchard was beautiful. Working here was going to be just what she needed to get back on track after losing out on those three other jobs as well as getting accustomed to working without her father beside her.

CHAPTER
NINE

After the introductions were all done, Roy and Beverly got back toward. There wasn't quite as much talking now as they settled into their duties. Beverly would tell what to do, and he did it willingly. She often picked up things that he thought might be too heavy for her, and he found himself no longer asking if she needed help with stuff like that because she could handle it herself.

They worked until well after Roy normally would for the day, and he was fairly certain all of the others had left already.

"Any chance you want to get dinner together?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

"I already have plans," she said.

The wave of disappointment that washed over Roy surprised him. "Oh, of course. A boyfriend?"

"My mom. She's coming home, and we'll probably eat, or else I'll make her something."

"So..." He wrinkled his nose and shook his head. It probably wasn't appropriate for him to ask if she was single or not.

"So... I'll be back again early tomorrow morning."

"How early is early?"

"Maybe a little before the sun's up. I'll be placing an order for more material. I'll have to put a rush on the items if they aren't readily available."

“Pass that charge onto us,” he insisted.

She made a face but nodded. “I will.”

“Good. So... tomorrow then.”

“Yes. Have a goodnight, Roy.”

“You too, Beverly,” he said, and he laughed as they fell into step with one another, heading for the parking lot.

“Do you think you and your brothers will eat together?” she asked once she reached her car.

“Possibly. We do eat together a lot. Not every night, though.”

“Do you not live together? I won’t specifically look, but I noticed that none of you are sporting rings...”

“Colton’s in a relationship. It’s new yet. They just got together over Valentine’s Day. Susan’s her name. They dated back in high school, drifted apart, and now, they’re stronger than ever before. The rest of us... we’re all single.”

He didn’t want to admit that his brothers were unattached, and that gave him pause. Beverly wasn’t working at the orchard to try to find someone to date, and he hadn’t hired her because he had been interested in her.

But now he was. There was something alluring about her.

Yet, there was a voice in the back of his mind that warned him to remember a promise he had made to himself long ago.

He wanted to only date women he thought he would one day marry. What was the point otherwise? And he just didn’t see himself marrying a girl who wasn’t a Christian.

Maybe, though, God had brought Beverly into his life so he could help lead her to the faith. More likely, God had brought Roy into her life when she needed someone the most, after her father passed away, but if he could also reach her heart...

He shook his head. Roy couldn’t deny that he was probably getting ahead of himself.

“I figured most of you had to be, what with Jack flirting with me and you warning me about how friendly Myles is.”

Roy rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah...” he mumbled. “They’re good guys, but if they ever make you feel uncomfortable—”

“Oh, no. They’re fine! I can tell they’re harmless. Trust me, in this line of work, there’s all kinds of people, those who think I can do anything, those who think I’m just... I don’t know. Decoration. It’s refreshing to be treated like one of the guys.” She laughed. “Seriously. Besides, I don’t think Jack is earnest.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” he said nonchalantly. “I wouldn’t call him a flirt, but...”

He knew why Jack was being that way with Beverly.

To tease Roy.

Not that he was going to get into all of that with Beverly.

Roy cleared his throat. “That anyone would treat you like decoration... that just blows my mind. You’re too strong and intelligent for that.”

“Thank you, but I’ll admit it. It’s going to be a lot harder for me going forward now that... People don’t expect a construction company to be a one-woman job. For the most part, it’s not, but... without my father...”

“Wait, are you trying to say people aren’t likely to hire you because you’re one person or because you’re...”

“Because I’m a woman.”

“That’s ridiculous. In this day and age?”

“It is what it is.”

“That’s terrible.”

“And that’s why I’m so grateful to you for this job, for trusting me... and for working alongside me. I’m going to have to hire someone else full-time, and the money from this job is going to go a long ways toward that.”

“I’m glad,” he said sincerely. “Anything I can do to help.”

He opened his mouth to say more, wanting to offer his services to her job, but he was a cowboy. He would only be able to work for her full-time a day or two a week at the most, and if he wanted to work after his chores were finished at the orchard, that would mean the sun would be setting, so how much work could he offer her? Besides maybe picking up material orders, he wasn’t sure he could do much.

Still, it was something he could consider making an offer of once the job was over and he had a chance to see if that was something he truly wanted to do.

Not just because he thought Beverly had a beautiful face and a wonderful soul that he desperately wanted to help. Because he would need to want to continue the job even if she rejected him.

If he did work up the courage to ask her out.

“I appreciate it,” she said with a warm smile. “More than you know, I appreciate it.”

She nodded to him and climbed into her car. He watched as she started the engine, began to back up her car, and then stopped total the hard hat off her he’d and put it on the passenger seat beside her. Adorable.

He waved, and she returned the gesture before driving off.

Roy climbed into his truck and checked his phone to see a text message from Jack.

Call when you’re finished work... unless you’re going to eat dinner with Beverly.

Roy snorted and called Jack.

“So, no dinner with Beverly, huh? How about your brothers instead?” Jack asked. “My place.”

“You guys haven’t even yet?” Roy asked, surprised. It was getting late. Normally, they would all leave the orchard to eat immediately. Manual labor sure worked up an appetite.

“No. We were waiting on you. I was hoping that our hungry bellies would be filled without your presence, but...”

Roy snorted. “Why did you flirt with her so much?”

“Ah, so you do like her.”

Roy could hear the grin in Jack’s voice. “No, I just don’t know if it’s appropriate—”

“I was just being friendly,” Jack protested. “Did I make her uncomfortable?”

“No,” Roy said.

“I made you uncomfortable.”

Roy snorted. “I’ll be there in ten.”



Ten minutes later, Roy arrived. He opened Jack’s apartment door without knocking first. Jack hardly ever locked it.

Immediately, Roy was greeted by the delicious smell of pizza as well as a chorus of greeting and ribbing from his brothers.

“How was construction?” Jack asked.

“Good,” Roy answered. “Beverly is a great worker.”

His brothers chuckled.

“So glad you decided to show up,” Parker asked. “Are you and Beverly an item now, or what?”

Roy shook his head as laughter erupted around him. He took a seat at the dining table and grabbed a slice of pizza. “It’s nothing like that,” he said before biting into the cheesy goodness.

“Uh-huh,” Ethan teased. “That was some serious flirting on Jack’s part though.”

Roy sighed and rolled his eyes but couldn’t help the smile that settled on his lips as he remembered Beverly smiling back at him before she had driven away.

“I don’t mind if you do like her,” Parker said seriously as he sat down next to Roy.

Roy looked up from his pizza in surprise. Of all his brothers, Parker was usually the most serious about things—especially relationships—so for him to be encouraging it meant something more than just teasing.

Especially when you considered that Theresa Harris had broken Parker’s heart when she moved to New York and then near contacted him again.

“Love blooming at the orchard again,” Jack declared. His eyes gleamed with mischievousness. “Colton first and now you.”

“It’s nothing like that,” Roy protested.

Despite what Roy claimed, his brothers continued to tease him about Beverly. Honestly, Roy didn’t mind. He knew they were being friendly, and he appreciated them being supportive of his decision to hire Beverly.

Roy cracked a smile and took another slice of pizza before joining the conversation with his brothers. It was early yet, but he was so happy that he had decided to hire someone with the construction. He never would’ve been able to put the entire new toolshed together in one day all by himself, roof included. Working with Beverly felt like an opportunity for Roy to be able to prove himself—both to her and also himself—and for that Roy was immensely thankful.

He had felt like he’d needed something more, and maybe he was getting more than he bargained for with hiring Beverly, but in a good way.

Just how good, though, remained to be seen.

“Are you going to continue to eat standing up?” Ronald asked. He patted the empty spot between himself and Jack on the couch. Parker was sitting on the chair on the opposing wall. All of the furniture faced the TV, which wasn’t currently on.

“That depends,” Roy said dryly. “Can we start to talk about basketball?”

Jack smirked but obliged, and thankfully, the brothers all discussed basketball and new fishing techniques.

It was nice to just be around his brothers, talking and laughing together. They all worked together, yes, and they were split up over two different apartment complexes, although each of them had opted for their own single bedroom places instead of being roommates. Sure, they could've saved some money by living together, but they all wanted to find a God-fearing woman to love and eventually settle down with in a house.

Maybe with a white picket fences cliché as that sounded.

For just a few minutes, everything felt right in the world again, and Roy found himself smiling happily despite all of the stressors that freak storm had started. Now that his brothers weren't teasing him anymore, he found himself enjoying this moment, even if he had lost count of how many slices of pizza he had consumed. He probably shouldn't have another, though. He was ready to burst at the seams.

Roy was beyond beat, though, and not even ten minutes later, he realized he was nodding off some.

"I should get going," he said, jerkin his thumb to the door. "I'm exhausted."

"Hard work flirting all day long, huh?" Ronald joked.

"A lot of hard work," Roy commented, grinning as his brothers howled with laughter that continued to ring after he waved and shut Jack's apartment door behind him.

CHAPTER
TEN

Her mom's flight had been delayed, which was why her mom was only getting in that night. Despite Beverly offering to pick up her mom from the airport, her mom insisted that she would just Uber home.

Her mom's flight was due in thirty minutes, so Beverly decided she could maybe hold off until then to eat dinner and texted her mom that maybe they could eat out tonight at a restaurant if she wanted.

To her surprise, not five minutes later, she received a response.

I'm tired. Eating out will have my face falling into my soup or salad. If we order out but have it at the house, that would be one thing.

Sounds good to me! What are you in the mood for?

How about Chinese?

You got it. How was the flight?

I couldn't sleep. I kept dreaming. Smooth flight but a little bumpy landing. I can't wait to see you.

I could always come get you.

I already have the Uber arranged. I'll see you soon. So glad the flight got in a little faster than anticipated!

Me too.

Beverly knew just the place to order Chinese from, and with her mom's arrival time quickly approaching, she called to

place the order. The restaurant currently had deliveries free of charge, so she opted for that instead of picking it up. It gave her time to hurriedly set the table, making sure everything was extra tidy. She was eager to catch up with her mom and tell her about her new job. As soon as she finished setting the table, she hopped onto the couch and waited for the food to arrive and for her mom to get home.

Dinner arrived maybe five minutes before her mom did.

Beverly greeted her with a hug before ushering her into the living room where dinner was served. The smell of Szechuan chicken filled up the small space almost instantly, and Beverly couldn't help but smile as she watched her mom close her eyes and take a deep breath before sitting down at the table.

"I'm so glad you're here," Beverly said as they both started digging in to their meal. "I've got some news I wanted to share."

"You look happy, so I'm hoping it's good news," her mom said with a grin.

Beverly laughed. "You could always read me like a book. Yes, it's good news. I got a job!"

"You did?"

"Yes!"

"A... construction job?" her mom asked a bit more timidly.

Beverly's heart sank. Why would her mom think she had been looking for a different job? Did her mom not think anyone would hire a woman?

Granted, three jobs that had turned into zero gigs wasn't exactly a strong look, but Beverly wasn't going to be deterred.

"Yes, a construction job and a big one at that." Beverly quickly gave her mom the rundown of the job and made sure to mention that Roy, the cowboy who had hired her, was helping out. "It's perfect because I don't have to pay him any, and he's willing to listen and learn."

“That’s great, honey,” her mom said, sounding so relieved that Beverly felt ashamed for being upset with her mom just moments ago. “I am so very proud of you for making a way for the business to continue to flourish. Your father would be just as proud.”

“Thanks. Roy and his brothers are all so nice. Colton is the owner of the orchard, and he’s a bit more serious, but I think that’s because he’s the boss, and that whole freak storm we had has him a bit preoccupied with everything the orchard still needs done in addition to all of the construction. Roy... originally, it sounds like he wanted to do it all himself, but he just wanted my expert opinion in case some of the buildings need to be completely redone because of structural damage at their foundations. I’m hoping that at least one of them can just be repaired. We’ll see, though.”

“It sounds like you and Roy have a handle on thins.”

“Yes, we do. We make a good team. We’ll have to be a great team, though, if we want to get it all done before Easter.”

“Before Easter?”

“Yes. Roy wants it done before then, and I’ll do my best, but I won’t skimp. Father wouldn’t be happy about that, and neither will I. Nothing less than perfection. A happy, satisfied client is as important as the building we’re building.”

“You sound just like your father,” her mom said wistfully.

Beverly smiled soundly.

Once they finished eating, her mom retired to the couch in the living room, yawning heavily.

“Don’t you want to go upstairs to bed?” Beverly asked.

“I... If I could just have a pillow and blanket, I think I’ll crash here. If you don’t mind,” her mom said.

Beverly winced. Of course her mom would need time before she could face her bedroom and the bed she aired with her husband whenever she came home.

Beverly hurried upstairs to the lining closet and grabbed a blanket before grabbing her mom’s pillow from her bed. She

returned to her mom to see her staring at the curtained window.

“You okay, Mom?” Beverly asked quietly.

“I am,” her mom said with a small smile. “Just tired.”

“I know,” Beverly murmured. “Me too.”

“And it’s late for me, what with the time difference, the time change. Um, do wake me when you eat, though. I’ll join you for breakfast.”

“It’s going to be super early, Mom.”

“I know, but eating at the right time for where I’ve traveled to has always been a huge help for me to be able to adjust to the time difference quicker than anything else I could do.”

“You got it.”

“Plus I want to hear more about this Roy fellow,” her mom said. If she was trying to sound casual, she was failing miserably.

“There’s nothing else to tell,” Beverly said lightly.

“Hmm. If you say so, but I want to know if he’s good-looking and single... for you, dear. Naturally.”

“Mom!”

Her mom smiled sadly. “I know it’s far too soon... I don’t see myself finding anyone else, but you... I’ve always wanted to be a grandmother.”

“You need to sleep. You’re talking crazy talk.” Beverly dropped a kiss onto her mom’s forehead.

“Sure I am. You know I’m not.” Her mom hugged her. “Goodnight.”

“See you in the morning.”



Morning came, and Beverly did wake her mom. While her mom ate toast and ham-and-cheese omelets with Beverly, she

was too tired for much talking, which suited Beverly just fine.

Beverly arrived just as early as she had told Roy she would. To her surprise, his truck was already there. He was just climbing out when she parked next to him.

“Are you ready to get this part sorted this morning?” she asked him.

“You know I am,” he said. “Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.”

“The way I figure it,” she said, “let’s handle some smaller bits of work today. The order I placed isn’t quite ready yet for the next big project.”

“You got it. Order me around, and I’ll listen.”

She grinned, and they immediately got to work, replacing old wood beams with new ones and hammering in nails for shingles. Fixing windows and the doors that need new glass panes would have to wait until the order was ready.

A few hours later, Roy was sweating, and he abruptly started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” she asked.

“It’s just... Your father was the boss before you, right? and then you were partners, so this is your first chance to be the head honcho, right?”

“Yes,” she said slowly, unsure where he was going with that.

“You’re doing an amazing job. I can tell that you did as much of the teaching with the high schoolers as your father did because you’re teaching me as we go, not just telling me what to do but why and the best way to go about it, even if some of it is stuff I’ve done before.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Yeah, I’m sure that you’ve fixed a few fences before in your time here at the orchard.”

“Yes, but I don’t mind.”

“I just hope I’m not coming across as bossy,” she said in a rush.

“Well, honey,” he drawled, “you just be you.”

She sucked in a breath as her heart began to pound in her chest painfully. “What... What did you just say?”

“I said you just be you.”

Beverly slowly nodded. It was a simple enough saying to most people, but that exact phrasing, *Well, honey, you just be you*, was something she had heard so many times over the years.

“Are you all right?” Roy asked urgently. “I didn’t mean to upset you at all.”

“No. No, it’s fine. You’re fine. It’s just... That’s something my father used to always say.”

“It’s a great saying,” he said. He wrinkled his nose, and she was sure that he wished he had come up with something better to say.

It was sweet, that he wanted to comfort her, but she strove to bury down her grief and bury herself in work.

They worked on mending fences, and Roy continued to try to make her feel better. He made jokes, that she sometimes could bring herself to laugh at, and he asked her questions about Nails R Us.

She slowly opened up about her hope to expand on the business more than just with a single new hire.

“Years down the road, maybe, I want to have maybe a while team under me,” she admitted. “I don’t know if it’ll be possible, though.”

“Why not?”

She winced and glanced away before tightening her grip on her hammer and working on the fence some more before sighing.

“It’s because you’re worried others won’t hire you still, is that it?” he asked, his tone a bit tight.

She met his gaze. He was so angry on her behalf.

“It’s a concern, yes,” she admitted. “Hopefully, one day, no one will blink an eye at hiring Nails R Us for all of their construction needs, but until then... well, and even then too, it’s just one job at a time.”

“Naturally.

As they worked through the day, Beverly found herself warming up to Roy more and more. He didn’t ask too many questions about what she was thinking or feeling, just gave her plenty of space while they worked. She was grateful for that understanding and found herself growing more comfortable with his presence with each new task. She even began to believe that maybe there still was hope for a brighter future for both her mom and her own life.

Still, when he asked her about the business and how it had been when her father was still alive, she closed right back up again.

“I didn’t mean to upset you again,” Roy mumbled.

“You’re fine,” she said, echoing her words from earlier.

But she found herself wondering when she would be the one who was fine.

CHAPTER
ELEVEN

Roy couldn't help being disappointed with himself. He had made a blunder by accidentally repeating one of her father's phrases to her. Then, he had made things right, and he had made things better. She had been smiling, talking, laughing even.

And then he had to make her sorrowful all over again.

In short, despite all of the progress they had made that day, he felt like a failure. He felt absolutely terrible for having hurt her. Unintentionally, of course, but what did that matter? He had hurt her.

He decided to head over to Roses Are Red. It was the flower shop owned by Susan Green, Colton's girlfriend.

"Going to eat dinner with your mom again?" he assumed as they headed toward their vehicles at the end of the workday.

"I plan on it, yes," she murmured.

"Bright and early again tomorrow?"

"Yes, of course."

She climbed into her car and drove off. She hadn't needed her hard hat today, and he almost wished she had a cowgirl hat to wear. She would look amazing in it. Since she tended to wear a lot of flannel and T-shirts and jeans with boots, she already looked the part of a cowgirl. Not that he wanted to recruit her. Being a construction worker was in her blood.

But if he could get through to her and convert her heart... not to loving him but to loving Jesus...

Well, and maybe then, after all that... to long him...

But he was getting ahead of himself.

Or was he?

Yes, of course. First, they had a job to do.

But he also wanted to make things right by her. The pain he had used her today was inexcusable, and he didn't want the workplace environment to suffer because he had been hurtful, however unintentional.

He quickly ran to the office, just for a moment, and then he drove off and headed straight for Roses are Red and managed to snag a spot right in front of the store.

The scents of flowers greeted him as a bell chimed to herald his entrance. To his shock, the display within the store had been changed so very much from what it had been whenever he had previously come in. Then again, the store had been a different name then, still with Susan as the owner.

Susan called out, "Welcome to Roses are Red," she said cheerfully, "where all of your wedding... Oh, hi, Roy. How are you?"

He sheepishly met her gaze. Her smile reached up to her eyes as if she knew what he was doing there, which wouldn't be the case. Did she often think that single guys came in here because they messed up with the woman in their lives?

Well, that was somewhat true. Beverly, after all, was a woman in his life, even if she wasn't his girlfriend. Oh, and he had messed up.

"Hi there," he said, returning the smile and nodding politely in greeting, trying desperately to feel less sheepish. "I'm looking for some flowers."

Susan smiled wider and gestured with a grand sweep of her arm toward all of the colorful bouquets that lined the shelves. "Well, you've come to the right place! I have every kind of flower imaginable! Is there a specific occasion?"

"I, ah, I just need to buy some flowers," he said, "but I really don't know what kind."

“That’s fine. I don’t have quite the same arrangements that I used to have before. Catering toward weddings is a bit different from having flowers for any and all occasions, but I’m sure I can make you something you’ll love. What do you have in mind? Daises? Wildflowers? Something else?”

Roy shook his head, feeling absolutely lost and a bit embarrassed for not knowing anything about flowers. Thankfully, Susan didn’t seem bothered by it. She just seemed happy to help him out.

“I don’t know,” he admitted, embarrassed, feeling a bit overwhelmed by all of the choices in front of him.

Susan chuckled softly. “It’s all right.”

“It’s... I made someone sad. I want to apologize with the flowers. I... It needs to be something special. A bouquet... Nothing too her theta. She, ah, she works for me. And she... I just...”

“Roy,” Susan said softly. “Let’s talk a walk around the shop. Just because I made this in mind for weddings doesn’t mean that none of them might be suitable. If not, I can create something brand new for you, okay?”

“If it’s not too much trouble.”

“Of course not,” she assured him.

Susan pointed out different arrangements she thought would be perfect. As they walked around, Roy noticed how much love and care went into each flower arrangement. Some were simple with just a few carnations or daises while others were intricate with multiple sorts of flowers tucked together in an artful display. She also pointed out some handmade cards that went along with each bouquet.

With so many options, it was hard to choose one but eventually, Roy settled on a bright yellow mixture of lilies, daises and roses arranged elegantly in a tall vase.

“Would you like a card to go with it?”

“No,” Roy said. “I can just explain to her everything.”

“Of course. Just speak from your heart,” Susan said. “She’s sure to accept your apology... with or without the flowers even,” Susan said, giving him a look that suggested she understood just how much all of this meant to Roy.

He paid for the flowers. Roy was too worried that his comments would affect her sleep. Sure, he could wait until tomorrow to give her the flowers, but he didn’t want to do that.

Which meant he needed to go to Beverly’s house tonight.

Thankfully, when they had signed the contract for the job, she had to give her address. Maybe it was a little much that he had snapped a pic of her address before he’d left the orchard, but he really wanted to make things up to her.

Her address wasn’t too far from the flower shop, but he missed the turn and it took him five extra minutes to reach it. Roy exhaled several times after he parked, and then he came around to the passenger seat to unbuckle the vase. He hadn’t wanted to risk the flowers tipping over on the drive here.

Feeling more nervous than he probably should, Roy carried the vase to the front door and knocked.

Was there a doorbell? He saw it just as the door opened, and a woman who looked like she could be Beverly’s older sister opened the door.

Roy fumbled a bit, surprised Beverly hadn’t answered the door. “Ah, you must be Mrs. Young.”

“That I am. You are?” She eyed Roy above the tall flowers.

He cleared his throat. “I’m Roy—”

“You’re the one from Hidden Creek Orchard, the one who hired my daughter.”

“Yes, I am.”

“And those flowers?”

“They’re for Beverly.”

“Do you often buy flowers for your workers?”

“This is the first time,” he said. “Er, it’s the first time I have a worker. And yes, the first time buying flowers for a worker.”

Mrs. Young chuckled and shook her head. “I’m afraid Beverly isn’t here right now.”

“Oh.” Roy hated how much that stung. “Do you know when she’ll be back.”

“I’m not certain, actually. If you want to come in and wait a bit for her—”

“I don’t want to intrude.”

“I wouldn’t have offered if I didn’t mean it, and maybe I wouldn’t mind the company. You are working with my daughter for long hours. Maybe I want to judge your character for myself.”

“If you truly don’t mind—”

“Again, I wouldn’t have offered if I did. Now, come in already so I can shut the door. You can put the flowers on the coffee table.”

Roy did as she said as she shut the door. She walked overtook the couch and sat and then swept out her arm for him to sit on a recliner.

“This flowers are lovely,” she said.

“Do you think Beverly will like them?”

“I do.”

Mrs. Young smiled, her gaze leaving the flowers to drift over to Roy. “You know, Beverly is a wonderful girl. She’s been working since she was old enough. She... Her father and I and Beverly, we were all saving up money so that we could go on a trip of a lifetime. We were all going to go to Europe, exploring and sightseeing. I... I suppose you know the my husband passed away.”

“I do,” Roy said softly. “I’m so sorry. I hope you and Beverly will still go on that vacation.”

“Maybe one day. I think both of us might want to stay close to home, but... Did she tell you I’m a traveling nurse? It’s not the easiest of jobs, and Harry and I, my husband, we decided that we didn’t want to move around from job to job once we had Beverly. Yes, as a construction worker, he could’ve picked up and moved easily enough, I suppose, once his jobs finished up, but Beverly with her schooling... Harry and I talked many times about my just coming back and being a more traditional nurse in the canyon here, but why I lost about the traveling aspect is that I go where help is truly, desperately needed. There’s nothing like knowing you are truly making a difference in the world.”

“That sounds wonderful.”

“It is. I mean, maybe one day, we will be able to see the beaches of Italy, the rolling hills of France, see if there is hustle and bustle of London at night like one of my patients claimed. Have you ever traveled abroad?”

“I’ve never left the country,” Roy said. “I haven’t been to many states either.”

“I’ve been to all but five of them.”

“Alaska? Hawaii?”

“Hawaii was where Harry and I went for our honeymoon. As for Alaska, I did a three-month stint there. I haven’t been to Montana, South Dakota, Arkansas, Colorado, or Ohio. I suppose at this point, I might see if I can get jobs at all of them, even if only for a few weeks, but... not just yet. Beverly needs me, I think, and I... I need her. In between jobs, I would come home for a period of time, and when Beverly was in school, during the summer, we would try to survive on just Harry’s income so that I could spend most of the summer here with them. I... I just wish that I would’ve done that more. I’m not ashamed to say I have some regrets. A job... one you love... it’s a blessing, but sometimes, it does require a sacrifice.”

“I’m sorry,” he murmured.

Mrs. Young waved her hand. “It’s on me, and it’s what Harry and I settled on as the best for us, so... but every time I spend time with Beverly, I’m amazed. She very much is her father’s daughter, and I love her to pieces. She’s always had a wild imagination but was hardworking student in both grade school and high school. She knew she had to make grades if she wanted to go with her father out to his work. Her motivation... no one is motivated like she is. She’s as passionate as can be.”

“I can tell.”

“Although, I will say, there was a few times teachers would call to let us know that even though Beverly was doing well in their classes, that she would sometimes get too caught up in her own world that she was having a difficult time staying focused on her classwork.”

Roy laughed. “Maybe it was the fact that she wasn’t engaged in the material? But that she still would do well in the class is great.”

“How were you as a student?”

“I did well enough. I struggled with English the most. I didn’t like to write essays. Generally, I do better speaking than I do writing.”

“Beverly didn’t care much for English either,” Mrs. Young said. “One of my favorite memories is one time when Harry got sick. I nursed him to sleep, and it was in August. Late August. Just before school was to start again, and I asked Beverly if she wanted to go for a walk, but she said no, took my hand, and we went out to the backyard and lay down on the grass and just watched the lightning bugs dance around us in swirls of life.”

With each story Mrs. Young shared, Roy got an understanding of who Beverly was and why he felt so connected with her. He could see why she was so desperate to keep Nails R Us going, not just for her father and his memory but for herself. She and her father had shared the same goal. Beverly wanted to pursue something that gave her passion, something that made her feel alive. He could see why working

at Hidden Creek Orchard meant so much to her. It showed how despite all the struggles life threw at her, no matter how difficult things got, she still held onto hope that one day everything would work out for the best.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Once Beverly was finished with work for the day, she texted her mom to say that she was going to be a bit yet. There was something Beverly wanted to do before heading home.

She wanted to visit her father.

For the most part, Beverly didn't like cemeteries. Maybe it was because she didn't like to think about herself dying, but after what happened to her father, she didn't like the idea of losing anyone else in her life. She had even been afraid for her mom on the flight home, but it wasn't as if her mom was going to drive how many hours to get home on a rental car. That would've been crazy.

Living in fear was no way to live, but that wasn't the issue.

Beverly was consumed by grief.

There were times when she could see the sun shining, when the grief wasn't oppressive and made it feel like she couldn't breathe. The moments especially seemed to come for her when she was with Roy or anytime she was in the thick of work.

But that simple phrase Roy had said... he had had no idea the storm of emotions he had triggered within her.

She knew that he hadn't meant to upset her. He had just been trying to cheer her up, if anything, and that it had had the opposite effect certainly wasn't on him.

Beverly parked to the side of one of the small roads in the cemetery and climbed out. She hadn't been able to bring

herself back here since the day her father had been buried, and her heart ached.

This wasn't the same. A cold slab of stone. It was no replacement for her father.

She walked past several rows of graves before turning and heading to the right before reaching her father's.

Harry Young.

Beverly stopped and stared at his tombstone, silent tears streaming down her cheeks. It was a relief to finally be able to let out all of the emotions that had been bottled up inside of her since his death.

She kneeled down and ran her fingers over the letters as if this could bring him back in some way. More tears welled up in her eyes, and she started to sob, wishing that he was here so that she could tell him everything... all of the struggles, the successes, how much she loved him.

Beverly took a few moments to compose herself before laying her head against the cold stone. Taking a deep breath, she began talking, pouring out her emotions and telling him everything that has happened since he died.

"It's... I think your... Mom is back home. It's nice, but... it's not the same. We both... We miss you so much, and... It's wrong. It's..."

She blew out a shaky breath.

"Nails R Us is doing well. I was really worried there for a moment. I always knew that it was a male-dominated field, but with you being there... People saw you, and they were fine with hiring us, but now it's just me, and I'm a woman... I suppose I was a bit naive to think that I could pick up right where we left off. Three jobs, Father. Three jobs in a row I didn't get picked, all because I was a woman. Well, and possibly because of not having my own crew, too, but I do have one job. A big one. It's with Hidden Creek Orchard. You know the place. We've driven by it so many times before, especially when we worked at that park about a mile down the road from it. There was a massive freak storm, and honestly,

other places might be in need of a construction company, but I'm too busy with the orchard and all of the work it needs. It's a... Well, it's a godsend, this job. Roy Griffin hired me. He's one of the cowboys who works there. I think... I think you would like him. He's been helping me. Originally, he wanted to do all of the work himself. Can you imagine? Someone with just a bit of construction knowledge he's picked up from working on the orchard? He wanted my expert opinion for foundational damage, possible foundational damage I should say, and because there is some, he hired me outright. He wanted to lessen the burden on the other cowboys. There are seven of them in total. Two families of cowboys. The owner, Colton, and his two brothers, and then Roy and his three brothers. But, yeah, Roy's been such a huge help to me."

She trailed off. Roy really had been a help in so many ways.

But she had to be careful. He was her boss. It wouldn't be right for her to lean too much on him emotionally. It wouldn't be fair.

"Everything..." She blew out a breath and rubbed her chest that ached something fierce. "It's just that everything in my life seems so different without you. I miss you so much. Driving away from this place... Being one of the pallbearers... That might've been..."

She struggled to get the words out.

"That might've been one of the hardest things I've ever done," she whispered. "The pallbearer... everything about that day..."

She closed her eyes, taking a few deep breaths and listening to the birds calling out in the nearby trees.

A few minutes later, she opened her eyes and looked up at the sky before turning back to the grave.

"I know it's been some time since I last... I'll come more often. I will. I just... I'm doing my best. I am. I'm trying. Can't do more than that, right? I'm... I'll be okay."

She took a shaky breath and wiped away a tear before continuing.

“I’m going to do whatever it takes to keep Nails R Us going. Your dream is alive... our dream... even without you here.”

She talked until there weren’t any more words left inside of her, until all of those things that had been weighing down on her heart were released. When she was finished, Beverly wiped away the tears from her eyes before standing up and holding onto the hammer in her belt as if it was an anchor against a sea of grief. She said one last goodbye before turning around and heading back to her car, feeling lighter now that some of the weight on her heart had been lifted.

Before she entered her car, though, she spied the cross closer to the entrance of the cemetery, which made her think about the conversation with Roy about God.

That conversation had opened up something inside of her, but she hadn’t taken the time to truly reflect on it until now. There was something more to the world than just what was here on earth, a world of faith and belief that she had known existed for others but not so much herself.

For so long, she hadn’t known what to believe, but she had to admit that there was something missing, more than just her father.

She wanted to believe in all of it, in God and His Son and in Heaven, but it was hard when she felt like all of the answers were so far away, and she didn’t have anyone to guide her. Even so, she wanted to try. She wanted to pray even though she didn’t really know how to, but she hoped that maybe, just maybe, it might bring her some comfort.

Was that fair, though? To want to pray for that reason? She had been so busy running from the pain of her loss that all of this seemed almost startling yet also wondrous.

She tried to reach out to God, to find some comfort in Him. Roy had made it sound so easy, so simple, and maybe she was putting too much pressure on herself.

Somehow, though, it didn't seem natural or comfortable to her. All she really was doing was hoping and believing that He was there and listening.

The more she thought about it, the more it seemed like faith was something that you needed to build over time, prayer by prayer until it became a part of you like breathing or walking. You could never really stop building on it, no matter how much time passed or how much you moved on with your life. In a way, it felt like a journey toward home—a journey toward understanding and peace within oneself, one that Beverly wanted to take. Desperately.

She bowed her head, closed her eyes, and tried to pray again.

“God... I know You are there, but if You're listening... I want to thank you for the time I had with my father. It wasn't long enough, but... Thank You. If... If I can... I would like to pray for strength. For guidance, I think. Yes, guidance more than anything. I don't know what I need most. I... I just think I need You.”

Not knowing exactly what she was praying for or even if it would be heard, Beverly let go of all of the uncertainties that had been growing inside of her. It felt strange and awkward at first, like it was unnatural for her to do something like this. But as the words flowed out of her mouth, they carried an unfamiliar peace along with them which surprised and delighted her.

Slowly, she could feel a stirring within her heart, but she wasn't sure how to reconcile what had happened with what she believed about God and faith, but maybe prayer wasn't so strange after all. Maybe it was just another way to talk directly with God without any barriers between them. Suddenly filled with new hope, she continued praying while walking toward her car and then drove away feeling lighter than before.

It had been a step, maybe a big one, toward helping her heal, all of it, visiting her father, talking to him, and then praying to God.

The drive home seemed to be much shorter than usual, and before she knew it, Beverly was turning onto her street. As she approached the house, her mom came out onto the porch and waved. She smiled back and parked in front of the house. The sound of her car door closing echoed in the silent night air as she exited the car and stepped out into the cool evening night.

She looked up at the stars twinkling in the sky and thought about what a strange day it had been, all of that digging up old emotions and having a conversation with Roy which had opened her eyes to so many new things. She hadn't expected to take such a journey today, but here she was.

And the night wasn't over yet.

As soon as she reached the front porch, her mom gave her a warm hug, and for the first time in months, Beverly felt like things were going to get better.

"Come on inside," her mom said, holding the door open for Beverly.

She headed inside, and Beverly realized her mom had company over.

Roy.

He stood, his smile a bit strange, like he was a little uncertain about things.

"I, ah... Mrs. Young, do you mind if I talk to Beverly a moment alone?" he asked.

"Of course," her mom said. She patted Beverly's arm before heading to the kitchen.

Where her mom would be able to overhear everything.

Beverly shook her head at her mom's backside and then smiled at Roy. "What's up? Is everything okay at the orchard?"

"Oh, yes. It is. I, ah... I know I upset you earlier, and I didn't mean to. I was just... Here."

He bent down and picked up the vase on the coffee table.

"You got me flowers?" Beverly blurted.

What a stupid question. Clearly he had.

“Yes. I hope... I hope that’s not overstepping. Not now, not earlier. I just... We’re working together, but I want us to be friends...” He trailed off.

Her cheeks turned pink, maybe even red. She definitely felt heated.

Did Roy want to be more than friends?

Did she want that?

Maybe... but right now, there was the job to do. And she was still trying to figure out her relationship with God. And handling her grief over losing her father.

Once she knew for certain who she was, then she could figure out where exactly she stood with God.

With Roy.

And with herself.

CHAPTER
THIRTEEN

Roy clasped his hands behind his back and rocked onto his heels. He didn't know what Beverly had been up to, but she seemed almost more at peace than he had seen her before.

Or maybe he was hoping that was the case.

Either way, she was staring at the flowers with such intensity that he wondered if she was actually seeing them.

"Do you like them? Is this overstepping? I'm sorry if I..."

"No! I mean yes!" Beverly laughed and shook her head as she touched her forehead. "Yes, I like them. I love them even, but no, this isn't overstepping. It's sweet of you, but I'm sorry if you felt like you had to make some kind of grand gesture."

"This is hardly a grand gesture," he protested as he held out the vase to her.

She accepted the flowers, and their fingers brushed. She looked up at him shyly, and he grinned at her.

"I..." She licked her lips and then buried her nose into the flowers. "They smell so nice. Thank you."

"Of course. I got them from Roses Are Red."

"Isn't that shop for wedding flowers?"

"Now, yes, but Susan, the one, she's dating Colton, and she helped me with the flowers."

"She did a great job. Thank you."

He rubbed the back of his neck. "So, if you're okay..."

“Why don’t you stay for dinner?” Mrs. Young called from the kitchen. “Did you eat yet?”

“Ah, no, I didn’t,” Roy said, “but I don’t want to intrude —”

“How is it intruding when you’re invited?” Mrs. Young asked, reentering the living room. “Did you eat, honey?” she asked her daughter.

“No. I...” Beverly’s expression changed slightly, and there was a flicker of sadness or maybe resignation that crossed over her dainty features. “I visited Father’s grave.”

“Oh, honey.” Her mom crossed over to her and rubbed her arm. “You didn’t have to do that alone. I would’ve gone with you.”

“It’s all right,” Beverly murmured.

Roy couldn’t help feeling a little out of place, like this was something the two of them should be discussing when he wasn’t there.

Mrs. Young smiled and squeezed Beverly’s shoulder before turning back to Roy. “So, dinner?”

“Yes, I’d love that,” Roy said.

“Wonderful! What do you like to eat? We’ll order some food, unless it seems like the food will take too long. I’m not sure what all we have to make.”

“There are some frozen dinner meals or pizzas,” Beverly said.

“We should have something fresh for our guest, though, don’t you think? Do you like Mexican food?” Mrs. Young asked Roy, gesturing for them to sit down in the living room. She and her daughter claimed the couch.

Roy moved over to a recliner. “I’ll honestly eat anything. If you’re in the mood for Mexican, that’s fine with me.”

She asked him which Mexican place had the best food, and he suggested *Mis Amigos Restaurante*. As soon as he brought up their menu on his phone and Mrs. Young glanced over it,

she agreed, and she called up and placed an order she would have to be picked up.

“A half hour isn’t too bad, right?” Mrs. Young asked.

Roy and Beverly both nodded.

“Great. I’ll be here to pick it up. Thank you.” Mrs. Young hung up and beamed at them. “Let’s sit and talk way. So, Roy, how long have you been at Hidden Creek Orchard?”

“For a long while,” he said with a laugh. “My brothers and I all work there.”

“How does that go?”

“Brothers working together? It’s not the bad. We aren’t kids who fight over stupid things, not anymore.” He laughed some more.

“You and your brothers probably never fought,” Beverly said.

He pointed a finger at her. “Then we have you fooled. All brother fight from time to time. It’s just something brothers do. It used to drive our parents nuts. We would poke each other until we would be rolling around. You would’ve thought we wanted to become professional wrestling.”

“Or become martial artists?” Beverly suggested.

“There is a dojo in the canyon, isn’t there?” he asked. “Run by a cowboy, I think. I never really thought about it, but it could be fun. Would you ever join?”

“I don’t know. I tend to work long hours, into the night. All day until it’s too dark to see, and then it’s picking up orders for supplies... If I could fit it into my schedule, I might be convinced to at least check it out.”

“You two keep on talking,” Mrs. Young said. “I’m going to head out and get the food. Be back in a jiffy!”

She breezed out the door, and Roy watched Beverly as she touched one of the leaves of the flowers.

“How was it?” he asked quietly.

“Going to visit the grave?”

He nodded.

Beverly kept her gaze on the flowers. “I talked to him,” she murmured. “My father. Would that be considered praying? Talking to someone who is dead?”

“I consider praying talking to God, but you can definitely talk to your father.”

“Do you think he heard me?”

“I like to think so, yes.”

“Have you lost anyone close to you?” she asked.

“All of my grandparents, unfortunately.” He grimaced. “I was close with them.”

“Was,” she repeated soulfully.

“I still feel like I am. It’s just a different kind of closeness.”

“Can we...” She looked away. “I tried to pray. For real. Talking to God. I used to pray when I was younger, mostly for things I wanted, which now... It feels wrong to just pray for wants.”

“There’s nothing wrong with asking God for anything.”

“Yes, but there has to be more to it.”

“There are different kinds of prayer, yes. Adoration... Supplication, asking God for something, is probably the most common form of prayer, so you don’t need to feel guilty over it.”

“That’s good,” she murmured.

“Prayers of thanksgiving... pretty self-explanatory.”

“Yes.” She smiled and shook her head. “Adoration would be...”

“Praising God.”

“Of course,” she murmured.

“There’s confessing,” he said, “and also intercession, when you pray on the behalf of someone else.”

“I see,” she murmured. “Does it matter if you don’t do the formal prayers?”

“A prayer just has to come from the heart,” he said. “It doesn’t even have to be spoken aloud. God knows You. He loves You. He knows what you are thinking, feeling. He can read your heart.”

She slowly nodded, her gaze on the coffee table rather than his face. Clearly, she was mulling all of this over.

Growing up surrounded by such strong religious influences had left Roy with a deep-seated belief in faith and an understanding that his life should be centered around worshipping God. He believed that taking care of others was one of the most important things anyone could do. He had always found solace in prayer, comfort in Scripture, and joy in singing hymns on Sundays with his family.

And he wanted to help bring Beverly to the church if he could.

“Does this help any?” he asked gently.

“I think. It’s just... It almost feels like it’s cheating,” she blurted out.

“How so?” he asked, confused, furrowing his brow.

“To turn to Him now...”

“When you need Him most?” he asked softly.

“I... You might be right.”

“And with Easter coming up... there’s no better time to join the church.”

He hoped he didn’t sound too eager, that he wasn’t pushing her too hard too quickly.

But before she could answer, the door opened. Mrs. Young had returned.

Beverly jumped up and hurried to the kitchen. She returned with plates and cans of Cola for them, and they started to split up the food Mrs. Young had bought them. The warm aroma of the egg rolls, chicken fried rice and beef chow mein filled the room as they began to eat.

Mrs. Young took over the conversation, talking to Roy about the orchard and his goals.

Beverly chimed in here and there with stories. Mrs. Young had more than a few to share herself, and they laughed and enjoyed themselves.

Roy watched Beverly with admiration as she laughed and joked along with her mom, Beverly's face aglow with happiness. He thought back to their conversation earlier and smiled inwardly—he could tell that whatever she had been seeking before was beginning to take shape. He hoped he would be able to help her find it fully one day soon, whatever it was that she needed.

Her mom finished eating first and went upstairs to retire.

"I'm still a little jet lagged yet," she claimed, although he had to wonder because of the meaningful look she gave her daughter before heading upstairs.

Now that they were alone again, Roy wondered if he could redirect the conversation back to faith.

"I suppose you're used to all of the manual labor," Beverly said.

"Oh, I'm definitely sorer than normal," he said with a laugh. "It's amazing how strong you have to be in construction."

"Definitely. I'm going to have to use more pulleys than before to help with some of the pieces, but I have a contract with a company for if we need to move any super heavy pieces that require machinery. I just... I hope to not have to because the ground is still so wet yet."

"No all of the water from the storm has soaked into the soil yet. I know. It's crazy."

“Oh, kids,” Mrs. Young called down. “There’s a basket in the kitchen, Beverly. Go ahead and enjoy.”

“Thanks, Mom,” Beverly called with a laugh. “Because kids can be in their twenties.” She shook her head.

“I think to moms, her kids are always kids.”

“He’s right,” Mrs. Young called.

“Mom! Go to sleep!”

“Yes, Mom,” Mrs. Young teased, and they all laughed.

“I’ll go bring out the basket,” Beverly said.

She left and came back with a basket covered with a red and white checkered cloth. When she removed the cloth, she revealed cookies.

Roy helped himself to one. Oatmeal raisin cookies with white chocolate chips. It was delicious. he had never had a combination like that before.

“So good,” Beverly said.

“You should ask your mom for the recipe,” he said.

“So I can make more of them for you?”

“So I can then get the recipe from you.” He grinned.

Beverly laughed. “Or you could ask her yourself.”

“That is an option. Not a family recipe then?”

“Not as far as I know.”

“It’s a recipe I got from a coworker,” her mom said.

“Do you just want to come down and join us, Mom?” Beverly asked.

“No, no. I’ll sleep now.”

“Sure she will.” Beverly playfully rolled her eyes.

They talked a little longer until Roy had to leave. He was getting too worn out from all of the construction work. The hours were longer than normal, and he needed the sleep.

Beverly walked him to the door. “Thank you for coming over. And for the flowers.”

“Of course. It was my pleasure.” He grinned at her, wanting to say something more, but there would be time for that later.

Beverly was clearly at a crossroads in her life, and he would help her once she made up her mind. He hoped to guide her to the church, yes, but the choice had to be hers.

No matter what she decided, he would be there for her, as a shoulder to cry on, to support her.

In any way that she needed him, he would be there for her.

He had figured that Colton had been so head over heels for Susan from the start because of their history. There wasn't any such history between Roy and Beverly, but he definitely felt a connection, and he couldn't imagine her not being a part of his life.

As a friend at the very least.

But hopefully as something more.

CHAPTER
FOURTEEN

Sighing almost happily for once, Beverly shut the door behind Roy. She smiled to herself and then headed over to the table to put away the leftover Mexican food when she heard footsteps on the stairs.

“Couldn’t sleep because you were eavesdropping?” Beverly teased her mom.

“I wasn’t listening... Well, not intentionally. You two were quiet but not quiet enough.”

Her mom said nothing and pitched in with putting the food away. Beverly went to bring the cookies back into the kitchen too, but her mom grabbed one first.

Once the food was all away, Beverly hesitated near the stairs before sitting next to her mom on the couch.

“You came down because you want to talk, I take it.”

“If you want to. I know how hard you’re working, and it is hard work. Your father would often fall asleep when we would talk after shifts... There were times when I would fall asleep too. We were like an old married couple.” Her mom smiled wistful.

“Just say what’s on your mind,” Beverly murmured, figuring her mom wanted to talk about her husband some more.

Her mom eyed the vase. “Such beautiful flowers.” She grinned.

“I want to talk about Roy.”

Beverly blinked. “What about him?” she asked cautiously.

Her mom gave her a look that said *you know what I’m talking about*. “Roy... he seems like a good one.” She paused. “What do you think of him?” her mom asked finally, her voice soft and hesitant.

Beverly bit her lower lip for a moment before answering. “I... I don’t know yet,” she admitted honestly.

Her mom nodded in understanding before patting Beverly’s hand in support. “Give it time,” she said gently. “He’s kind, and he clearly cares for you deeply. He wants to be your friend... That may not seem like much now, but it might mean more when you find yourself again.”

Beverly felt a wave of emotions wash over her, and she nodded before looking away to hide the tears in her eyes. She knew what her mother was trying to say, that friendship could turn into something more if it was meant to be. It seemed like such a distant possibility with all that had happened in the past few weeks, but maybe someday soon, she might be ready for something new and exciting in life.

“Even if you two only remain friends,” her mom continues, “the two of you make a good team.” Her mom put her hand on Beverly’s arm and gave it a light squeeze. “Sometimes when life throws us curve balls, it takes time to figure out how we fit into each other’s lives in more than just a work capacity. Roy is patient and kind enough to wait until you’re ready. That’s not something every man will do.”

Beverly was stunned by this turn of events. She’d expected her mother to be against the idea of her getting close with anyone let alone Roy specifically, but here she was, supporting it.

“Thanks, Mom,” Beverly said quietly.

Her mom smiled softly and hugged Beverly gently.

“It’s just... I don’t know. I haven’t really been on many dates ever. I’ve always been so work oriented, and the few guys I dated, they didn’t understand why I would want to work in construction. They thought I was just going it for my father,

not because I truly wanted to do it, but here comes Roy, hiring me within blinking. But... that's just it. I work for him. The job will end eventually."

"You two can remain friends at the very least."

Beverly swallowed hard. "Yes, friends," she said, surprised by the bitterness in her voice.

"What's wrong, honey? Am I worn? I think I see something brewing between you two, but it's possible I just might want to see that. I don't want you to be alone."

"Mom, I have you," Beverly protested.

"Yes, but I won't live forever," her mom said softly.

"Can we not talk about that?" Beverly asked stiffly.

The last thing she wanted to think about was her mom dying anytime soon.

"I'm sorry, honey," her mom said.

"It's just... I don't want to think about losing you, and the thought of letting someone in... as more than a friend potentially... I don't want to get hurt again."

"I don't think Roy would hurt you."

"Yes, I know. I don't either... but the others I work... it wouldn't be easy to find a guy who is willing to tolerate all of that, and there are days when I come home and don't even eat dinner and just go to bed. I wouldn't even be up for a phone call. I'm talking after this job, after I've moved on..."

"Maybe you shouldn't focus on the negatives so much and focus on the positives."

"Mom..." Beverly bit her lower lip. "Can we talk some?"

"Of course. We can talk about anything you want?"

"You and Dad... you both believed in God, but we never really went to church much growing up."

Her mom sighed. "That's true," she said. "I... Let me tell you about something that happened to me just before your father died."

Beverly shifted, curling her legs beneath her as she settled in to listen to her mom's tale.

“There was a patient who was dying. Maybe five years older than me. She came from a very wealthy family. Her parents died young. She never married, had no siblings. She had no one really. Just her money. She hadn't trusted much of anyone because she thought everyone only ever wanted something from her. I asked if she wanted the chaplain to come in and talk to her, and she started to cry. She had never prayed before, and she was afraid of dying, and she thought that if she prayed now, God wouldn't believe her or accept her because it was only because of fear.”

Beverly said nothing, but she could understand where the woman in the story was coming from.

“I asked her again about the chaplain, and she said yes, but she wanted me to stay in the room. The three of us talked, although I intended at first to just be there for moral but silent support. It... During her stay in the hospital, this woman had been so upset and afraid. It made her condition worse, but after the three of us talked, she calmed right down, and she was at peace. I could tell something profound had changed within her, and she died in her sleep the night. She... I told her that I would watch mass with her on TV the next morning because it was a Sunday. She was removed from the room before then, but I did go to her room before another patient came in and watched mass. I... I might go on Sunday here. I might not. I don't know, but I do think God is real. I think prayer is important. I'm not sure if I've impressed that on you enough, but maybe... We always would go for Christmas and Easter... Your father would take you?”

When Beverly had been in grade school, her mom would try to take off some time during those major holidays in addition to the summer to spend time with the family. Once she hit high school and worked more with her father, her mom wasn't always able to get time off during the holidays. Health care professionals were in demand every day of the calendar year, after all.

“Not so much for the past few years,” Beverly admitted in a low murmur. “I... I would say I believe in God, but I didn’t really do much of anything with that belief.” She paused. “Roy’s talked to me about God. he’s a firm believer. Was raised that way.”

“Does it bother you that he’s a strong believer? Does he go to church?”

“I’m sure he does. No, it doesn’t bother me. Talking to him about God and prayer... it makes me question myself.”

“In a good way?”

“I... That woman you told me about... Would it be wrong of me to turn to God because of grief? Because I’m hurting?”

“I don’t think God cares at all why you turn to Him, so long as you turn to Him at all,” her mom said. “If you want to go to church with me on Sunday, I would love that. If you would rather go with Roy—”

“We can go together,” Beverly said.

“Maybe all three of us.” Her mom smiled and then yawned. “I’m off to bed, but we can talk more about this soon, okay?”

“Sure, Mom. I love you.”

“Love you too. Don’t stay up too late.”

Beverly watched her mom go before sighing and flopping back against the couch cushions with a slight smile on her face. She might not know what lay ahead with Roy yet, but she was thankful for the chance to find out, even if it wasn’t quite in the way either of them might have expected it to be.



Beverly lay in bed that night and started to drift off to sleep. Suddenly, her father appeared in her dream. He was dressed in his Sunday best, wearing the same starched shirt, tie, and suit he had last worn to church the last time they had gone to Christmas mass together as a family. His smile was gentle and

understanding as he stood beside the bed and held out his hand to her. He gestured for her to take it, and as soon as she did so, they were surrounded by a light so white and pure it almost hurt her eyes.

He guided them through the light until they were standing on a grassy hillside overlooking a small town with steepled churches dotting the landscape like stars against an inky sky. Beverly smiled at how peaceful everything seemed from up there, how protected somehow. The warmth of her father's hand didn't leave hers even for a moment. She could feel strength radiating from him, strength that filled her heart with hope and gave her courage despite any fears.

Neither of them said anything, but there was nothing that needed to be said. She stared into her father's eyes. His arms wrapped around her, and she sobbed against his chest, soaking his shirt. She never expected to feel his arms around her again.

When she drew back and wiped her eyes, she realized the location around them had changed. They were now in the middle of a large open field on a sunny day, with wildflowers blooming everywhere around her. The flowers were such an array of beautiful colors—purples, blues, yellows, pinks—that Beverly could scarcely believe it was real.

It wasn't real, though. She knew it wasn't. Her father was dead, yet here he was.

A gift. This dream was a gift.

As she took it all in and just enjoyed being among nature's beauty, she heard a familiar laugh.

“What's so funny?” she asked him and then wrinkled her nose.

Even if this was only a dream, that was the question she had for her father?

She hugged him tightly, and he laughed again.

“Can you talk?” she asked.

“I can.”

He bent down, and she closed her eyes as he kissed her forehead. When she opened her eyes, he was gone, and she was once again somewhere else, now standing in an open meadow, the sky above filled with bright stars and a full moon on the horizon.

Almost frantic, she glanced all around and sighed with relief when she saw that her father was there as well, looking strong and content. He wore a plain white shirt and beige pants but no shoes, like he was connected to the earth beneath him.

He held out his hand for Beverly to take, and she did without any hesitation. As they began to walk together through the tall, golden grasses of the meadow, her father began to tell her stories, stories of faith and hope too. Everywhere they went, he pointed out beauty in nature that reflected God's glory: lush trees with vibrant leaves that provided shade and shelter, delicate wildflowers that added tiny splashes of color to otherwise barren patches of soil, peaceful streams filled with darting fish, even animals large and small that shared their space within this world without fear.

"Father... does this mean you're in Heaven? Why didn't... How... Your faith..."

"Each one comes to their faith in their own time, in their own way. My path wasn't the same as yours. Maybe I should have shared more with you, but you are finally on your way. I knew you would always spread your wings. You can soar to Heaven. You'll see me again."

"Not just in dreams?"

"Not just in dreams."

"How do I... This might just be a dream and nothing more."

"Does it matter? Faith is what matters. Faith and love. Dream or not, you know I love you."

Beverly clung to him again, crying once more, and when she woke, she was still crying.

CHAPTER
FIFTEEN

The days turned into weeks which passed on by quickly, almost too quickly. It was almost time for Easter, and with Beverly being as resourceful as she was, she had been able to come up with solutions to the foundational issues in two of the buildings so neither had to be torn down and built from scratch.

In fact, tomorrow would be their last day working together.

And Easter was four days away.

He didn't want to let her go. She had gone to mass on one Sunday that he had seen with her mom. He had hoped to talk to her afterward, but Jack diverted his attention, and when he had looked around for her again, he hadn't seen her. She hadn't been the next Sunday, and while they talked about God a little bit, most of the time, they would speak about work or else got to know each other a little more.

A lot of times, they would eat lunch together, but she often would just eat with her mother, so he would with his brothers or with the Spanglers, all of them. Every time, though, the cowboys would all tease him about Beverly. He didn't care, didn't mind at all.

Every night he would sit back and look at all the progress they had made since morning. It gave him immense satisfaction knowing that what once was broken was now being restored back to its original state or, better yet, an improved version of its former glory!

But the thought of saying goodbye to her tomorrow... No. No, he had to figure something out.

Once lunchtime rolled around, he nudged his elbow toward Beverly. "Let's take a break."

"We're so close." Her eyes danced.

"Yes, but we need to eat to keep up our strength."

She laughed. "If you insist, Boss Man."

"I do." He grinned and rubbed his hands together. "I made some arrangements with Colton. He's got a great campfire spot where we can sit outside and enjoy the breeze while we enjoy our lunch."

Beverly smiled and nodded, and he hoped she was glad that he had put such care into planning their afternoon together. He wanted to be thoughtful without being too over the top.

He quickly hurried to the office to get the food he had gotten for them both, and then he returned to Beverly. They headed to the remote area near the edge of the orchard.

When they arrived, Beverly looked all around, her jaw dropped. "I don't remember being here before during the tour!"

"The storm didn't affect here much at all, somehow," he explained.

They laid out a blanket, and he placed their food onto it: a small picnic of fruit, cheese and crackers, and some homemade sandwiches.

Beverly's eyes lit up. "This looks delicious! You didn't have to go all out."

He shrugged. "I wanted it to be special."

She smiled as she ate her sandwich.

He took a bite of his. The soft bread was full of flavor, and the vegetables inside were crunchy and fresh. He'd made several different kinds of sandwiches since he didn't know which one she liked best.

Then, he dug out the macaroons that he had made late last night.

“These are delicious,” she said after taking a bite. “How did you make these?”

He laughed. “It’s a secret recipe.”

Beverly nodded and raised her eyebrows as if to say, “I won’t ask again.”

She then glanced around at the orchard and back to him before saying in a soft voice, “This is so peaceful... It almost feels like... Heaven.”

He smiled and looked down at his food before picking up an apple. He handed it to her. “Here,” he said with a slight chuckle. “Eat some of Heaven’s bounty.”

Beverly smiled and accepted the apple, but then she paused for a moment before looking back up at him with an inquisitive look.

“What?” he asked with a smile.

“Nothing,” she murmured, returning the smile. She bit her lower lip and then asked, “It’s all right to joke around like that?”

“It is.”

“I’ve dreamed about my father a few times. Have you? About your grandparents, I mean.”

“I have,” he said simply.

She smiled again. “Thank you for this. It’s perfect.”

They ate slowly, not wanting it to end so soon. It felt like they were the only two in the world—just them and their food, surrounded by nature’s beauty. Soon enough, though, their plates were empty.

Before she could suggest that they get back to work, he finally worked up the nerve to ask her a question that had been on his mind since they started working together.

“Beverly, what are your dreams?” he said quietly “What do you want to do with your life?”

He could see in her eyes that she had been surprised by the juxtaposition of this question against the backdrop of their casual picnic in the orchard.

“My dream is all tied the business,” she said. “I want Nails R Us to be as successful as possible. It used to be my father’s and my dream. Now, it’s just mine. It isn’t a father and daughter company anymore, and I want to grow it over time.”

“Anything else?” he asked.

A part of him was hoping she would say something about having someone special one day... someone who will be there for her no matter what...

But he wasn’t surprised when she just shrugged. After his mother’s father had passed away, a girl had tried towrope hints that she was interested in dating Roy. He hadn’t wanted to get close to anyone then, not wanting to then lose them. It seemed too risky. As far as he knew, she had started dating someone else and was married with a kid on the way.

Beverly might very well feel the same, which was why he wasn’t about to refer to this picnic as a date.

“Well, I was thinking... since we’re finishing a little early... I thought maybe I could hire you for one more task.”

Beverly lifted her eyebrows. “What are you considering?”

“Do you see that area to the right? I thought that maybe we could make a grotto there or something for Easter. We could change it up for Christmas time and maybe do something there in the summer... Just a thought.”

“Did you talk to Colton about this?” she asked.

Roy made a face. “I wanted it to be a surprise.”

She made a face right back at him. “With the orchard being his... It would have to be a surprise for everyone else.”

“You’re right,” he admitted.

“But I do like the idea,” she said slowly. “Let’s go talk to Colton and see what he thinks.”

Roy nodded and whipped out his phone. He put the call on speaker.

“Hey, Colton, you by any of the others right now?”

“I am. Is something wrong?”

“No, I just wanted to talk to you in private without having to actually see you,” Roy joked.

“Yeah, yeah. Give me a sec. Okay, what’s up?”

“So, and I would foot this, so don’t worry about the price, but I wanted to surprise everyone by connecting a small part of the orchard into a grotto. For now, it would be Easter-themed, but we could switch it up for summer and for Christmas, different holidays. What do you think?”

“I love that idea. Where exactly?”

Roy explained, and Colton agreed.

“Not a lot of time before Easter,” Colton pointed out.

“Oh, we can get it done,” Beverly spoke up. “We’ll be finished with the last of the work on the orchard tomorrow. Outside of the grotto. I can come up with some ideas to present to you—”

“Just talk to Roy about it,” Colton said, “so I can be surprised some. I love this idea. Maybe talk to Susan some if you want flowers.”

“We will,” Roy said. He hung up. “See? All above board.”

Beverly smiled, her eyes glittering in the afternoon sun. “Good. Now, what about you?” she asked. “What are your dreams?”

Roy felt his heart skip a beat, and he froze. He hadn’t expected the question, and he hadn’t ever been asked this question before. He wasn’t sure how to answer it.

Beverly looked at him with such intensity that he almost couldn’t look away. He could tell she was hoping for an honest

answer.

Truthfully, he hadn't really thought about his dreams. All he'd done was focus on the orchard, even before it had been Colton's. Eventually, he would like a wife and a family, but he didn't think he should mention that to her.

All the things he wanted seemed so small compared to what she was going through now, and her dream of making Nails R Us successful meant so much more than anything else in his life.

"I...uh..." he stumbled, unsure of how to answer.

For a moment, he felt like she could see right through him, as though she already knew that he was still trying to figure out what he wanted for himself.

Finally, Roy managed to find something to say. "I guess I don't have any grand dreams," he said honestly. "Just a few little things here and there."

In truth, these "little things" were more like wishes. He wanted to ask her out. Maybe help with her dreams with her company if he could. Get a house one day. Start a family.

Okay, so many not all of those were small things.

For a moment, he considered asking her out on a date, but then she spoke again,

"I'm scared of losing my mom," she said softly. "I don't have many friends, and I've never felt so alone before."

Roy suddenly realized that all of his dreams didn't matter. All that mattered was being there for her and helping her get through this tough time in life.

"You have at least one friend in me," he said sincerely.

Her smile was small. "Sure, but you won't even share your dreams with me. This is just a business relationship."

"You want me to go into more details? All right." He blew out a breath. "Because this isn't... We really are friends, Beverly. Your question just threw me off guard."

She tilted her head to the side. “You asked me about my dream.”

“I know, and turnaround is fair play so... I want to be successful. yes, I know I’m a cowboy so there’s not real success in my line of work, but I want to do my work with a smile on my face and not let anyone down. I want to make a name for myself. How exactly, I don’t know yet, but more than all of that, I want to help others in some way.” He wrinkled his nose. I know it sounds cheesy, but I really do think that helping other people should be one of the main goals of life. It’s what gives our lives meaning and purpose.”

He glanced at Beverly, wondering if she found his words too grandiose or silly. To his relief, though, she just smiled softly and nodded in agreement.

“That’s beautiful,” she said quietly. “I’m glad you have such strong values about helping others. You’ve already helped me so much, far more than just giving me a chance with all of the work here at the orchard. And I’m sorry. I know we’re friends. I just... The thought of losing anyone... It’s scary. The reason why I don’t have a lot of friends is because of my work schedule. It’s just not... It’s not a priority, and I’m so glad my mom is back home, but... She’s going to go back to work eventually, maybe in the canyon, maybe elsewhere... and I’ll be alone. I just... I don’t feel like I have anyone right now who understands me completely.” She looked away then, as though embarrassed.

“I am here for you,” he said firmly. “As a friend. I’m not going anywhere, even after I run out of jobs for you to do here at the orchard with me.”

Beverly laughed softly. “I’m glad we’re friends.”

He grinned at her, but he couldn’t help being a little disappointed in himself for not asking her out.

Roy didn’t just want to be her friend.

He wanted to be her boyfriend.

CHAPTER
SIXTEEN

Since Beverly was sticking around a little longer, she didn't mind that she and Roy took a longer lunch break. They had to discuss what precisely Roy had in mind for the grotto, after all.

Roy said he would handle getting all of the material they needed, and they finished up the work for that night, and then by the next night, the first major project was finished.

"Tomorrow, bright and early, we'll get to work on the grotto," she said. "I'm excited for the project."

"Me too." Roy beamed at her.

"Ah, if you don't mind... if this isn't... Never mind. it's none of my business."

"You can go ahead and ask me anything," Roy assured her.

"I was just wondering how you can afford to do the grotto, the materials, hiring me..."

"I don't have a lot of hobbies," he said. "I just save up what I can outside of bills, my apartment, food... It doesn't take a lot to make me happy."

"No hobbies?"

"I love to go fishing. My dad has a boat, so all we have to do is buy lure."

"Do you and your bothers all love to fish?"

"Yes, all of us. Have you ever gone?"

“My father took me once. I didn’t... We didn’t catch anything. I wouldn’t stop talking long enough for us to get any nibbles. My father said that I scared all of the fish away.”

“It doesn’t have to be completely silent for fish to bite, but the steadier your hand...”

“I was maybe six at the time, so I didn’t have as steady a hand as I do now.”

“You have to be steady-handed when you’re wielding that hammer of yours.”

They laughed.

“Well, the project’s all done,” he said. “How about—”

“It’s not, though. Not until tomorrow. Can we get all of the material to be finished tomorrow?”

“I hope so,” he said.

“All right. Good. Man, am I beat. I’m going to hit the hay early. Maybe after a bath. Tomorrow then?”

“Yes, of course.”



After the completion of a huge project like this one, Beverly and her father would usually go out for a nice steak dinner and get three desserts to split. Then they would collapse into bed, exhausted.

This time, she was too exhausted to eat anything at all and just opted for the bath as she had told Roy and then bed. It wasn’t until she shut her eyes that she recalled that she had cut off Roy when he had been about to ask her something. Maybe dinner. She hoped he enjoyed a hearty meal with his brothers or maybe his parents or his entire family. He had worked as hard as she had, and without his help, she wouldn’t be halfway done with that project.

And now she had a new one in the morning. She didn’t even have to worry about going out and landing another one

yet.

Life was good.



As soon as Beverly arrived at the orchard the next morning, just like always, Roy was there, leaning against his truck, waiting on her.

“You make me feel like I’m late all the time,” she complained good-naturedly as she climbed out of her car.

“That’s not the case at all,” he assured her. “I brought most of the material over to the spot already. Just this here left.”

They split the rest of the stuff and carried it on over.

“What do you think about what I picked out?” he asked eagerly.

“Oh, it’s going to look great,” she assured him.

“I thought all of the stones would help to make like a tomb almost, or at least a stone arch that we can fill in the back of.”

“I have the plaster ready to mix for that,” she said. “And the cross and the statue of Mary is a great touch. Do... Prayer is talking to God, so then when you talk to Mary... Do you talk to her?”

“I do. It’s asking for her to intercede for me on my behalf.”

“So she’ll pray for you then?”

“Yes, or go to her Son.”

“I see.” Beverly wrinkled her nose. “My father wasn’t the most religious, like I mentioned before, but actually... Easter was his favorite holiday. He loved painting eggs and eating ham... but he also would, every year, have a tiny planter that he would plant perennials in. He had a whole collection of them out back, and he grew an entire garden out of them because each year, they would come back bigger and bigger until they had to be transplanted into the yard.”

“Plants, especially perennials, are a great symbol of Easter.”

“To celebrate when Jesus rose from the dead.” She blew out a breath. “You really believe we’ll go to Heaven.”

“I do.”

“My father...”

“He helped a lot of people.”

“Yes, but shouldn’t you go to church?”

“I think Jesus is able to reach into hearts and minds. It’s not for any of us to say yes or no to that question, but...”

Beverly slowly nodded. “I should intercede for my father and pray for him.”

“That can never hurt,” Roy said softly.

She blinked back sudden tears. “It’s bittersweet,” she murmured, “having an Easter project.”

CHAPTER
SEVENTEEN

When lunchtime rolled around, Roy stretched his back.

“Take a break,” he said. “I’m going to head out and get us lunch.”

“You really don’t have to keep buying me lunch,” Beverly protested.

“I want to,” he said. “It’s a perk of the job.”

“Not all bosses do that for construction workers.”

“Well, I do. You should be used to that by now.”

She grinned. “Thank you. I do appreciate it.”

“Of course. Just don’t work while I’m gone.”

“Sure...”

He laughed and shook his head as he turned around and headed to the parking lot. If he knew Beverly, which he did, she was going to keep on working despite what he had said.

Roy drove downtown to the center of Shooting Star Canyon. He wasn’t sure what he was in the mood for today. Eventually, he found a parking spot and got out and walked up the block, bypassing a few laces that were far too busy in favor of a deli.

There was a line, a relatively short one, though, and he stood behind an older man who was on his cell.

“I’m telling you , this construction company I hired is terrible. Just terrible! They’re dragging their feet, and not one

of them, not a single one, is a hard worker. They're trying to make this job take a lot longer than it has to, and I know it's because they're trying to milk more money out of me. It's just not right. I'm fit to be tied, and... I'm ready to fire them, but I'm afraid they would do something to ruin the entire thing so I'm stuck. Yeah, well, you know how they say they don't make things like they used to? They sure don't make workers like they used to either. It's a shame. A real shame. I just... I'm up to order. I'll call you back." The man hung up.

"What can I get you, Mr. Davis?" the woman behind the counter asked him with a smile.

"The usual," he grunted.

"You got it!"

She got to work making his sandwich, got him a fountain drink, and a cookie. He thanked her and paid, and now it was Roy's turn.

"What can I get for you?" she asked, still smiling.

"Ah..." Roy had been so busy listening to the man's grumbling that he hadn't paid attention to the menu. "Let's do two specials with drinks and cookies."

"Sure thing!"

Three minutes later, Roy walked out of there. He glanced up and down the sidewalk and realized he was looking for that older man, but he was long gone. There was something about that older man and the way he talked about the construction workers that really fired Roy up.



Despite feeling upset earlier with that man, Roy was all smiles when he approached Beverly. The stone path she had started was really coming along, the stones artistically arranged with large ones in the center and smaller ones all around.

"Looking good, but you know what looks better? These specialty sandwiches."

“Thank you! I’m starved!”

They sat down on the grass and dug in. Roy kept telling himself not to say anything, but he couldn’t help himself.

“There was a man at the deli in line in front of me. He was complaining about the construction company he hired, saying they were being slow on purpose to milk more money, and it just...”

Beverly shrugged. “Sometimes, that does happen,” she said. “I would never. My father would never, but a few times, we had been hired to finish jobs other companies started because of similar issues.”

“That’s despicable.”

She made a face. “I know. They give construction companies a bad name.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not too sure I would like to work for Mr. Davis.”

“Oh, I’ll never work for him,” she said. “He refused to hire me when I was looking for a job before this one opened up.”

“Refused? Why?”

“I got the impression he didn’t want to work with a woman. He passed over me because it would have been too much of a strain for a young girl.”

“A young girl? He didn’t really call you that, did he?”

“Oh, yes, he did.”

Roy couldn’t be more furious. He jumped to his feet. “That’s ridiculous and insulting.”

“It’s all right,” Beverly murmured.

“No, it isn’t.”

“It’s possible the construction company ran into some snags outside of their control that is making the project take longer, or maybe he is right, but either way, the man isn’t someone I will ever work for. End of story. I’m thrilled to have the jobs here, and since Nails R Us is my company, I can pick

and choose which jobs I accept, and I won't ever accept one from Mr. Davis or anyone else like him."

"Good, but..."

"It is what it is. Others won't want to hire me for this reason or that. I won't get every job, especially since I'm, for now at least, a one-woman crew."

"The high schoolers—"

"Some won't like that, but I... I'm oddly confident. Everything is going to work out."

"It will," he said firmly.

And he prayed right then and there that that would be the case for her.

CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN

Beverly couldn't be happier with how the grotto was coming along. She had made a massive construction that appeared to be almost like a hollowed-out boulder with stone and plaster. She finished painting it earlier, and now, she was nailing the massive cross Roy had bought inside. Next to it was a stone arch that went above the Mary statue. A potted plant was between the makeshift boulder and the statue, and she had also made a stone oval that Roy would fill with water once he finished up his other chores. She was working on placing stones in an arch that would go from one end of the stone pond to the boulder. It helped that the place Roy had picked for the grotto was in the valley between two hills because otherwise, she didn't think she would be able to accomplish this stone arch. It isn't easy, getting the stones to fit just right together so that it would hold together, and she had to whittle some of the rocks to better secure their positioning. It was like a jigsaw puzzle.

Once she finished, she stepped back to admire her handiwork. It looked good, but it still needed the greenery and flowers from Susan's shop. Other than that...

Beverly decided to surprise Roy. As quickly as she could, she hurried to the grocery store and then to the dollar store before heading home to hard boil the eggs. Once they were cooled, she quickly returned to the grotto with her supplies.

It was time to paint eggs.

Even if she and her father stopped attending church in more recent years, they still did, even with her in her twenties,

paint eggs every year.

As she worked, she stuck out her tongue. She couldn't say why she did that when she painted, but she always had, and her father would always try to reach over and tug on it.

Beverly painted some with dots and swirls, as her father tended to prefer. Beverly's father had always been a traditionalist. He was also quite creative, so when he painted eggs, he made sure to put in some intricate details and colors. He used natural dyes such as onion skin, beets and turmeric. Beverly was not as creative but she still managed to make the colored eggs somewhat striking with the help of dyes and glitter paint. She also painted a few of them solid colors like blue, green and yellow because she wanted to have a rainbow of colored eggs inside the grotto as decorations.

Once she was done painting the eggs, Beverly stepped back and admired her work. They looked beautiful, almost like tiny works of art instead of just plain hard-boiled eggs.

Finally happy with how everything looked, she placed the eggs into the grotto carefully so as not to break anything. She smiled softly at her craftwork before standing up again to look around some more. She stepped back, admiring her masterpiece with a deep sense of satisfaction. It really was a lovely Easter project for Roy, and she hoped she might come around to see it from time to time. It served as a reminder to her how important family was even if they weren't always present in person when holidays rolled around. Once the flowers and more plants were added, she was sure it would encourage everyone who looked at it to recall that happiness and faith are possible even in tough times.

More than anything, she wished her father could see this. He would have loved it.

She closed her eyes, and the breeze stirred, and somehow, Beverly sensed him, and she knew that no matter what, she would be okay.

Letting the feeling of peace and contentment settle, Beverly stayed a while longer, reminiscing about her father and the good times they shared. She was grateful for the

time she had with him, even as fleeting as it was. She silently thanked Roy for teaching her how to cherish those memories in a creative way.

It felt like home here.

Beverly stepped forward and ran her fingers across the smooth stones of the arch she crafted, giving silent thanks for all he had taught her.

The sun was beginning to set, and Beverly knew she should be cleaning up her supplies. Roy would be returning any minute now, but she was reluctant to do anything at the moment.

Her eyes closed, and she found herself praying before she even realized it. She prayed for her father's soul, thanking him for all his love and guidance. She prayed for her mother and asked that God fill her with peace and strength in the midst of her grief. Then, she prayed for herself, that she might be guided by the same resilience and faith that Roy had demonstrated. She asked for strength to make it through this journey of life and that she would be able to find joy again in the memories of time shared with him. She prayed for healing and perhaps a little bit of guidance so that she could find the courage to keep going when things felt difficult.

Next, she thanked God for the Easter project. It was the perfect way to honor her father's legacy and remind everyone that family is always worth celebrating even from far away.

Finally, she prayed that the peace and love of this special grotto might bring some solace to everyone who came here in the years to come. She prayed for strength as she went through life and found new ways to honor her father's memory, no matter what came.

CHAPTER
NINETEEN

When Roy approached the grotto, plants and flowers in a wheelbarrow, he couldn't believe how amazing it looked, but what was that splash of purple?

"What's that?" he asked as he lowered the wheelbarrow.

"What's what?" Beverly asked. "Do you like it?"

"I love it! I can't believe you managed that arch after all."

"You should know by now to never doubt me," she said with a laugh, lifting her chin.

He beamed at her, loving how confident she seemed. "The purple."

"Hmm?"

Was she purposely pretending not to understand him?

Roy walked over and bent down. An egg.

He held it up. "You painted eggs?"

"I did," she said, clasping her hands together. "Do you like that idea? I know it might be secular, but I thought it would be cute..."

"It's not secure. Hatching eggs, rebirth... it's a perfect religious theme for the holiday," he assured her. "When did you come up with the idea to paint eggs?"

"Earlier," she said.

"Today? Wow. Was I really gone that long?" He rubbed the back of his neck. He had gotten caught up talking to his

brothers. Maybe they'd talked longer than he had realized.

"It's fine. If we work together, we can put the flowers and plants all set out and be done."

"Let me just get the hose..."

The two of them worked together to put the last finishing touches on the grotto. The sun was beginning to set, and the orchard had a distinct golden hue as it sparkled in the fading light. It was a beautiful sight.

As the stone oval continued to fill with water, Roy eyed Beverly. She was so beautiful, but more than her outward appearance, she had a beautiful soul. She was exploring her faith, and he felt pleased to have had a part in that.

More than anything, he didn't want to think about tomorrow and how life would change. She wouldn't be there to greet him in the morning, and they wouldn't be working together anymore.

The thought of losing her was too much for him to contemplate. He hadn't expected them to finish the grotto so quickly, but she had been motivated, and the holiday was only two days away.

"Will you go out with me?" he blurted out and sucked in a breath as he waited for her to reply.

A part of him felt relieved that he had finally worked up the courage to ask her out. He wanted more than just being friends. He wanted to hear more about what motivated Beverly, and he wanted to always be there for her. Maybe they could go out fishing, or would that not make for a good first date? Should they do something more traditional? Dinner and a movie?

"What do you mean go out?" Beverly frowned. "Go out where? Are you asking me on a date?"

Roy smiled, his eyes crinkling around the edges. "Yes, I'm asking you on a date. I want to spend more time with you, and I want to be more than just friends." He closed the distance between them and took her hands in his own. "I want you to know that I'm serious about this," he said softly as their eyes

met in mutual understanding. “I want us to have a real relationship, but I understand if you don’t feel ready yet.”

He swallowed hard as emotions threatened to run wild within him.

“Will you explain why it is you want me as your girlfriend?” she asked finally. “What do you see in me that makes me special enough to be asked?”

Roy was taken aback. He hadn’t expected her to ask him such a pointed question. The truth was, he didn’t have an answer that would do justice in conveying the depth of his admiration for her, but he tried anyway, searching within himself for the right words to express his feelings.

“Beverly,” he said, squeezing her hands gently. “I see in you something that I haven’t seen in any other person before. You’re strong, brave and kind-hearted... qualities I admire greatly and aspire to embody myself.” He paused, giving her time to process what he had said before continuing. “I know you have been through so much, but that you’re going to mass and learning about the faith... I think it’s wonderful. You’re wonderful.” His voice softened as he spoke with tenderness and admiration. “You are so remarkably unique and I want nothing more than to get to know you better... if you’ll let me.”

He smiled at her, but the longer she remained silent, the more he became nervous.

So he continued to talk. “I care about you deeply,” he said taking a step closer to her. “You have the most beautiful way of looking at things. You have a wonderful sense of humor that I find utterly charming, and I love that you’re always curious about life. Most importantly, I’m drawn to how true you stay to yourself no matter what other people think or say about you.”

He closed his eyes, letting out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. When he opened them again, Beverly looked thoughtful but still uncertain. With a gentle smile, she shook her head.

“Roy,” she began cautiously, searching for the right words as she spoke. “I am very touched by your offer, and I’m grateful for how much you care about me. You do make me feel special, like I can overcome anything, and I love that feeling of security, but I’m not sure if this is the right time for us to be taking our friendship to a romantic level.” She smiled sadly at him. “I think it would be better for both of us if we took things slowly. We’ll always have our friendship. I... I’m just not ready for a relationship right now.”

Roy’s heart sank at her response, yet despite the disappointment he couldn’t help but feel proud of her for knowing and respecting what was best for herself. He nodded in understanding and stepped back, his hands falling away from hers.

“I understand,” Roy said quietly.

He wished more than anything that things could be different between them, but he also knew that if they were to truly have something special together, it had to start from a place of trust and mutual understanding. So with one final look at her beautiful face, he smiled sadly and turned away, fiddling with some of the greenery in the grotto as if nothing had ever happened between them.

She breathed in deeply enough for him to turn and look at her once more.

Beverly smiled, her eyes misty. “Thank you,” she said softly, her voice filled with emotion. “I’m honored that you have such high regard of me. I just...”

“I understand,” he repeated.

“This isn’t something I take lightly,” she continued. “I know this is hard for you to understand, but I feel like if we get together now, neither one of us can truly become who we need to be in this life. I... I’m still trying to find out who I am without my father, and the company... I just need to find my place in the world.”

“I understand,” he said for a third time.

Beverly's smile looked painful, and she grabbed her things and walked off, taking a part of him with her.

CHAPTER
TWENTY

When Beverly arrived home, she almost wished she could have slipped up to her room, but no. Her mom was waiting for her and jumped to her feet as soon as Beverly entered the house.

“What’s wrong?” her mom asked.

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“I might not have been around as much as your father was, but I can tell that something happened. You can tell me anything.”

Beverly hesitated and slowly shut the door behind her. “It’s Roy.”

“Did something happen? Is he all right?”

“He’s fine. It’s done. I finished up all of the work at Hidden Creek Orchard, and now’s the part that I hate. Moving on and finding another job. It’s always a letdown of sorts when a job is finished. I mean, there’s an initial rush when you complete the task, but then you need to have another job and another and another, and each of them is unique so it’s always fun and challenging, but until you find that next job...”

“I know,” her mom said gently. “Your father would always feel the same way. We would talk about that often. But... I don’t think that’s all that happened, is it?”

“Roy asked me out,” Beverly admitted. She crossed her and sat on the couch, not willing to sit on her father’s recliner.

“Oh, that’s wonderful! Why are you two going to do?”

“Nothing. I turned him down.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Beverly parroted. “Because I’m not ready.”

“Not ready,” her mom repeated. “Why aren’t you ready?”

“I just... I don’t want to lose anyone. After Father... I just can’t.”

Her mother sighed and sat beside her, pulling her into a hug. “I know it’s hard, sweetheart, but you can’t keep living in the past. You have to live in the present and look ahead to the future. That’s what your father would have wanted too.”

Beverly sniffed and tried to sort through her emotions. She didn’t want to cry because it hadn’t helped her any so far, and she was feeling her father’s presence more and more. She didn’t feel quite so alone.

Yet, he wasn’t here. He couldn’t hug her like her mom was, and that loss still struck Beverly deeply.

After a few moments, her mom pulled away and cupped Beverly’s cheeks in her hands.

“It’s okay to be scared,” her mom said softly, “but don’t be afraid of life because then you would miss out on all of the beauty that comes with it, like love, joy, and happiness.”

“I... You said you don’t think you would ever be with anyone else. Marriage is until death do you part.”

“Yes, it is, for some,” her mom agreed, “but your father and I... I don’t know. Maybe it’s just too early, but the love we shared... I still love and adore your father. No, our relationship wasn’t like most. It was long-distance, and there were times when I just wanted to hang up my nurse’s cap and go home to you both and never leave.”

“So why didn’t you?”

“I actually did once,” her mom said. “I came home to surprise your father and told him I wasn’t going back, and he... he wasn’t happy.”

“Why not?” Beverly couldn’t believe it.

“Because he knew that, deep down, I would miss my job. Finding a balance between the job and helping people as I’ve always felt called to do and being there for you and him, my family... it wasn’t easy on me. It was a sacrifice on all of our parts. Wish I could’ve been here more, and I will always have that on my conscience, but your father and I made decisions together, and I tried to circumvent that, and we decided ultimately to go back to how things were. It worked even if it wasn’t perfect, and isn’t that the way all of life is?”

“I suppose,” Beverly said slowly.

Her mom gently scolded her, “Beverly, life is all about taking risks. You can’t be scared of falling in love and living your life. It will only make you miss out on so much. Relationships are important and can bring you so much joy if you just let them.”

Tears welled up in Beverly’s eyes as she thought about what her mom said. She had been so focused on protecting herself from pain that she hadn’t allowed herself to experience the good that comes with being with someone else.

“I’m sorry,” Beverly said softly.

“Honey, I don’t want you to apologize. I just want you to live. Your father would have wanted that too, and I think you and I both know that your father would have liked Roy as much as I do. The question is... do you like him? Do you want to date him? There’s no harm in putting yourself out there and dating, but that doesn’t mean it has to be with Roy.”

“Even though that’s who you want for me.”

“What I want doesn’t matter so much as what you want.” Her mom tapped Beverly’s heart. “What does your heart want?”

“I...” Beverly blew out a breath.

“It’s okay if you need more time to think about this.” Her mother reached over and pulled her into a hug. “It’s okay, sweetheart. I know this is hard for you and I understand why you’re scared, but don’t let fear keep you from experiencing something beautiful.”

Beverly smiled and bit her lip. “I have some soul searching to do. I mean... Do I have feelings for Roy? Yes, of course. What if we’re only meant to be friends, though? What if trying to see if we can be something more ruins it? And all of the work I have to do...”

“I think he knows a bit about the hours you work considering you two have basically been partners on this job, haven’t you?”

“Outside of when he’s had to do his chores around the orchard, yes,” Beverly admitted.

“And tomorrow, you’ll be going to the office.”

“I know. No more beautiful scenery.” Beverly chuckled. “I’ll miss the place as much as I’ll miss him.”

Her mom smiled. “You’re scared about going back to work tomorrow, and so am I. After the holiday, I have an interview to work at the hospital.”

“Are you sure?”

“There are sick people everywhere,” her mom murmured. “Yes, I liked to work where people truly needed me, but the sick people here need nurses too, and what’s more... you need me, and I need you. I...” Her mom looked away but not before Beverly saw her mom blink back tears and one getting free and trailing down her cheek.

“What is it, Mom?” Beverly asked gently.

“I just hope you don’t resent me for my work,” her mom whispered. “I hope... I hope I never let you down, and I tried to be able to come when you had special events. If you would’ve gone to prom...”

“I didn’t go to prom. I wasn’t interested, and I know you would’ve been there for me if I had gone. Even if it had only been over FaceTime or Skype. It’s fine, Mom. Trust me. You following your professional dream... It made me feel like I could follow mine. It’s not easy, being in my field as a woman, but you let nothing hold you back, and I won’t either.”

Her mom collapsed into Beverly's arms, and they held each other for a long moment without saying anything.

Eventually, her mom pulled back just enough to look into Beverly's eyes. "I truly, deeply understand how you feel, honey. We both need to remember that life doesn't stop because of grief. You need to keep living and keep loving. I know your father wouldn't want you to shut yourself off from the world. It's okay to be scared, but don't let fear keep you from living your life. Maybe start small. Take Roy up on his offer or seek out other people who make you happy. Don't be afraid to open your heart again."

Beverly laughed. "You make it sound like I lost a romantic partner."

"When you lose someone you love, it's hard to put yourself back out there again. Your heart is wounded, but it can heal. With time. With friends. With... a partner."

"It's not just dating, though. It's also my job. I'm worried... But fear and worry shouldn't dictate my actions romantically or professionally. I... I need more time to think, but thank you, Mom."

"Always, honey. Always."

CHAPTER
TWENTY-ONE

Just like the cowboys always did on Sundays, they all showed up at the ranch as early as possible on Easter so they could finish up their chores and have time to go home and get changed before heading out to mass.

This Sunday, being Easter, Roy urged them all to follow him before feeding the animals.

“It won’t take long,” Roy said with a grin.

Colton nodded. “Lead the way, Roy.”

“Why do I get the feeling you two know what’s going on while the rest of us are in the dark?” Myles complained.

“They’re keeping secrets from us,” Ronald agreed. “Very suspicious.”

“You two should have enough with the conspiracy theories by now,” Colton said.

“Is it paranoia if you have a reason to be paranoid?” Ronald asked.

“No need to feel paranoid. Why do you feel paranoid?” Roy asked, baffled.

“Not so much paranoid,” Ronald said.

“As left out,” Myles finished for him.

Lawrence shrugged. “I don’t feel left out.”

“That’s because you do what you can and you jet away to the fire station,” Jack said.

Parker shook his head. “Better you than me.”

He made a show of rubbing his right bicep.

Roy snorted. “Wasn’t it your other arm?”

“Ah, yes,” Parker said sheepishly.

They all laughed.

Parker, one year during the Fourth of July, set off some fireworks. It wasn’t a firework that burned him but one of the matches that somehow caught his shirt sleeve on fire. He had the tiniest mark from the burn.

The others continued to tease one another as Roy marched in the front, leading the way to the grotto. Colton had helped Roy by making sure none of the others worked nearby that they might see and ruin the surprise Roy had planned. As far as Roy knew, even Colton hadn’t seen the grotto yet.

“Here we are!” Roy announced as they reached the top of the hill where the grotto rested at the bottom.

The cowboys gasped in shock and awe as they laid eyes on the breathtaking sight. The massive rock formation he and Beverly had created to look like a hollowed-out boulder had turned out even better than he had anticipated. It really was perfect for being a metaphor for the tomb Jesus had risen from. The cross glittered in the early sunlight, and the statue of Mary looked perfect with all of the flowers laid at her feet. Between the pained eggs and the flowers everywhere, there was plenty of color.

As he let the others approach to get a better look of it all including the pond in the stone basin, Roy thought maybe vines would be a nice touch for next time, especially if it wrapped around the arch that went from the stones of the pond up to the boulder.

With the sunlight, there was no need for any kind of artificial lights here. Even without more lights, the place seemed to have a religious atmosphere that perfectly fitted the occasion. The pond filled with clear blue water seemed to shimmer in the sunlight, and Roy realized his throat was thick with emotion.

The cowboys couldn't take their eyes off it as Roy finally spoke. "Beverly helped me create this for us all."

"It's amazing," Lawrence said.

"Who knew you could do such good work?" Parker teased.

"I'm sure it's mostly because of Beverly," Jack said with a wink.

"This is breathtaking," Colton said. "I'm not just saying that. All of this... It's wonderful."

"Thank you," Roy murmured.

This place was more than just any spot. It was an oasis of peace and tranquility that only someone with a genuine sense of care and respect could have designed, and he gave Beverly all of the credit in the world.

"I don't think I've ever seen a sight like this before," Myles admitted.

Roy grinned. The grotto was an incredible creation of manmade nature meant to honor God Almighty.

"Wow," Jack said, taking it all in.

"Who knew something this beautiful was hiding on our ranch?" Ronald marveled.

"Not really hiding," Myles countered. "They had to make it so."

"You know what I mean," Ronald said, and Myles could only nod.

"It's amazing," Parker said, awestruck by its beauty.

"It sure is," Lawrence agreed with him.

The cowboys found themselves standing speechless as they took in the spectacle before their own eyes. It felt as though they had stumbled into some kind of secret paradise where time seemed to stand still.

"I think our grandparents would have loved this," Jack said. "It's so peaceful and beautiful that it almost takes your breath away."

Roy nodded in agreement. He could almost imagine all four of them standing there, taking it all in, their eyes sparkling with admiration and love for their grandkids. He was sure they would have been proud of what he had created here and how much work he had put into something like this.

Beverly had put a lot of hard work into this project as well, even more than he had, and together, they had accomplished something truly remarkable. It filled him with pride that he had been able to create something that his family could enjoy together and that might even bring joy to others who stumbled upon it in the future. Colton had talked about wanting to let people come and see the orchard, to maybe buy their fruit here on the orchard themselves, and they could see the grotto as well as Susan's garden one it was in full bloom.

Both sets of his grandparents had become close friends while his parents had been dating. It truly had been a close-knit family, and although the older generation had all died years ago, Roy still missed them all terribly.

This grotto was a testament to the power of teamwork, love, and dedication. Roy knew it would be remembered for years to come by those who ventured through its gates.

"Did you make this with them in mind?" Ronald asked Roy softly.

"Not consciously at least," Roy said, "but..."

"It deserves a name, the grotto," Colton said. "What's the name, Roy?"

"The Joyous Grotto," Roy said after a minute. "Unless you think that's corny?"

"I like it," Ronald said.

"Joyous because of John?" Jack asked.

Roy nodded.

Both of their grandfather's had been named John.

"I lost wish we had a ribbon for me to cut," Colton joked.

Roy glanced all around. The name was perfect, and the grotto really was a fitting tribute to their grandparents, even if it hadn't intentionally been constructed that way.

But it was also a way to honor God for all that He had blessed them with.

The thought brought a warmth to Roy's heart as he placed his hand on Jack's shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

"Time to get to work," Colton announced. "We don't want to be late for Easter service."

"Or go there smelling like animals," Myles said, and they all laughed.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-TWO

Right and early Easter Sunday, Beverly got ready for service at Grace Community Church. She put on a light blue sundress that fell to just above her knees, cinched with a thin linen belt around her waist, and did her best to tame her unruly wavy hair. It wasn't often that she got so dressed up, and she didn't have a lot of dresses in her closet, but today definitely warranted one.

After getting ready, Beverly went downstairs where her mom was already finishing up making breakfast.

Her mom smiled as Beverly walked into the kitchen and wrapped an arm around her daughter's waist. "That color looks beautiful on you," she murmured.

Beverly beamed and gave her mom a hug in return. "I'm glad you like it." She glanced down at their breakfast of pancakes, eggs, bacon, and coffee and smiled. "This looks delicious!"

"It's my pleasure," her mom said as they both sat down together at the table.

As they shared a quick bite and talked about what was going on in each other's lives, Beverly couldn't help but feel very loved in that moment, not just from her mom but from God too.

Once they finished, Beverly grabbed her purse, and they both headed out to the car. Beverly's mom drove while Beverly looked out the window as they drove through town. The streets were relatively empty, and she wondered if when

they drove back, kids would be out in their front yards looking for Easter eggs.

The parking lot was already full, so they had to park down the street. The sun was just beginning to peek out from behind the clouds, promising a beautiful day ahead. As they walked side-by-side, Beverly felt a peace she hadn't experienced in months.

They arrived at the church shortly before the service was starting and took their seats near the front.

Beverly found herself looking behind her every few seconds. The church was filling up, and there was room for only one more in her pew, and the moment she spied Roy, she found herself not just waving to him but motioning for him to join them.

He noticed her, waved, and she figured that would be the end of it. He would want to sit with his brothers after all, but as she watched, he said something to them and then strolled up to her and claimed the last seat next to her.

“Good morning,” he said.

Beverly smiled. “Good morning.”

She glanced over at him, and in that moment, she was filled with an immense sense of admiration. He looked so peaceful and happy.

And somehow, that was rubbing off on her. It felt right to be here in church today, to celebrate the most holy of holidays. And, blessedly, it was almost like she had left all her worries and grief behind her.

She had been through so much pain and sadness since the death of her father, but here she was on Easter Sunday, ready to go to church and face a new day ahead with strength and optimism, in part because of the man beside her. He seemed to have found a kind of inner peace that she could only hope one day to achieve.

“Thank you,” she murmured.

“For what?”

“For reminding me how important it is to stay connected to those who truly care about you even when you feel overwhelmed by fear or sadness.”

He chuckled quietly. “I did that?”

She nodded.

His easy demeanor reassured Beverly that life could still be enjoyed in all its complexity and beauty even when it didn’t turn out as they had planned.

He nodded to her mom and smiled at Beverly before turning his attention to the front of the church.

She felt a flutter in her chest as she realized that maybe he was exactly what she needed. A friend. Someone who understood her and accepted her just the way she was, flaws and all.

The service began soon after, and Beverly found herself thinking of her father quite a bit during it, as she had expected, but there was something different now too. It wasn’t just sadness that overwhelmed her but a sense of calmness too, knowing that he would want them to move forward with their lives no matter what.

She could feel her mom looking at her every now and again as if checking to make sure she was okay, but inside, Beverly felt almost a sense of joy that surprised and delighted her.

Throughout the service, she kept stealing glances at him and noticed how often he also glanced back at her with an understanding smile on his lips.

Pastor Abernathy’s sermon was inspiring and uplifting, reminding them to never give up hope in life’s struggles despite how difficult they may be. They could all rise up, just as their Savior had.

By the end of it, Beverly felt like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders, replaced by a newfound hope for life’s possibilities.

The three of them headed out of the service, and when her mom turned to talk to a friend she hadn't seen in the longest of times, Beverly decided to take a chance.

She turned to Roy. "I know you probably have plans with your family, but do you think you could come with me to the grotto? Just for a little bit?"

Roy smiled down at her. "I would be honored to."

CHAPTER
TWENTY-THREE

Seeing Beverly here, on this day, with the beauty of the grotto all around them... Roy didn't want to risk ruining things, but he also didn't want to lose her.

"I don't mean to pressure you," he murmured. "That's the last thing I intend to do, and if you say no again, I won't ask again, but... Beverly, I think we're meant to be more than friends. I think we bring out the best in each other, and I've never felt more alive than when I'm with you. You bring me so much happiness, and the days and weeks we've worked together... No one can deny that we make a good team."

Beverly smiled and touched his arm. "I feel the same way," she said softly. "The days we've spent together have been some of the best weeks I can remember. After everything with my father... you became my anchor. At first, I thought it was just because of work, and then that I... I wanted to make sure I wasn't using you to replace my father. I'm not."

Roy couldn't help but smile and he reached out to take her hand in his. His heart was bursting with joy, and he felt as though he could fly up into the sky with happiness.

"You've made me so happy," he said, squeezing her hand gently, "and I'm so grateful for that."

Beverly looked up at him. "I didn't want to rush into anything," she whispered. She took a deep breath. "I really do like you. More than just a friend."

Before he could say anything, Beverly leaned forward and kissed him sweetly on the lips. Roy melted into her embrace,

feeling his own emotions bubbling up inside of him. In that moment, nothing else mattered besides Beverly and their budding love for each other. All the hard work they had put into this project seemed to pale in comparison to what he felt for her at this very moment.

They held each other until they finally pulled apart, their hands intertwined as they shared a smile filled with love and admiration for each other. Well, maybe not love, not yet at least, but he certainly felt that he could love her and only her for the rest of his life.

Roy smiled, feeling as if his heart might burst from happiness. He stepped closer to her and took her hands in his own. He pressed his forehead to hers.

“I’m glad,” he said softly.

She smiled at him before reaching up and touching his face tenderly with the tips of her fingers.

“So... does that mean we’re dating now?” she asked.

He laughed and drew back. “Do you want to make it official? Do I need to ask?”

She giggled. “No. You already know the answer, and I know the perfect date.”

He loved the way the sunlight sparkled in her eyes. “What’s that?”

“Well... it’s Easter Sunday, so I’m sure you want to spend the day with your family, and I have plans, dinner plans with my mom, but tomorrow...”

“Tomorrow I’m all yours.”

“Good,” she whispered. “Still, if you have some time right now...”

He lifted his eyebrows. “What do you have in mind?”



Roy should've known. As soon as Beverly pulled into the cemetery, he realized what she wanted, and he couldn't be more touched.

"I thought this might be fitting, what with it being Easter Sunday and all, and rising from the dead and going to Seven and all of that," she said sweetly.

"You're amazing," he marveled.

Once he parked, they got out of his truck. Hand in hand, they walked until they stood before her father's grave.

Beverly breathed in deeply. "Do you mind if we take a moment of silence? To honor my father's memory."

Roy smiled and squeezed her hand gently in his own. He was sure they both understood why this moment was so special and meaningful. It was the perfect way to start their relationship.

He nodded solemnly, and they both closed their eyes, taking a few moments to pray for her father and to give God the glory of all He had given them and those who had come before them.

Roy felt the tranquility of the cemetery surrounding them, and in that moment, he knew that no matter what life threw at them, they could withstand it all.

He opened his eyes again and gazed at Beverly with a newfound appreciation for her, for her strength, her courage, and her determination.

He stood there beside her, taking in the beauty of this special place, feeling as if he had finally found his home. Not so much in the cemetery, but with her.

They shared a moment of silence to honor Beverly's father's memory before Roy squeezed her hand gently and pulled her into his embrace.

He could feel the pain radiating from her, but he also felt the love emanating from both of them in that very moment.

Maybe it wasn't too early to at least think he loved her, even if he wasn't quite ready to say that to her. She had only

just agreed to start dating him. He didn't want to scare her off already.

Not that he thought she would be scared away easily.

He brushed his lips against her forehead as they held each other tightly, soaking in every second of this special moment together.

“My grandparents are buried here too,” he murmured.

“We can visit their graves soon... if that's okay.”

Roy nodded. He felt her relax against him and he was glad.

Finally, they stepped back and he looked down into her eyes with a gentle smile.

“Are you ready to introduce me to your father?” he asked softly.

She nodded, her lips curving into a small smile as she looked at him. “Yes,” she whispered, taking his hand in hers. “I'm ready.”

Roy smiled as they stepped closer to the gravestone and he noticed the way Beverly's eyes lit up when she read her father's name etched in stone. “Harry Young.”

He knew this must be difficult for her but he also knew that she was happy to be here with him—with them both—to honor her father's memory together on Easter Sunday.

Beverly stepped back and looked up at him with a gentle smile on her lips. She squeezed his hands and took a deep breath before turning to look at the gravestone in front of them.

“Father, this is Roy. Roy Griffin. Roy, this is my father. Roy's... Roy's my boyfriend,” she said softly, her voice barely audible.

Roy tightened his grip on her hands as he stood beside her, feeling proud to be able to introduce himself as the man who had won Beverly's heart.

They stood there a little longer, Roy and Beverly both talking to her father and each other before they moved on and he took her to his grandparents' graves and told her stories about the four of them.

Only then did they return to his truck, and he drove her over to her house for her to eat her Easter meal with her mom with the promise that tomorrow would be theirs together.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-FOUR

Everything had been amazing with Easter dinner and then the next night? The date of dinner and a movie had been so wonderful that Beverly didn't want the night to end.

But all good things did come to an end, and Roy pulled up to her house.

"I had a wonderful time," he murmured.

"Me too." She smiled at him. Her heart was racing, and she felt happiness bubbling within her like never before.

He took her hand in his. "The night doesn't have to end just yet. How about a walk?"

"I would love that."

So, they walked, hand in hand, through the streets until they arrived in a nearby park.

Once there, Roy began to tell her stories from his past that made her laugh and smile.

"I'm sure you got into all kinds of misadventures with your brothers when you were young," she said.

He burst out laughing. "Without a doubt! One time, we all went swimming in a lake without informing our mom first... only she found out about it not even a minute after I cannonballed into the water!"

"You cannonballed? I would've expected that from Ronald, not you. Myles too."

“The Spanglers weren’t there, but I wasn’t the only one to cannonball.” He laughed and shook his head. “Ronald did, and he splashed Mom. To say she was furious... yeah...”

“Oh no!”

“Oh yes.” He laughed some more. “You really need to meet her.”

“I would love to meet your parents.”

The stars started to twinkle brightly in the sky above them. Beverly didn’t think she could feel happier than she did, but each moment spent with Roy only increased her happiness.

Roy smiled at her. “Do you want to explore a bit?”

Beverly nodded eagerly, and soon, they were running along trails surrounded by lush foliage, enthralled by all the colors of nature that only seemed to brighten in the moonlight.

They sat together on a bench overlooking a small lake, and Roy began to tell her about his childhood. He spoke of days spent fishing with his dad, camping trips with his family during summers, how he explored every inch of their property looking for new places to explore or animals to befriend.

He shared stories about when he was younger and got lost in an unfamiliar forest but found himself again.

“During high school, one of my friends pulled off involving hundreds of balloons being released inside the cafeteria during the lunch break. The teachers didn’t even get too upset about it because they took credit for it, saying it was for the principal. It turned out it was his birthday that day.”

“Seriously? Wow.” Beverly couldn’t help but laugh.

His funny anecdotes from the past had her endeared to him all the more, and she found herself listening with rapt attention as he described each incident with vivid detail.

The night was getting late, but neither one of them wanted it to end. They continued strolling around the park until eventually, Beverly noticed that the hour was really getting late.

“We should probably head back,” she murmured.

“If that’s what you want.”

She looked down at the ground before meeting his gaze. “Despite everything... despite not knowing how easy it’ll be for me to get another job or not... despite missing my father so much... I’m happy. I didn’t think I would be, but...”

He reached out and cupped her face in his hands. “You don’t have to worry, Beverly.”

He pulled her in for a hug, and she hugged him back, inhaling the scent of his cologne. She didn’t care if it was the night of their first date or not. She knew she could trust him.

As they head back toward her house, they talk about their dreams and aspirations. She loved that Roy encouraged her as much as her father had.

And then Roy just about floored her.

“I want to offer you my services.”

“What do you mean?” She gaped at him, coming to a halt.

He stopped walking too and faced her, holding her hands in his. “I mean that I want to donate some of my time to helping you with your jobs. The ones that require an extra body, extra hands. I’ll make it work. I haven’t formally talked to Colton about it, but he won’t care so long as I get my chores done at the orchard each day, and I will. I like the feel of a hammer in my hand, and I’m already coming to miss it, the construction work... and working side by side with you.”

She could melt right then and there.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“I’m positive. If you’ll have me.”

“Of course,” she murmured. “Maybe you could even come with me when I have on-site interviews.”

“You mean in case there are more like Mr. Davis,” he said flatly.

She nodded.

“We’re just going to have to get so many testimonials and so many gigs that people won’t care who is doing the work from Nails R Us, they’re just going to be lining up for us to do all of their construction needs. In fact, they’ll be waiting, even if they have to wait months, just so they can get us to do it.”

“Is that right?” she marveled with a laugh. “You might have bigger dreams for my company than I do.”

“Dream big,” he urged her. “You can do anything, Beverly. I believe that.”

She hugged him so tightly. The stars kept watch as they lingered in each other’s embrace until eventually Roy walked her up to her doorstep. , Roy turned to face her, a gentle smile curving his lips.

“Thank you for tonight,” he said quietly. “I had so much fun that I didn’t want it to end.”

“Neither did I,” she murmured.

He said goodnight with a gentle peck on the cheek and promised to call soon before he drove away into the night.

Truly, Beverly couldn’t be happier if she tried.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-FIVE

Despite his best intentions, things were really hectic at the orchard because of new animals coming in and needing to get acclimated, so Roy wasn't able to help Beverly like he wanted to, not immediately at least. Soon, he hoped, though.

It had been three weeks since they had started dated, and they had dinner together at least twice a week, if not more. It all depended on their schedules, but they always at least spoke on the phone in the early morning and before bed. She was the first person he talked to and the last, and he didn't want it to be any other way.

This night, he picked her up from her place for them to head back to his apartment where he had a home-cooked meal waiting for her. yes, she could've just driven herself over, but he was a bit old-fashioned that way.

Once they arrived, Beverly beamed at him. "You made dinner for us?" she asked, her voice filled with awe. Her eyes twinkled with joy.

Roy smiled and nodded, feeling proud of himself. "I figured it would be nice to have a nice meal together without having to go out somewhere," he said.

She smiled back and leaned over to kiss his cheeks before he took her hand to lead her into the kitchen. His apartment was small, so there was no separate dining area, but he did have a small table in the kitchen where he ate.

Roy lit the candles on the table that was already set with two plates of steaming food that smelled delicious. Roy had

cooked Grandma's recipe: a classic Easter lamb roast with potatoes and other vegetables cooked in the sauce of the meat.

"I don't know if you had lamb on Easter or not," he said.

"We ate ham. You don't have to worry. I love lamb."

She said a prayer before they dug in, thanking God for this wonderful meal and for all He had provided them both with so far. It was like nothing Beverly had ever tasted before.

"I'm hoping to be able to help out more next week," he said, wincing. "I'm so sorry that things have been so hectic at the orchard."

"Don't worry about it," Beverly said. "The business is mine, and so far at least, more jobs are coming in, and honestly, I think I have you to thank for that."

"Me?"

"You've been telling everyone and anyone about Nails R Us," she said, "haven't you?"

"Maybe," he admitted with a laugh. "Yes, but for people to hire you... that's on you, and I'm so thrilled."

"Thanks. Me too... I just don't know if I should accept one job."

"What makes you hesitant about this one?"

"Well... it's Mr. Davis."

"*That* Mr. Davis?"

She nodded.

"Well, it's up to you, of course, but I think you should accept the job and prove his initial reservations about you wrong."

"Oh, I know I can."

"Does he want you to step in and finish the job from the other company?"

"They actually botched things," she said. "I'll have to go in and fix things."

“Oh, wow. So he’s trusting your judgment.”

“He’s a bit desperate, from the sounds of it.”

“I have to say... I really miss you around the orchard, so I’m more than willing to help out.”

She beamed at him. “You really care about me, huh, if you’re willing to work for me.”

“You better believe that’s the truth.” He winked at her. “Do you want me to talk to Mr. Davis on your behalf?”

“No. I’ve already talked with him and negotiated a price higher than I normally would’ve charged in case he tries to pull anything. I don’t think he will, and I aim to please all of my clients, and that includes him.”

“I have no doubt he’ll regret not hiring you from the start.”

“If he had, I wouldn’t have been able to work at the orchard,” she said softly. “Everything worked out.”

“God meant for us to meet.”

“I firmly believe that.”

That night, as they sat in the candlelight, they talked and laughed about their days. They were both thankful for how everything had turned out, and being together felt like a blessing.

As Roy looked into Beverly’s eyes, he couldn’t help but reflect on how the freak storm at the orchard and his hiring her had changed both their lives for the better.

Roy marveled at how much his life had changed since Beverly had entered it. She was passionate about her work, and she inspired him to be better too. He felt so lucky to have found someone who shared his values and work ethic.

“One night a week,” he said suddenly, “at least once a night, but hopefully more, we need to have a date night. I know with your job it won’t always be the same night, but we need to spend time together.”

“A night just devoted to one another.”

“Yes.”

“I own my own company,” she said. “In contracts going forward, I can make it that I only work Monday through Friday. We can go to mass together every Sunday and spend the day together. How does that sound?”

“Perfect,” he said. “Simply perfect.”

EPILOGUE

Lawrence Spangler stood before the Easter grotto. It was beautiful, and he found himself coming here time and again just so he could have a moment to relax.

He didn't often get the chance to relax. Just about every work day, Lawrence tried to get his chores done as efficiently and quickly as possible. Not because he wanted to rush home or because he had a wife and kids to tend to.

Just in case there was a fire somewhere in the canyon.

The last thing he wanted was to leave his brothers and the Griffins with a ton of chores to do while he was out fighting a fire.

Like the previous owner before him, Colton knew that Lawrence might have to leave at the drop of a hat. If he didn't go out with his brothers for dinner after the work day was done, Lawrence often would go to the fire department to hang out with his second family.

Fires didn't tend to wait for anyone.

Go, go, go, go. That was how Lawrence's life went, and while it wasn't an easy path, he wouldn't give it up for anything. It was crazy and hectic and exciting.

But it was also lonely.

He hadn't realize noticed just how lonely it was, not until Colton and now Roy had found girlfriends. Lawrence knew deep down that both of those relationships had staying power. They were going to stand the test of time, but Lawrence? He

hadn't been on a date in years. He couldn't remember when exactly it was. He was just too busy for love, pure and simple.

But that didn't mean he wanted to always be single.

"Mind if I join you?" his youngest brother asked.

"You're fine, Myles." Lawrence grinned at him.

"You look sad," Myles noted.

Lawrence chuckled. "My smile too fake, huh?"

"What's going on?"

"I was just... You're young yet. You have time."

"Time for what?" Myles tilted his head to the side.

"To find love."

"Ah," Myles said with a nod. "You're thinking about Colton and Roy."

"Yes. They'll get married one day."

"Most likely." Myles shrugged. "I always thought you would settle down with a female fire fighter."

Lawrence shook his head. "No. Unless we get a new one, all of the females are already married or in committed relationships."

"Then help me convince Colton to hire a cowgirl." Myles laughed.

Lawrence held up a hand. "We don't need one, and after all of the money Colton had to spend to fix up this place after the storm, I just don't see a new hire, male or female, happening anytime soon."

"Eh, probably not."

"Why do you want a cowgirl working here so badly? Looking for love yourself?"

"I... Not really," Myles said. "Happy with the status quo, for now at least, but for you,,, yeah, I think you need to get yourself a girl."

Lawrence furrowed his brow suspiciously. “And why do you think that?”

“Maybe because then you’ll stop killing yourself.”

“I’m not—”

“You are. You head from here to the fire station where you’ll stay for hours. You sleep there more nights than you do at your apartment, and the think is... how much sleep do you get a night? Not nearly enough. Studies have been done that show that if you don’t get enough sleep long enough, it’ll take years off your life. You need to slow down some and just relax, and maybe finding a girl to settle down with will help you cut back. You should switch to part time. We could get a cowgirl then.”

“I am not cutting back,” Lawrence protested.

“I’m just worried about you, and I don’t want you to die young.”

“I’m not—”

“You run into burning buildings,” Myles said. “Between the sleep thing cutting down on your lifespan and the fires... I have reason to pray for your safety and health and well-being.”

Myles looked so earnest that Lawrence wrapped an arm around him for a side hug.

“I’ll try to sleep more, okay?” Lawrence said. “It’s the best I can do.”

“Well, I’m going to add praying for you to find love in my prayers,” Myles announced.

Lawrence just chuckled. “I—”

“Hush. I’m praying right now.”

Lawrence just shook his head, but he couldn’t help smiling. He hadn’t realized he was freaking out his brother with his lifestyle, and he appreciated the prayers.

He’d always figured that love would happen on its own time, when God wanted it to, but maybe that time was coming sooner rather than later.

Lawrence bowed his head and prayed that not only he but all of the cowboys at the orchard would find love soon.



Thank you for reading [A Cowboy's Easter](#)! The next holiday is Easter with [A Cowboy's Fourth](#), featuring Lawrence, the perfect holiday for a volunteer firefighter to find love, don't you think?

Be sure to sign up for [my newsletter](#) to learn when the new book is available!

Until next book,

~Sierra

OTHER BOOKS BY SIERRA GAMBLE

Seven Holidays in Shooting Star Canyon

[A Cowboy's Valentine](#)

[A Cowboy's Easter](#)

[A Cowboy's Fourth](#)

[A Cowboy's Halloween](#)

[A Cowboy's Thanksgiving](#)

[A Cowboy's Christmas](#)

[A Cowboy's New Year](#)

Christmas in Shooting Star Canyon

[Her Cowboy's Coworker](#)

[Her Cowboy's Return](#)

[Her Cowboy's Jilted Bride](#)

[Her Cowboy's Opposite](#)

[Her Cowboy's Secret Baby](#)

[Her Cowboy's Love Triangle](#)

Matchmaker at Melody Meadow

[A Match for the Cowboy Dad](#)

[A Match for the Cowboy Billionaire](#)

[A Match for the Cowboy Soldier](#)

[A Match for the Cowboy Neighbor](#)

[A Match for the Cowboy's Matchmaker](#)

Christmas with Seven Sisters at Blue Moon Ranch

[Enemy of the Cowboy](#)

[Friend of the Cowboy](#)

[Second Chance with the Cowboy](#)

[Best Friends with the Cowboy's Sister](#)

[Protected by the Cowboy](#)

[Stranded with the Cowboy](#)

[On the Road with the Cowboy](#)

Shooting Star Canyon Ranch

[Cowboys and Fireworks](#)

[Cowboys and Summer Flings](#)

[Cowboys and Falling Leaves](#)

Cowboys and Spooky Nights

Cowboys and Friendship

Cowboys and Mistletoe

Oak Spring Acres in Shooting Star Canyon

The Cowboy's Friend

The Cowboy's Secret

The Cowboy's Second Chance

The Cowboy's Fake Relationship

The Cowboy's Forbidden Love

The Cowboy's Love Triangle

ABOUT SIERRA GAMBLE

Sierra Gamble has always loved horses. She used to draw them all the time as a little girl even if they were sometimes far too fat or way too skinny. For a little while, she took horseback riding lessons, and she would love nothing more than to get back in the saddle again one day!

Her grandfather used to watch western movies all the time. Sierra never really got into them until he became really sick. Now, she tries to write combine the horses that she grew up loving with the westerns Pop-Pop always loved. Of course, being a hopeless romantic, Sierra has to add romance to each story too!

Sign up for [Sierra's newsletter](#) to learn when her next book is released as well as excerpts, cover reveals, and giveaways!

For more information

www.SierraGamble.com

Sierra.Gamble@SierraGamble.com

