



DOCTORS
of Eastport General

DOCTOR

Feelgood

USA Today Bestselling Author

Amy Stephens

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Doctor Feelgood
Doctors of Eastport General Shared World Series

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Doctor Feelgood

Make an appointment and be sure to arrive on time.

The doctor will see you now...

As the newest doctor in the Eastport General Geriatric Physicians Group, Nathaniel “Nate” Longmire has more on his mind than just establishing himself with his new patients. The fact that he’s about to turn thirty and that he’s still single is more than a big deal to him.

So why can’t he find the perfect woman to satisfy his sudden urgency to start a family?

After all, he’s sexy, smart, and successful...

When Nate’s newest patient attempts to play matchmaker with his granddaughter, Nate knows he shouldn’t cross the line where his patients are concerned. But is it really that big of a deal? Especially since the two of them seem to hit it off. Or do they?

Murphy Anderson knows an attractive man when she sees one.

But because she's put up a wall from all the bad dates she's been on over the last few years, she's convinced they're all the same. Or are they? Nate does seem different...

Afraid that he's going to end up like all the rest, Murphy does her best to keep Nate at arms distance. When her grandfather takes a bad fall, she soon realizes there's more to Nate than just a white coat and doctor title. He's a genuine good person that's all about attending to her needs and making her feel good too.

Doctor Feelgood has the cure for all that ails you...Be sure to pick up your prescription today!

Doctors of Eastport General is a brand-new Contemporary Romance series of stand-a-lone irresistible romances. Get ready for all the naughty nurses, dirty doctors, and patient shenanigans that take place in Eastport General.

Dedication

For A

Because you encourage me more than you'll ever know.

Chapter One

Dr. Nate Longmire rocked from one foot to the other as he stood in the checkout line at the convenience store waiting to pay for his chili cheese hotdog. Normally, he'd grab a bite to eat in the Eastport General cafeteria when he was between patients or he'd have one of his nurses grab him something from *Sub King*, a soup and sandwich shop on the main floor of the hospital. Today, though, while he was out running an errand during his lunch break and he'd stopped to put gas in his truck, he'd found it hard to resist the cheesy goodness being advertised on the sign at the pump. Of course, what he'd grabbed off the hotline looked nothing like the image, but that was true for most fast food.

He couldn't recall the last time he'd had a chili dog, and as he waited for the cute blonde ahead of him to complete her purchase—which, by the way, seemed to be taking forever—he wondered if he'd be able to wait until he got back to the hospital before taking a bite. It smelled *that* good!

At the rate things were going...

“I know it’s here somewhere.” The young woman reached behind her and patted the back pockets of her jeans—the jeans she wore quite nicely, mind you.

Nate wasn’t one to stare, but damn, this one was certainly easy on the eyes. At least from behind.

Flipping her long blonde hair over her shoulder, he could see she was more than just a little flustered as she looked for whatever it was that she’d lost or misplaced. And when she slammed her purse up on the counter and began to pull out random things, he knew she was seriously on a mission to find something.

Unfortunately, after a quick glance down at his watch, Nate didn’t have much time before his next patient was due to arrive. So, whatever it was she was looking for, she needed to find it quickly, or step to the side.

As a Geriatric Physician, he did his best to stay within his patient’s appointment times and being late wasn’t something he wanted to have a reputation for. The older generation loved to talk, so when one of them needed a few extra minutes of his time, he tried to make sure they got his undivided attention while keeping with his schedule. Getting back even a few minutes late could throw off the entire rest of his day.

The clerk blankly stared at the woman as several more customers stepped to the end of the checkout line.

“God, I can’t believe this,” she said and lowered her head down. “I *just* had it.”

“Ma’am, is there something I can help you with?” Nate didn’t want to pry or come off as being nosy, but just like everyone else behind him, he was anxious to pay for his food so he could be on his way.

“I’m so sorry,” she said apologetically to the clerk. “I seemed to have misplaced my debit card.”

Nate could see she was not only embarrassed, but from the pink coloring of her cheeks, that she was on the verge of crying.

“Do you have another card you can use?” the clerk asked, his voice slightly aggravated.

Shaking her head, she replied, “No, I don’t believe in having multiple cards. This one is linked to my bank. I always have to come inside because the stupid magnetic thing on the back won’t work at—”

Someone standing behind Nate cleared their throat while another person let out a loud—and somewhat rude—sigh. Feeling bad for her, he stepped up alongside her and placed his food down on the counter. “I’ll take care of hers too.”

“I can’t let you do that,” she said, a shocked expression quickly appearing on her face.

“It’s okay, really,” Nate replied and offered her a smile. “I want to.”

“But I,” she began. “If you’re willing to wait a few more minutes, I’ll run down to the bank and—”

Nate put his hand up while he removed his wallet from his back pocket with the other. “Can you just add whatever

she's getting to this," he told the clerk again and pointed down at his chili dog.

"How much gas do you need, ma'am?" the clerk asked smugly. From the tone he used, Nate wondered if he'd ever encountered someone paying for another person's purchase before. It wasn't that big of a deal, was it?

"I was going to fill—" she began then paused. "Ten dollars. That'll be plenty."

"Are you sure?" Nate asked. "If you need more than that, I don't mind."

As she fought to hide the tears that had slowly worked their way into the corners of her eyes, all she could do was nod her head.

Nate slid his card into the machine, punched in his PIN, and then picked up his food while he waited for the transaction to finish processing.

"Pump five is ready to go," the clerk replied after pressing a few buttons on the side of the register. "Would you like a receipt?"

"I'm good," he said and hurriedly headed towards the door.

"Wait," the young woman called out. "I didn't get a chance to properly thank you. Can I get your address or at least find out where you work?" she asked. "So I can repay you. I'm very sorry for holding you up."

"That won't be necessary," Nate replied as they stood on the sidewalk just outside the entrance of the store. "It's just ten dollars. I would've done it for anyone."

“But—”

“It’s okay, really.”

“What about your email then? That way I can send it to you electronically.”

He couldn’t believe how persistent she was being over such a small amount. “How about this,” Nate began. “Maybe pick up the tab for the person behind you the next time you’re buying coffee or something.”

And with that, he rushed over to his car and climbed inside. He hoped he hadn’t come across as being short with her, but he had more important things to worry about—like getting back to the hospital *and* his one o’clock appointment.

As he waited for a break in the oncoming traffic, he glanced into his rearview mirror to see the woman standing alongside her vehicle at the pump—a gorgeous Jeep Wrangler. Of all the colors, it just happened to be candy-apple red. He shook his head, a smile appearing across his face.

Too bad he hadn’t been able to catch her name...

Chapter Two

The phone on his desk chirped and Nate reached over to see what his head nurse, Sue Ellen, needed. She'd been a godsend when he'd joined the Eastport General's Geriatric Physicians Group—helping him organize and set up everything in his office—and now, almost three years later, he couldn't imagine life without her.

Having moved to Eastport, Rhode Island from Atlanta, Georgia, Nate had asked himself many times if moving so far away from home had been the right thing to do. The transition hadn't been an easy one, starting out in a brand new city and not knowing a single soul, but he'd slowly adjusted and fallen in love with all that Eastport had to offer.

Except for the availability of single women.

Plain and simple, there were none. Or at least none that he'd been able to find.

He wasn't one for hanging out in bars or nightclubs, so where was a nice-looking, professional guy supposed to meet

a woman these days? The grocery store? The gym? Well, he'd tried looking there too. And the thought of meeting someone on a dating app made him cringe. Oh no, he wasn't about to go there—he wasn't that desperate...yet. He'd heard his share of dating app horror stories, and that's the kind of trouble he wanted to avoid.

It wasn't like he was looking to get married—although that thought had slowly started to work its way inside his head—but he'd love to find someone to share a cup of coffee with or to accompany him to a sporting event or concert. That wasn't too much to ask for, was it?

Maybe he'd done the steps all wrong and he should've worked on his relationship status before going to medical school, but it was too late for that now. With his internship and residency out of the way, surely there was someone out there for him.

“Is Mr. Anderson here yet?” he asked as soon as he picked up the phone. Martin Anderson was a new patient, having recently relocated to the Eastport area so he could be close to his son and granddaughter. Nate had spent a good bit of time going through the older gentleman's medical files, and he was doing one more scan just to refresh himself before his new patient arrived. Being the newest doctor to the Group, most of the new patients came to him as he was still working to get his name established.

“He should be arriving any minute now. His granddaughter just called to let us know she dropped him off at the front entrance. Apparently, she's having some trouble finding a place to park, since they're working on the addition

to the parking garage. I'll buzz you when I get him to his room." Sue Ellen's voice was always so pleasant and cheerful, one of the many reasons why so many patients loved her.

"Thank you," Nate said as he sat the phone back down.

Instead of putting his coat on though, he rolled up the ends of his sleeves, then pushed them midway up his arm. Since this was his first time meeting Mr. Anderson, he wanted it to be a little more relaxing for them both. Reaching up to run his fingers through his hair, he glanced at his reflection in the mirror.

It was hard to believe he was turning thirty in a few weeks. Thirty years old! Seemed just yesterday he was graduating high school and starting college.

Several minutes later, his phone chirped again, and Sue Ellen's voice sounded through the speaker. "All set in exam room two. Mr. Anderson is waiting for you."

Nate finished the last swallow from his water bottle then dropped the plastic container into the trash. Grabbing the file off his desk, he closed the door behind him and walked down the hallway to the exam rooms.

Sue Ellen had left Mr. Anderson's paperwork with his vitals in the plastic holder on the outside of the door and he reached up to grab them before lightly knocking.

"How are we doing today?" Nate asked as he strolled into the room. "I'm Dr. Longmire."

The older gentleman cleared his throat and grasped onto the side of the examination table as he struggled to sit up. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

“Did I catch you dozing off to sleep?” Nate chuckled and sat the paperwork down on the counter next to the sink so he could wash his hands.

“Heck no,” Mr. Anderson replied and reached up to adjust the baseball cap he wore.

“Braves fan, huh?” Nate asked and a huge smile quickly appeared on his face at the sight of the Atlanta Braves emblem on the front of the cap.

“Been a fan for most of my life. Was a season ticket holder for many years, but it just got to be too much driving into the city after I retired. That downtown Atlanta traffic can be a nightmare sometimes.”

Nate knew almost immediately that he and Mr. Anderson were going to get along just fine. One thing he’d learned early on in med school was that he needed to find a connection with each of his patients, and it looked like theirs was going to be baseball. “So, you’re from the Atlanta area?” Nate inquired as he opened Mr. Anderson’s folder. He couldn’t believe he’d missed that bit of information when he was reviewing his files earlier.

“Born and raised northeast of the city. Ever heard of Stone Mountain?”

A huge grin appeared on Nate’s face as he listened to Mr. Anderson’s deep Southern drawl. “I’m *very* familiar with it. Went there often as a kid. I’m from the southern outskirts of Atlanta, around the Newnan area. My family still lives there actually.”

“Well, well,” Mr. Anderson said and let out a pleasant sigh. “It’s a small world, isn’t it?”

“I’d say. How are you enjoying Eastport? I understand that you’ve recently moved here to be close by your son.”

“I’m learning really quick I’m not cut out for so much snow, but my son promises me that I won’t have to do any shoveling. Let’s just hope he’s true to his word.”

The two men continued to swap stories until they were interrupted by a knock at the door. Expecting to see Sue Ellen, Nate stood up from where he’d been leaning against the counter.

“Grandpa, they said I could come back to wait with you.”

Grandpa?

It was her—the pretty blond from the gas station last week. The young woman he’d bought gas for.

“Hi,” Nate said and extended his hand. “I’m Dr. Longmire.”

Chapter Three

“Wait a minute,” the young woman said, a shocked expression suddenly appearing across her face. “Oh, my God. It’s you.”

“Hold on, you know each other?” Mr. Anderson asked and looked from his granddaughter then over to Nate.

Nate was just as surprised as she was. “Small world, huh?” Never one for being at a loss for words, Nate suddenly found himself struggling for something to say that didn’t sound corny. Of all the people he could’ve run into, he never expected it to be her!

“No, grandpa, we don’t *know* each other,” she said, using air quotes to accentuate the word ‘know.’ “He was at the convenience store the day I’d stopped for gas and couldn’t find my debit card.”

“Speaking of cards...did you ever locate it?” Nate had genuinely felt bad for her that day.

“You never mentioned you were a doctor,” she said warily without answering his question. “It’s no wonder you insisted I didn’t need to pay you back, being a doctor and all.”

“Murphy,” Mr. Anderson said rather curtly. “Dr. Longmire didn’t have to do anything for you.”

“I didn’t mean it—”

“It’s okay. I’m glad I could help.” Nate didn’t understand why she’d suddenly changed her tone. She’d been as sweet as she could be at the gas station and now, she acted like she had a chip on her shoulder all because she hadn’t known what he did for a living. Did she have something against doctors? Now wasn’t the time to be concerned about it though, and Nate did his best to shrug off her curt remarks. “Shall we get started with today’s visit, Mr. Anderson?”

The next twenty minutes, Nate and Martin Anderson chatted about his medical history. Other than a few bouts with heartburn and some dry patches he was worried about on his forehead, it was safe to assume Mr. Anderson was as healthy as a twenty-five year old. For someone who was knocking on the door of being eighty, Nate was impressed to hear he was still walking almost two miles a day and the only medication he took was a *One-A-Day* multivitamin.

Mr. Anderson chuckled when he admitted he’d had to invest in a treadmill because the Rhode Island weather didn’t allow him to stay outdoors for very long, but the important thing was he was getting his steps in.

Murphy Anderson had finally leaned back in the chair over in the corner of the room, but each time she shifted one leg across the other, Nate found himself looking right at her.

He hated to presume she was doing it on purpose, but the distraction was really starting to annoy him. Not really annoy him per se, but damn, why did she have to be so good looking?

“So, there’s no aches or pains anywhere?” Nate made a few clicks on his tablet as he read thru the series of final questions.

Mr. Anderson nodded his head. “Nope, not the first complaint.”

“And there’s no trouble sleeping?” Nate raised his brows as he waited for Martin Anderson’s response.

Murphy’s suede boot suddenly scuffed against the floor and Nate jerked his head her way. Again. *Dang it*, he sure wished she’d sit still and stop wiggling around in her chair.

Mr. Anderson’s response was yet again the same. “Nope. None at all.”

“On average, how many hours sleep would you say you get each night?”

“A good seven to eight. All depends on how late I stay up and whether there’s a game on or not.”

“He’s definitely an early riser.” Murphy spoke up. “I never have to worry about setting an alarm or being late for work.”

“Well, that’s because Mother Nature calls,” Mr. Anderson chuckled at his granddaughter’s comment.

Hold on...she still lived at home? Nate suddenly became worried that he’d gotten her age all wrong. He could’ve sworn she was close to being thirty, just like him.

“Oh, grandpa,” she said and laughed.

He was glad to see she’d settled down, but there was a hint of sass about her that he kind of liked.

Nate finished up with the last few questions then submitted the information to the server. After a quick glance at his watch, he hated that Mr. Anderson’s appointment was coming to an end. Even worse, aside from routine check-ups, he probably wouldn’t see very much of him at all. Which meant he wouldn’t be seeing Murphy Anderson either.

He extended his hand again to thank Mr. Anderson for choosing their physician’s group. Lord knows there were countless other doctors he could’ve chosen to go to. “I’m going to let you change back into your clothes now, but if you need me for anything, I’m just a phone call away. It’s been a pleasure meeting you.”

Murphy stood up to follow him out of the room. When they were alone in the hallway together, he quickly tried to come up with something to extend their conversation, something he felt was safe to talk about. Unfortunately, his mind was drawing a complete blank.

“Dr. Longmire,” Murphy turned around to look at him. “It’s nice to be able to put a name with a face.”

“Likewise.” Nate did his best to hide the smirk on his face. “But please, call me Nate. Your grandfather seems quite the man. And now that I know we have something in common —”

“Wait, did I miss something?” Murphy quickly interrupted.

Nate could feel his face turn red. “That’s right, you weren’t in the room yet when your grandfather and I were discussing his Braves cap. I was born and raised outside of Atlanta.”

“Say that again.” Murphy paused to make sure she’d heard him correctly.”

“Yeah, up until I moved away to go to medical school.”

“Talk about small worlds.” Her face lit up. “My step-mother is from Eastport, so when my father asked her to marry him, naturally, we were the ones to relocate. I knew you had an accent I just didn’t want to say anything.”

Unfortunately, it wasn’t the first time someone had mentioned his southern drawl. He tried not to make too big of a deal about it, since he didn’t think he spoke that way at all, but it was nice someone wasn’t giving him a hard time about it.

“Dr. Longmire,” Sue Ellen stuck her head around the corner. “Pardon me for interrupting, but you have patients in rooms four and five now. We’re still waiting on the test results for Mrs. Carney.”

“I’ll be right there.” Nate couldn’t believe he’d allowed himself to get distracted so easily. His patients were first... always.

“Well, maybe I’ll see you around sometimes. Who knows, maybe I’ll bring Grandpa again for his next appointment,” Murphy added.

“I’d like that,” Nate said and winked the same time Mr. Anderson opened the door to walk out of his examination

room. "I'd like that a lot."

"You'd like what?" Martin Anderson asked and looked from Nate to Murphy then back to Nate again.

Nate felt himself tense as he was suddenly at a loss for words.

"Nothing, Grandpa. Come on, let's get out of here."

Murphy looped her arm through Mr. Anderson's and together they walked towards the front. Nate noticed the way her hips swayed in the tight jeans she wore, and he couldn't help but wonder if she sashayed that way on purpose because she knew he was still watching her.

Yeah, she knew what she was doing alright...

Chapter Four

It's become a tradition that on Fridays, each of the doctors in their group take turns bringing in something for everyone to eat. Whether it's breakfast or lunch, the staff seems to really enjoy it. The nurses usually set everything up when they're in between patients, then see to it that it's all cleaned up at the end of the day.

Since he forgot to call ahead, Nate left his apartment earlier than he normally would and stopped by *The Cooling Rack*, a locally owned bakery, for an assortment of breakfast items.

The young lady who'd taken his order offered him a complimentary cup of coffee while he waited. With his cup in one hand and the plastic card with his order number in the other, he made his way over to one of the empty tables.

Never one for drinking his coffee black, he added some creamer and sugar from the little basket sitting on the table then brought the steaming cup to his lips.

“Fancy seeing you here.”

Nate jumped at the sound of Murphy Anderson’s voice, nearly spilling his coffee on the table. “Good morning. You’re out and about early.” He’d recognize that sweet-sounding voice almost anywhere.

“Thought I’d stop by for a little something to eat before heading over to the school,” she said then took a sip of her coffee.

“School?” Nate inquired.

“Yeah, I’m substituting today. Fifth grade math.”

“Interesting. I would’ve never guessed that about you.”

“It’s the least I can do to help a few of my friends who are already teaching. I would’ve been finished myself had I not taken some time off a few years ago. They graduated and found jobs, and here I am still pounding away.”

“I hate to hear you got behind, but glad you decided to keep working on it. There’s such a demand for teachers these days, so you shouldn’t have any problem finding a job when you’re finished.” The same was true for doctors. He couldn’t believe all the offers he’d received once he was finished with school.

“I have two semesters left, but you’re right about the jobs. Plus, since I’m already subbing at several of the schools in the area, it shouldn’t be too hard to find a permanent position.” Murphy lifted her cup to her mouth again and Nate watched as her perfect lips touched the rim of her cup.

“Number 21,” the young man behind the counter called out. “Your order is ready.”

They both looked down at their plastic cards to verify their numbers. “That would be me,” Nate replied and lifted his card so the gentleman would see he was on his way to collect the food. Just when he was finally starting to find out a little more about her.

“It was really good to see you again,” Murphy said and smiled.

Nate stared at her for a moment as though there was something he wanted to say. Instead of looking like an idiot, though, and saying something stupid, he took the safe approach. “Please tell your grandfather I said hello.”

“Oh, I sure will. He’ll be happy to hear that I ran into you today. He’s brought your name up quite a few times since his appointment the other day. I think it’s safe to say he was pleased with his new doctor.”

“Twenty-one,” the counter clerk called out again.

Nate beamed hearing her say that about him. “Please tell Mr. Anderson I can’t wait to talk baseball with him again.”

Two large bags were waiting for him at the counter, and he did his best to juggle them both without spilling what was left of his coffee. Before walking out the door, he turned and looked back over his shoulder. With a smile spread across her face, Murphy raised her hand and waved.

Just as he was securing the second bag in the backseat, he could’ve sworn he heard someone calling his name.

“Dr. Longmire,” Murphy shouted as she made her way across the parking lot. “Hold on, you forgot something.”

“The orange juice,” he said and palmed his forehead. “I can’t believe I forgot it.”

“Thought I’d save you a trip back inside.” Murphy said and passed the chilled container to him.

“Breakfast wouldn’t be the same without it. Have you tried this stuff? My nurses spoiled me with it, so anytime I grab breakfast for the staff, I make sure to pick up a jug of it.”

“I’ll have to try some. Thanks for suggesting it. Well, I gotta run,” she said and lifted her tiny paper bag for him to see. “Wouldn’t want to be late for school.”

Instead of walking to her jeep that was parked a couple spots down from his SUV, she just stood there as though she wanted to say something else.

“Hope you have a good day. Maybe we’ll bump into each other again.” Nate lifted his hand to wave before getting inside.

“I’d like that. Well, not the bumping into part, but yeah, maybe we’ll see each other again.”

So much for subtle hints...

Chapter Five

The pastries, gourmet cinnamon rolls, croissants, and bagels were a hit in the office and when it was time to go home at the end of the day, Nate insisted that Sue Ellen take the few remaining items home with her.

“Your kids will eat them,” he insisted when she tried to resist.

“If I bring these home, the kids will be fighting for them,” she began to laugh.

“Sneak them inside and put them away for you and your husband,” he suggested.

“Heck, I’ll probably have to hide them from him, too. Those buttery, flaky croissants were simply amazing.”

Nate joined in laughing at her own comment. She did have a point. It was also one of the reasons for the long lines at *The Cooling Rack*—the quality of their baked goods was nothing less than superior.

Speaking of the bakery, he still couldn't shake that he'd ran into Murphy Anderson there. It was a pleasant surprise for sure, and even more so that she'd appeared to be happy to see him too.

Why had dating been so much easier when he was younger? So many of his friends from med school were married and already having their second kid while he was still...keeping the couch warm on Saturday nights.

From the little bit of time he'd spent around Murphy, she really seemed like a sweet person. Someone that he could see himself dating. The fact they were both from Georgia gave them something in common, and he was quite sure there were a few other things that would connect them if they had the opportunity to find out.

How was he supposed to make that happen though?

If he would only get out more, he might find his chances of meeting someone was a lot greater than staying home all the time waiting for them to find him. Still, that was easier said than done.

It didn't help that it wasn't warm enough to be outside, so playing a round of golf or visiting the shoreline weren't options. He wasn't much for blind dates, so having a co-worker set him up wasn't something he wanted to entertain either. Where was he supposed to meet a single woman then?

Murphy Anderson crossed his mind more than once over the weekend and as soon as he arrived at his office at the hospital on Monday, he immediately opened her grandfather's information on the computer. He knew it was wrong what he was doing but if he could find out where they lived and maybe

even see if she were listed in the emergency contacts, having that bit of information might come in handy again should they happen to cross paths later.

No, he wasn't going to stalk her or anything like that, but he might be tempted to ride through her neighborhood. He laughed at the ridiculousness of it. It almost made him seem desperate and that wasn't the case at all. Surely, he hadn't reached that point, had he?

Suddenly, an idea occurred to him, and it was one he should've thought of already. It was also something he wouldn't get into trouble for either!

With Martin Anderson's name and address jotted down on a piece of paper on his desk, he picked up his office phone and paged Sue Ellen.

"Dr. Longmire, can I get you something?" Sue Ellen asked as soon as she picked up the inter-office phone.

"Good, I wasn't sure if you were here yet," he said and let out a deep breath he hadn't realized he was holding. "Do we have any stationary here in the office? I'm looking for something with the group's name on it. I know I can print something off the computer, but I was hoping to be able to put a little personalization to the note I need to send out."

The phone went silent, and he wondered if he'd somehow lost the connection with her. "Sue Ellen?"

"Yes, I'm still here. Let me see if I can find something for you. I'll bring it by your office if I do."

Nate found himself looking over at his office door every time he heard a noise in the hallway. If she didn't bring

him something soon, he was afraid he'd lose the courage to follow thru with his plan. Even worse, his first patient of the day was scheduled to arrive in ten minutes, and if he had to wait until later to follow thru with his plans, he very well might talk himself out of it.

In the meantime, he called the hospital's gift shop and ordered a medium-sized fruit basket. And since he was hoping to make a good impression, he asked if they could add some assorted nuts and cheese to go along with it. He'd never done such a thing for one of his patients before, and he hoped he wasn't overdoing it the more he thought about it. The last thing he wanted to do was send the wrong impression.

Instead of calling him back, Sue Ellen showed up at his office and stuck her head around the door. "You're in luck," she said and laid a couple sheets of paper along with an envelope down on the edge of his desk. "Will this work?"

"Perfect. It's exactly what I needed." He picked the pages up and moved them to the other side of his desk.

"Anything else I can get for you?" she asked before walking out.

"Courier services? You know anyone off the top of your head that could make a delivery for me this afternoon?" He knew Sue Ellen would jump at the opportunity to do something like this—especially if she knew what he was up to—but he didn't want to involve her if he didn't have to. In fact, he didn't want her to know much about it at all in case the whole thing blew up in his face.

"Want me to handle it for you?" she asked. "I could take care of it on my way home. You must have someplace

you have to be this evening.”

“No, nowhere but home. I would just rather someone drop a gift off for me than having to do it myself. I’ll see if the giftshop has someone they can recommend.”

“Okay then. Is there anything else I can get for you? Your patient should be arriving any moment now.” Sue Ellen turned to look back over her shoulder before closing the door.

“Wait, there is something. I need a gift card. When you get a chance, can you run down to the coffee shop across from the cafeteria and get one for me?” Nate leaned over and pushed his white coat to the side so he could pull out his wallet. “Just have them put it on my credit card.”

Sue Ellen walked back into the room to retrieve the card from him. “How much?”

Nate thought to himself for a moment. “Do you think \$50 is too much?”

“Speaking for myself, I’d love to get one for that amount,” she said and chuckled. “I’m lucky if I get one that barely buys me one cup.”

“Let’s go with that for now. Oh, and thanks.”

“Not a problem, Nate. I’ll get that handled for you as soon as I’m able to get downstairs.”

No sooner had Sue Ellen closed the door behind her, he forgot to ask if she thought the gift card could be used at other locations in addition to the one here at the hospital. And if not, Murphy might be stopping by the hospital for a cup of coffee for quite a few days. He kind of liked that thought...a lot.

Chapter Six

When he was in between his morning patients, Nate tried to come up with what he wanted to include in the letter he was sending to Martin Anderson. Even if nothing ever came from his generosity, he still liked the older gentleman and looked forward to visiting with him again. Twenty minutes was hardly enough time to really get to know someone; unfortunately, that was all the time his practice allowed. Unless the patient was having other things done, like X-rays or scans, then extra time was allotted for the visit. With Mr. Anderson's near-perfect health, he'd just have to make the most of their appointment.

One of his afternoon patients had had to cancel last minute, so Nate used this time to walk downstairs to the giftshop. The basket he'd ordered was sitting behind the counter and he couldn't believe how nice it'd turned out. When he'd completed the purchase, he slipped the square envelope from his coat pocket and handed it to the clerk.

“I appreciate you being able to deliver this for me,” he told the young man. “Can you make sure this envelope gets sent with it?”

“We sure can, and it’s not a problem at all. We deliver flowers all the time for orders that come in after a patient has been released. It’s the least we can do.”

“I really appreciate it,” Nate said then slipped a ten dollar bill from his pocket and passed it to the young man. “Here. I almost forgot.”

“Would you like me to text you confirming the delivery?”

“Would you mind?” Nate hadn’t even thought to ask if that were possible.

“Not at all. Just put your number here next to the address. I’ll make sure to follow up with you,” he said and slid the paper over for Nate to complete.

“Thanks again,” Nate called out as he walked from the counter.

“You bet’cha.”

True to his word, around six o’clock, Nate’s phone alerted him of an incoming text. He grabbed it from the kitchen counter where he’d already started to fix himself something to eat, and a smile quickly appeared on his face as he read the message.

Well, the hard part was over with. He'd made the first move and it was up to her if she took the bait or not.

He was in the middle of flipping his hamburger at the stove when he suddenly stopped, and a wave of panic washed over him.

What in the world did I just do? he asked himself.

He believed in doing something nice for someone—going that extra mile—but had he gone a little too far by giving her a gift card along with the fruit basket for Martin Anderson? Maybe he should've kept the basket strictly for Mr. Anderson and left it at that.

It wasn't like he could unsend either, so he tried to push the thought out of his head. No sense in worrying about it now.

But he did. All night long as a matter of fact. And the next day and the day after as well.

As each day passed and he'd yet to hear a thing from Murphy Anderson, there wasn't a doubt in his mind that he'd made the worst decision he could possibly make. He'd just keep an eye out for any appointments for her grandfather—if he even chose to return to the practice—and then he'd be the better person and apologize. He'd do everything he could to make it right.

Late Thursday afternoon when he was finishing up with his last patient, he met Sue Ellen in the hallway.

“I knew you were still in the examination room, so I didn't want to bother you, but one of your patients is on line

one. He was hoping you'd be able to see him before you left today," Sue Ellen said.

Nate pushed his sleeve up enough to check the time on his watch then winced. "Did you mention it was Frank's night to work late and if they'd consider seeing him?" Ordinarily, Nate would try to squeeze his patient in the following day, but since the doctors each took turns working late one night a week, he always suggested they see one of them. Unless it was an emergency, and if that were the case, they needed to use the Eastport Emergency Services.

"I did," Sue Ellen continued. "But the gentleman was adamant to see you specifically."

Seldom did he tell one of his patients no, but it had been a long week for him. He was looking forward to getting home, popping an ice-cold beer, and throwing a steak onto the grill. He'd even remembered to put it into the marinade this morning before he left for work.

"Did they say what their reason was for coming in so late? Seems like if they were ill, they would've come sooner —"

Sue Ellen cut him off before he could finish what he was saying. "Dr. Longmire, it's Martin Anderson."

Nate's gaze locked with Sue Ellen's. "Well why didn't you say so earlier."

"I wanted to make sure before I told him to come on in."

"Wait," Nate began. "He's already here?"

Sue Ellen nodded. "He's in the waiting room."

“Is he alone?” Nate asked and ran his fingers through his hair. What if Murphy were here as well? How would he react seeing her again?

“Yep, looks like he came over on the public transportation bus. Kind of late for him to be out all by himself, so you might want to make sure he gets home safely. I think the buses stop running around six.”

A worried expression suddenly appeared on his face. Of all the crazy things, why would Mr. Anderson venture out on his own this late in the day?

“Send him in, please.” Nate instructed. “If the first exam room is ready, just put him in there.”

“Would you like me to stick around?” she asked. “I don’t mind.”

Nate shook his head. “Let me put this away,” he looked down at the folder he had clenched in his hand. “And I’ll be right in to see him.”

So much for that steak he was craving...

Chapter Seven

Nate hung his white coat on the back of his office door and adjusted the collar on his shirt. As much as he wanted to be upset with Mr. Anderson for coming in so late, there was a part of him that was looking forward to seeing the older fella.

Taking a deep breath as he stood outside the door, he knocked before going into the room. “Mr. Anderson,” he said and closed the door behind him.

“Doc, I’m sorry to bother you so late.”

“What have we got going on?” Nate asked and sat down on the stool across from the table. Pulling the stethoscope from around his neck, he held it in his hands as he rolled the chair over the floor. He didn’t *look* sick, but that didn’t mean there wasn’t something else going on.

“I think it’s my heartburn flaring up again,” Mr. Anderson replied without meeting his gaze.

“Heartburn?” Nate squinted his eyes as he repeated Mr. Anderson’s ailment. He couldn’t believe he’d insisted on

seeing him because of heartburn. *Heartburn?* Really?

“It’s been bothering me since earlier in the week.”

“And you’re just now seeking medical attention for it?” Nate had lots of patience—it was one of the reasons why he’d chosen to work with the geriatric age group—but this was a little much.

“In fact, it was late Monday night when it first started. Right after I tore into that package of salami that someone sent me. That was the spiciest damn shit I’ve ever eaten in my life.” Mr. Anderson did his best to keep a straight face before he suddenly busted out laughing.

Caught completely off guard, Nate leaned back in his seat while his face turned several shades of red. It took him a moment to regain his composure and say something. For the life of him, he couldn’t believe what had come out of the old man’s mouth.

“Mr. Anderson, I—” he began but Martin Anderson cut him off.

“Son, do me a favor, will you?”

Nodding his head, Nate replied, “Uh, sure.”

“Just ask her out. Please.”

Uncertain if he’d heard him correctly, Nate looked at Mr. Anderson with a puzzled expression. “Can you repeat that?”

“I said,” Mr. Anderson cleared his throat and sat up straight on the table. “I said for you to ask her out.”

“What makes you think she’d want to go out with me?” Nate asked and looked at Mr. Anderson squarely in the face.

“I just know these things, son. That granddaughter of mine has come home from school every day this week and found some reason or another to bring up your name.”

Nate wasn’t sure what he was supposed to say. So he smiled instead and leaned his head to the side as though he was waiting for it all to sink in.

“I’m guessing you all have enjoyed the basket I sent over?” he asked, still avoiding the subject of Murphy. “Including that salami that you spoke so highly of.”

“Son,” Mr. Anderson began. “I’ve visited many doctors in my lifetime and you’re the very first one that’s ever thanked me for selecting them as their physician. That says something about your character, that you were raised right. I appreciate that. Integrity goes a long way with an old codger like me.”

“Yes sir. I appreciate the compliment.”

“Hold on, I’m not finished,” Mr. Anderson said and quickly added to what he was saying. “Add in the fact that you included something for my granddaughter, I’m...I’m simply at a loss for words.”

“I hope she’s able to put it to good use,” Nate replied. “I know she enjoys her morning coffee, and that particular coffee shop just happens to be one of the best.”

“Will you promise me that you’ll at least ask her?”

“I...how do I even know she’d agree to go out with me?” Things were starting to get a little interesting. If there was something Martin Anderson knew, he needed to come right out and say it. Otherwise, Nate wasn’t up for playing games, especially this time of the night.

“I just know these things, okay? Just do it.”

“Mr. Anderson, don’t you think it’s getting a little late for you to be out? Your family’s going to be worried sick about you.” Nate did a quick glance up at the clock on the wall behind the examination table.

“That’s not what’s important right now. I need your word that you’ll call her.” Mr. Anderson slid to the edge of the table then lowered one foot to the floor.

“Okay, I’ll do it,” Nate said with a smile. “And I’ll ask her out.”

“Tonight? Considering tomorrow is Friday and it’s almost the weekend, I’d say you better get to it before it’s too late.”

Nate wondered why he’d said it that way. Did he know something, and he just wasn’t saying? Was there someone else interested in Murphy and he wanted me to get to her first?

“Come on, Mr. Anderson. We need to see about getting you home.”

Chapter Eight

“You promised me you’d ask her, so don’t let me down.” Mr. Anderson put his hand on the door handle then paused before getting out of the car.

“I won’t disappoint you, sir, I promise,” Nate replied and shifted the car into park. “Do you need some help getting out?”

“I got it. I’m perfectly capable of getting out of this car. Now that jeep over there,” he stopped speaking long enough to point at Murphy’s jeep that was parked on the outside of the garage. “That’s a different story. I’ll let you off the hook tonight since I’ve tied you up for so long, but I better see my granddaughter with a big ‘ole grin on her face when she gets home from school tomorrow.”

Nate waited for Mr. Anderson to make it up to the front door before he pulled away. He couldn’t believe the mess he’d gotten himself into this time! He was afraid if he didn’t follow thru with Martin’s request, he’d never hear the end of it.

When he finally made it home, he switched his car off and sat there before going inside. How in the world had he gotten himself into this predicament? Well, there was only one person to blame—himself.

By now, it was too late to cook his steak, so he took the easy route and fixed himself a bowl of cereal. As he sat at the table replaying everything over in his head, he couldn't deny what he'd done was pretty clever. Mr. Anderson had pretty much said the same thing.

Nate needed a plan of action, but tonight he was mentally and physically exhausted. He'd done nothing but run all day long—from one exam room to another. He needed to sleep on it and hopefully by morning he'd have some idea of how he wanted to approach Murphy and ask her out.

When he got out of the shower the next morning, he stopped to look at himself in the mirror. He'd always tried to keep himself in the best physical shape, so why was it such a struggle for him to find someone? Did the way he styled his hair have something to do with it? He'd always combed it over to one side after using a tiny bit of gel, but maybe it wasn't the right look. Or was it because his eyes were such a piercing blue?

He finished getting ready, grabbed his coat, and headed out the door. Instead of waiting until he got to the hospital for a cup of coffee, he decided to swing by *The Cooling Rack* and get a cup there. When it was his turn to order at the drive-up window, the clerk repeated his order back to him then asked if there was anything else he needed.

“Go ahead and make that two,” he said.

Two? Why in the world had he told her he wanted an extra cup?

He knew it was a ridiculous idea, but he hadn't been able to come up with anything better. If it didn't work, he'd move on to plan B.

As he drove through the parking lot of Eastport Elementary School, he scanned row after row for Murphy's red jeep. He was just about to give up she was substituting for anyone today when he caught sight of it parked at the end of the next row over.

Pulling into the spot next to her, he grabbed a couple packages of cream and sugar then headed to the front entrance of the school. Students were still being dropped off and he hoped he could catch her in time before she settled in with her class.

"Hi, can I help you?" The young lady behind the counter greeted him as soon as he entered the office.

"Do you think it's possible I could get this delivered to someone?" he asked and shifted the cup over to his other hand.

"Is it for one of the teachers?"

"Actually, for one of the subs here today." Nate hoped she wouldn't make too big of a deal over it.

"Sure. Can I get the name? I'll page her to the front if that's okay. We still have a couple minutes before class is scheduled to begin."

"Murphy Anderson." Nate replied, liking the way her name sounded as he said it out loud. "She's subbing for one of her friends today."

“Aww, she’s such a sweetheart,” the young woman replied. “I just love her. She never told me she had such a handsome man in her life.”

Nate knew the woman was teasing—quite possibly flirting if you wanted to know the truth—but he smiled and pretended not to be nervous. “Thanks. Should I wait on her out in the hallway?”

“Oh, no. You can wait here for her if you’d like.”

Nate took a couple steps back then turned to the side so he could look for her through the glass. More than anything he wanted to see her before she spotted him.

Sure enough, the moment she rounded the corner, a huge smile appeared on his face. When she looked up and locked gazes with him, there was no denying she was happy to see him.

“Nate,” she said before the door had time to close behind her. “What a pleasant surprise.”

“I could say I was in the neighborhood and wanted to stop by, but you know as well as I do how much of a lie that would be. Coffee?” Nate extended the cup, and their fingers brushed during the exchange.

“Wow. I wasn’t expecting this. Is there some special occasion?” Murphy’s cheeks suddenly turned a light shade of pink.

“Well, I suppose it could be a special occasion. I hadn’t really looked at it that way.” Nate grew silent for a moment as he thought about what he wanted to say next. He couldn’t just blurt out that he was there to ask her out on a date. Or could

he? Maybe he should just go ahead and get everything out in the open. But if she said no...that was a whole other issue.

Chapter Nine

The bell sounded and out of habit, Murphy looked down at her watch. Nate still hadn't admitted as to why he'd stopped by other than to give her a cup of coffee. If he didn't make a move soon, he was going to miss his opportunity...and have a lot of explaining to do. Martin Anderson wasn't playing around where his granddaughter was concerned.

"Thanks for the coffee this morning, Nate. It was really a nice surprise," Murphy said and took a couple steps towards the door.

"You're welcome. I know you need to get to class, but can I ask you something really quick?" Nate bit down on his lower lip.

"Sure."

Though he'd always been known for paying close attention to details, he couldn't believe he'd never noticed the little dimple in her left cheek until now. "Would you like to go to dinner tonight?"

“I’d love to,” she replied without giving it a whole lot of thought.

“Aww,” the young woman behind the counter cried. “Oh, never mind me. I didn’t mean to listen in on your conversation.”

Nate opened the door for her and the two of them walked out to the hallway together.

“Look,” he exclaimed. “It’s been a while, so don’t make fun of me if I’m a little rusty at these sorts of things.”

“If you must know, I’m a little awkward myself,” Murphy admitted.

“What’s a good time to pick you up?”

“Seven, okay?”

“I’ll see you then.” Nate lifted his hand to wave goodbye.

“Is everything okay?” Sue Ellen looked up as soon as he walked in through the back entrance.

“I guess so, why do you ask?” Nate knew exactly why she was asking. Though his first patient wasn’t scheduled until ten this morning it wasn’t uncommon for him to arrive an hour, or even two hours, before then.

“You’re late,” she said and raised her brow.

“I’m not late,” he corrected her. “I’m just not as early as I normally am.” Unfortunately, the ‘cat-that-ate-the-canary’ look on his face was a dead giveaway that he was hiding something.

“Does it involve a woman?” Sue Ellen was never one for beating around the bush. She was as straightforward as she could be.

Nate stopped suddenly and looked over at her. Was it that obvious?

“Nate Longmire, did you have someone stay the night over at your place?”

Shaking his head, he quickly replied. “No. Absolutely not.”

Sure, he’d had a few women over the years spend the night, but that was true for countless other people too. It just sort of happened when you were dating someone.

“Then you must’ve been the one to stay over.”

“No, I slept in my own bed...*alone*.” And with that Nate turned the corner and punched in the alarm code so he could enter his office. Somehow, he didn’t feel this would be the only time Sue Ellen brought it up.

Much to his surprise, the day passed rather quickly, and before he even realized it, he was done with his last patient.

“Goodnight, Sue Ellen,” he called out just as he was about to slip out the door. “Have a good weekend.”

“Nate, hold on,” she cried and dropped the set of files down onto the counter before she hurried over.

Nate rolled his eyes when he realized there was no escaping her. Expecting her to start in on him again, he was actually surprised when she placed her hand on his forearm and said, “Have fun tonight. You deserve it.”

“Thank you. And thank you for not giving me a hard time about it.” He winked and pushed the back door open.

“That’s what Monday is for.”

Nate lowered his head and laughed. He should’ve known he wasn’t getting off the hook that easily.

He hurried home and jumped in for a quick shower. It wasn’t like he was dirty or anything, but he wanted to look his absolute best for Murphy Anderson tonight.

Chapter Ten

“Dinner was delicious,” Murphy said and stepped closer to him as they walked down the sidewalk towards the parking garage.

The wind had picked up considerably and as it whirled in between the older downtown buildings, he was pretty sure they were going to get an extra layer of snow by morning. He’d dealt with the occasional winter storm when he’d lived in Atlanta but there was no comparison to the amount of snow he’d had to endure since relocating to Eastport.

He slipped his arm around her waist and pulled her to him. “You could’ve waited inside until I’d gotten the car. I didn’t mind driving around to pick you up.”

“It’s not that far to walk. I’ll be okay.” Murphy had dressed comfortably tonight in a lavender sweater and jeans and Nate had once again noticed the sway in her hips. The black leather boots she wore had given her a few inches in height, bringing her face almost to his chin.

“Can I at least offer you my gloves to wear?” he asked and reached into his coat pocket. “I hate you forgot yours.”

She lowered her head to keep her scarf from blowing from around her neck. “No, no. I’m good. Please don’t feel bad about wearing them yourself though.”

Nate didn’t care what she said about him wearing the gloves—there’s no way he’d wear them while she had none—so he shoved them back into his coat pocket then reached down to lace his fingers with hers. “It won’t be so bad once we get into the garage.”

They didn’t quite make it that far before they both stopped to look across the street. The sound of live music coming from inside *Spade*—a local nightclub/bar—caught both their attention.

“Ever been there before?” Murphy asked.

“No, I sure haven’t.” Nate replied. Though he’d never considered going someplace like this by himself, he wasn’t against checking the place out if that’s what she wanted to do. And if he were being honest, he wasn’t quite ready for their night to come to an end. “Would you like to grab a drink?”

“Sure, why not?” Murphy pressed her folded arms to her chest as they walked over to the crosswalk to wait for the light to change. When they got the signal to cross, Nate slid his arm behind her back as they hurried across the street.

The bouncer pushed the door open as soon as he saw them walking up. “Evening,” he mumbled.

“Do you have somewhere we can leave our coats?” Nate asked when they were far enough inside the doorway

they could no longer feel the wind.

“You can check it over there,” he replied and pointed to a small opening right before a set of swinging doors.

“Here, let me have your coat,” he said and assisted her in taking it off.

Murphy shivered as she readjusted the sleeves of her sweater. “Maybe a drink will help warm me up.”

Nate shoved the claim ticket into his pocket then placed his hand against her lower back as they walked further inside.

The faint smell of a cigar met Nate’s nostrils and he turned his head to see if he could detect where it was coming from. The lighting was mostly dim except for the area surrounding the bar. “Come on, let’s walk back here.”

Murphy climbed onto one of the leather barstools and Nate stepped as close to her as he could. Music played through the speakers set up in the corners and overhead making it a little difficult to hear.

“What can I get for you?” the bartender asked as soon as he was close enough for them to hear.

“Do you know what you want?” Nate asked Murphy then leaned his arm against the side of the bar.

“Can I get a vodka with cranberry, please?”

“I’ll take a Bud Light,” he said loudly so the bartender could hear him.

“Draft or bottle?”

Nate couldn't remember the last time he'd had an ice cold draft beer, so the decision was quite easy for him to make. "Draft."

"I'll be right back."

With less than a couple inches separating the two of them, Nate craned his neck to look around the room. There weren't very many people, considering the time of night that it was, and he wondered if the latest weather forecast had kept everyone at home for the evening. Though he'd learned that a couple more inches of snow wasn't as bad as it sounded, he still wasn't fond of having to get out in it if he didn't have to.

"I really enjoyed dinner tonight," she said and placed her slender fingers over the top of his hand.

"Enough that you'd like to go again?" Nate knew the moment he said it there was no taking it back and he held his breath while he waited for her response.

"I'd love to," she spoke up. "Except next time, you get to choose where we eat instead of me."

Before they could take their conversation any further, the bartender interrupted them by placing their drinks down in front of them. "Here you go," he said and handed Nate the ticket. "Want me to start a tab for you?"

Nate hadn't planned on having more than one drink—well, Murphy could have as many as she wanted—but he didn't want to run into any issues when it was time for them to leave. "I think we're good with these," he said and laid his card down on top of the ticket.

“I’ll be right back,” the bartender noted and tapped the side of Nate’s card against the counter.

Nate pulled the barstool that was behind him over, so they’d be able to hear one another over the music. “How’s your drink?” he asked then lifted his beer to his mouth.

“It’s really good,” she exclaimed. “It’s been a while since I’ve had one.”

“Same,” he said and tilted the bottle in her direction before sitting it down on the bar. “I’ll have a beer at home every now and then when I’m watching a game, but it’s no fun drinking alone.”

“I’ve caught Grandpa sneaking in the refrigerator a time or two even though we’ve told him he really shouldn’t be having any sort of alcoholic beverage.” Murphy laughed and tossed her head back.

“Eh, I don’t think one beer’s going to do him any harm. It’s not like he’s getting drunk or anything.” Nate kind of felt bad about them giving Martin Anderson a hard time. “Or that he’s getting behind the wheel of the car.”

“True, but the idea of him getting buzzed...just no.”

“I guess you’re right,” Nate agreed with her then took a long swallow of his beer. “I sure do like him, though.”

Murphy grew silent for a moment. “He thinks the world of you too.”

The last thing Nate wanted to do was jinx himself, but he couldn’t believe how well he and Murphy got along, especially in such a short period of time. Of course, it was way

too soon to speculate anything but there was no denying the happiness he felt from spending time with her.

“Will you excuse me while I go to the restroom?” he asked and pushed his empty beer bottle to the edge of the bar. “Are you okay being here alone?”

Murphy glanced around at the few patrons sitting nearby. “I think so,” she said and smiled.

He’d been raised to be a gentleman and that’s what he was hoping to convey to her. He was a ‘what-you-see-is-what-you-get’ kind of guy—no secrets or strings attached—just genuine and true to his word.

Before he rounded the corner, he glanced back over his shoulder at her. *Damn, had he gotten lucky or what?*

While he was away, Murphy had turned her barstool around so she could watch the house band playing over in the corner. They’d been playing mostly easy-listening tunes, but now, something a little more upbeat blasted through the speakers.

As he worked his way over to her, Nate noticed the way she bounced in her seat and tapped her hands against the tops of her knees. Either she liked the song a lot or the drink had relaxed her quite a bit.

“Want to dance?” he asked and slid his hand underneath hers.

At first, she seemed stunned that he’d asked such a thing. Other people were dancing in the open area across from the band, so why not? Unless she were ashamed to...

Chapter Eleven

Nate was a little surprised when she slid down off the barstool and pulled him out onto the dance floor. The first couple songs were upbeat, and you pretty much had to be a stick in the mud to not move to the music. But when the band slowed it down a few notches, Nate soon realized Murphy wasn't ready to retire to her seat.

The band began a much slower, more intimate song and before Nate could even wrap his head around what was happening, Murphy stepped into him and rested her head against his chest. As they swayed together, he slipped his hand against the lower portion of her back. He couldn't help but to breathe in her intoxicating scent. He'd never dated anyone who smelled so good.

Neither of them cared that the night was slowly fading. When Nate realized it was nearing one o'clock in the morning, he whispered in her ear, "I don't know about you, but I've had a wonderful time tonight."

Murphy grabbed hold of his hand and they walked back to the bar. “It’s been an amazing night. I’d love to do this again. Soon.”

“Promise?” he asked and stepped in behind her.

“Promise,” she repeated then reached up to cover a yawn that had suddenly come out of nowhere.

“Come on, let’s get out of here. If I don’t get you home soon, Martin Anderson is going to come looking for me.”

Nate grabbed their coats and they stood just inside the door as they bundled up. The snow was coming down much harder now and he hoped they didn’t have any trouble making it to her place.

Instead of cutting through the alley to get to his car in the parking garage, they walked to the end of the street then cut over into the main entrance. Only a handful of cars remained—not much of a surprise considering the time of morning it was.

Nate grabbed the door for her, then quickly scurried around so he could jump in on the driver’s side. “*Brrrr*, it’s cold as you know what,” he said and blew into his folded hands.

“You can say that again,” she said and pulled her coat tightly across her chest. “I swear, the temperature’s dropped another ten degrees since we first got here.”

As soon as the car began to warm, Nate backed out of his spot and drove down to the bottom level of the garage. Stopping at the box where he was supposed to pay, he opened his wallet and pulled out the ticket to insert it. “This is crazy,”

he said and attempted to shove it in the narrow slot multiple times. “It looks like it may be broken.”

Murphy shifted in her seat then leaned forward to see what he was talking about. “Look,” she said and pointed at the message scrolling across the top corner of the screen, directly above the credit card payment slot. “Temporarily out of order.”

“You have to be kidding me,” Nate said, raising his voice just slightly.

“Wow! What are we supposed to do now?” she asked.

Nate rolled the window back up to try and reserve some of the car’s heat. “I’m not sure. I’ve never encountered this kind of situation before. Nor have I ever heard of anyone else either.”

“I guess we could call 9-1-1, but there’s no telling how long it would take someone to get here, considering this isn’t really an emergency type situation. I mean, it is for us, but there’s so many other things I’m sure they’re tending to. Plus, with the weather, that could delay them getting here, too.”

“We need to come up with a plan. We can’t very well sit here all night with the car running. We could for a little while,” Nate said and glanced down at the fuel level on the dash. “But I don’t think it’s smart to do it for an extended length of time.”

“I agree. I wouldn’t want you to do that either.”

“God, this is crazy,” Nate laughed and nodded his head. “What a way to ruin a first date.”

Murphy reached for his hand. “Ruin? What are you talking about? I’ve actually enjoyed myself quite a bit.”

“Of all the things that could’ve happened, I never would’ve picked this. Why couldn’t they raise the arm, so everyone that’s parked here can just drive on out? Hey, wait a minute.” Nate undid his seatbelt and opened the car door.”

The cold, metal gate arm was freezing against his bare hand, so he wrapped his arm around it and gave it a slight tug. Sadly, it didn’t budge. He attempted to lift it one more time, but it was no use.

“I can always call my father,” Murphy suggested as soon as he got back inside the car. “He could probably come and get us.”

“I’d really hate to do that. Let me think for a moment,” he said and reached for his phone that he’d dropped down into the cupholder. In a matter of seconds, he had Google maps pulled up and he quickly punched in their approximate location. Then, sliding his finger across the screen, he zoomed into their exact area.

“What are you looking at?” she asked and leaned over in the seat.

“Would you be opposed to getting a hotel room? It looks like there’s one two blocks over. Of course, I’d get us two rooms,” he quickly added before she had a chance to say no.

Nodding her head, she replied, “I’m up for that. But I can’t let you pay for a room for me. It’s not like you planned for this to happen.”

“I know, but I feel terrible not having any other options at the moment. I mean, I could try to crash through the gate,

but I would really hate to damage my car.”

“Come on, let’s get out of here,” Murphy suggested then slipped her hand inside his.

Nate lowered his gaze to their intertwined fingers. Then, out of nowhere, she reached up to trail her hand against the side of his face. Nate couldn’t resist and leaned his head towards hers.

Murphy’s breath was warm and inviting as she pressed her lips to his. The soft smacks of their lips seemed to echo inside the car. When Nate realized how heavy he was breathing, he pulled back for some fresh air. Resting his forehead against hers, he whispered, “Murphy Anderson, you’re incredible. I’ve never met anyone like you before.”

He knew it sounded cliché, but it was true.

Chapter Twelve

“I’d like to get two rooms, please,” Nate told the young woman standing behind the counter at the hotel. “We sort of got stuck inside one of the parking garages and we aren’t able to get my car out.”

Nate couldn’t help but laugh as he tried to explain their situation.

“Two rooms?” the check-in clerk repeated.

“Yes, two, please.”

“Nate, there’s no need to spend the extra money. We’re only talking about a couple hours anyway. I’m perfectly fine sleeping in the chair or even—”

“I’m sorry, but I could never let you do that,” he insisted.

“If you must.”

“Would you like those two rooms to be adjoining?” the clerk asked as she punched away on her keyboard.

“That would be nice,” Nate said then looked over at her. It was hard to believe a few moments ago the two of them had shared their first kiss. Yeah, hard to believe, for sure.

“I need to see an ID, please,” the clerk said and reached out to retrieve Nate’s driver’s license.

“I’ll send my father a text as soon as we get to our rooms. I wouldn’t want him or grandpa to worry when they wake up and find I’m not home yet.”

“That’s probably a good idea,” Nate replied. “I’d hate for either of them, especially Martin, to get the wrong impression of me. It’s not like I did this on purpose, you know.”

“I know, it’s crazy, isn’t it?” Murphy said and shook her head. “This is certainly a first for me.”

The clerk handed Nate two sets of keycards and explained they’d have to insert one of them in the slot inside the elevator so it would take them to their appropriate floor.

“Anything else I can get for you two?” she asked.

Nate shook his head. “I think we’re good.”

He reached for Murphy’s hand and led her to the set of elevators that were just down the hallway. Sure, the hotel had cost him a pretty penny since it was older and recently renovated, but it sure beat staying at one of those chain hotels.

Neither of them said anything as they waited for the car to take them to the twelfth floor. As soon as the door opened, Murphy pointed to the left and Nate followed behind her. It was nice the clerk had put them in adjoining rooms, but

right now, Nate was more concerned about them getting some sleep.

They found their rooms at the end of the hallway and Nate handed her one of the keys. "I'll let you have this one. Does it bother you if I open the door between our rooms?"

"No, not at all. I think it'll be kind of neat that we're side by side."

"Me too."

Nate let go of her hand and waited for her to open the door to her room and disappear inside. The lavender scent of cleaning solution met his nostrils as soon as he walked into his own room. He scrunched his nose then flipped on the light. The inside was very fashionable, and he hated he was only going to be here for a couple hours. He hoped Murphy's was just as nice.

Rather than barge right on in, he knocked before opening the divider separating the two rooms.

"Come in," she said.

Nate stepped through the opening and immediately noticed she'd already removed her shoes and pulled back the sheets.

"Ready for bed?" he asked.

"I think so. I didn't realize how tired I was."

"Yeah, me too. If you need anything..."

"The next room over," she teased. "Goodnight, Nate."

Nate decided to test the waters and he stepped up to her. Sure enough, she slipped her arm around his waist and

pulled him close. They exchanged a soft, tender kiss then she backed away.

“Goodnight.”

Despite how tired he was, Nate struggled to fall asleep immediately. He wasn't sure if it was because she was only a few feet away in the next room or if it was something more. Either way, he knew he needed to get rest or else he'd be cranky the next day. His days of pulling an all-nighter like he'd done so many times when he was in medical school were long gone—now, he'd gladly take as much sleep as he could possibly get.

After another ten minutes of staring at the clock on the bedside table, he slipped out from underneath the covers and quietly padded over to the wet bar for a bottle of water he'd noticed earlier. He smiled when he heard her soft snores coming from the other room. *At least one of us is getting some rest*, he thought to himself.

Rather than crawl back into the bed in his clothes, he decided to take everything off and lay them over the chair closest to the bed. No reason to wrinkle his clothes if he didn't have to, right? And if Murphy happened to catch a glimpse of him wearing nothing but his underwear, well, he just hoped she enjoyed what she saw.

Chapter Thirteen

Nate rolled over and opened his eyes, the bright morning sun shining directly into his room. “God, what time is it?”

He bolted upright when he saw that it was just shy of noon, almost an hour after check-out time. Scrambling out of bed, he reached for his pants and slipped his feet in first. He nearly lost his balance as he struggled to get them fastened.

“Murphy, you awake yet?” he called out and quickly ran his fingers through his hair. Considering how hard he slept—once he’d finally gotten to sleep—he knew his hair was probably a mess. With his shirt in hand, he walked over to the doorway and peered around the edge. The last thing he wanted to do was startle her. Lowering his voice, he said her name again, “Murphy.”

Standing in the doorway, he felt his stomach drop as he took in the sight of the empty bed. Well, it would certainly explain why the room was eerily quiet. Seeing the darkened

bathroom didn't help either. Or the now empty floor where she'd kicked her shoes off this morning.

She was gone.

It was possible she'd gone downstairs for brunch, but he knew she wouldn't have gone by herself. And he doubted she would've gone wearing the same clothes she'd slept in.

In a nutshell, Nate was devastated. She'd left without so much as saying goodbye.

With his head hanging low, Nate walked back over to his side. A note sitting on the table captured his attention and he quickly tossed his shirt down onto the bed and scooped up the piece of paper.

Nate,

My father insisted on coming to get me since you were still asleep. I really didn't want to wake you, since you were sleeping so soundly. I got them to extend your checkout, so you're good until one o'clock. I had a good time last night and hope we can do it again soon. Well, except for the parking garage. Maybe next time we'll park on a side street. Lol.

Talk soon,

Murphy

P.S. Dad is grilling tonight for the game. Text me if you'd like him to throw a steak on the grill for you.

Nate suddenly felt the weight of the world lift from his chest. *Whew!* He couldn't imagine that he'd done something

wrong, but you never knew with women. A smile suddenly appeared on his face as he thought about her invite to dinner later tonight.

He'd be there alright. No questions about it.

Nate showered then threw on the clothes he'd wore last night. After checking out from his room, he walked across the street and down the two blocks to the garage where he'd left his car. He was relieved to see the gate's arm standing straight up in the air. He still couldn't believe of all the things that could go wrong while being on a date, he never would've guessed that one.

He arrived at the Anderson's just shy of six and Murphy greeted him at the door with a huge smile on her face. "Hey, you," she said and stood on her tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek. "I'm glad you decided to come eat with us."

"Did you think I could say no?" Nate said teasingly. Even if he'd had other plans, he would've cancelled if it meant he'd get to spend another night with her.

"I was hoping you wouldn't" she replied and stepped to the side to allow him in.

Martin Anderson was sitting in the recliner, the remote control clenched tightly in his hand.

"Mr. Anderson," Nate said and stepped over to his patient. "It's good to see you again."

"Martin," the older man chuckled. "Don't let me tell you again you to call me Martin."

"Can I get you something to drink?" Murphy interrupted. "Beer? Iced tea? Coke?"

“A soft drink is good,” Nate replied and passed her the plastic bag he still had in his hand. “I wasn’t sure if there’d be any room for dessert, but I grabbed a cheesecake just in case.”

“Did someone tell you that I have a weakness for cheesecake?” she asked and slipped the rounded container out of the bag. “Oh, my god, you got the good kind too.”

“No, no one told me. I just took a chance that everyone would like it.”

“I’m not sharing this with anyone,” she said and hurriedly walked from the living room to the kitchen.

Nate sat down on the end of the sofa closest to Martin Anderson and the two of them immediately began to discuss the football game that was set to come on within the hour. From players to predictions, there wasn’t a single thing about the game they didn’t touch on.

Meanwhile, Murphy helped her father and stepmother in the kitchen get everything prepped for their dinner.

With a plate of steaks in her hands, she stuck her head through the doorway and asked, “How would you like yours cooked? Dad’s getting ready to throw them onto the grill.”

Nate looked over his shoulder then replied, “Don’t laugh, but I like mine well done.”

Murphy was already nodding. “I’m with you on that.”

“Is there something I can do? Does your father need any help with the grill?” Nate felt bad that he hadn’t asked about this sooner.

“We’re good,” she replied. “Just keep grandpa occupied until we’re ready to eat.”

Martin Anderson shook his head. “That granddaughter of mine. I don’t know what I’m going to do with her.”

“She’s not a handful, is she?” Nate knew Martin was only kidding, but he loved the witty way they all seemed to poke fun of one another. The close bond they shared was one he admired.

“If you only knew...”

Chapter Fourteen

Nate leaned back in the chair and brought his hands to his lower torso. “That was so good,” he said. “I literally can’t eat another bite.”

“What? No room for dessert?” Murphy asked and turned to stare at the cheesecake sitting at the end of the table.

“Maybe later, but not right now.”

“Never tell a woman no,” Martin Anderson said out of the blue.

“You’re right about that,” Murphy’s father agreed and nudged his wife in the arm.

“Excuse me, I said maybe later. I never said no,” Nate chuckled. “Don’t go putting words in my mouth.”

Murphy stood up from her chair then stepped behind Nate. Placing her hands on top of his shoulders, she began to gently massage the area.

Nate felt a trail of goosebumps run the length of his body. For someone who'd been somewhat quiet and a little reserved initially, she sure didn't mind showing a little affection in front of her family. Especially knowing her grandfather was all eyes and ears when it came to the two of them right now.

Later that evening, when it was just the two of them in the family room, Nate leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. "Thank you for having me over tonight. Your family has sure made me feel welcome."

"Yeah, well, your name has become the topic of conversation lately and it's all they want to talk about."

"You make it sound as though that's a bad thing," Nate became worried that maybe he needed to back off. The last thing he wanted to do was wear out his welcome.

"Oh, no. Not bad at all." And with that, Murphy draped her leg over on top of his and lowered her head into his neck. Her breath was warm against his skin as she began to plant kisses along his jawline.

Nate softly moaned as he slid down further on the sofa. As though she were reading his mind, she crawled over on top of him and leaned her forehead against his.

Sliding her hips up and down over the tops of his jeans, Nate couldn't resist lifting his hips. *No*, he told himself. *It's way too soon. Not yet and definitely not here in her family's house.*

He did, though, cup his hands around the cheeks of her butt. Just as he was getting ready to squeeze, they both jerked

their heads when someone across the room cleared their throat.

Murphy had never moved so fast before and reached up to push her hair from her face. “Grandpa, what are you—”

“Doctor Longmire? Murphy?” Mr. Anderson asked.

Nate didn’t like his tone one bit, especially since he’d used his doctor title and not his first name.

“We thought you’d gone to bed. We can explain—”

Once again, he cut her off. “There’s no need to explain anything, young lady.”

Nate suddenly felt the coloring drain from his face. One minute Martin Anderson had been all for them being together, so what was the problem now?

“I was just telling Murphy goodnight, sir,” Nate said the first thing that popped into his head. He was by no means ready to call it a night, but he also knew when he’d worn out his welcome. It was best to let Murphy smooth things over with her grandfather, than to make matters worse.

“I thought so,” he said and continued to make his way over to the kitchen. “Don’t mind me, I’m just grabbing some water. I...I had a tickle in my throat.”

“Grandpa, you hate water,” Murphy quickly stated.

Nate grabbed his coat and had it halfway on at this point. He needed to situate his jeans but there was no way he’d do that now, not in front of Mr. Anderson.

“I do, don’t I?” he said and shuffled on out of the room.

“Can I call you sometime this week?” Nate leaned down to kiss Murphy on the cheek.

“I’d love that. I’m sorry about Mr. Grumpy,” she said and pointed towards the kitchen. “I don’t know what’s gotten into him lately.”

“It’s all good. Lots of my patients have mood swings, some of which, have gotten worse over the years. It’s just part of getting older. We get so set in our ways.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“Come tomorrow, he’ll have forgotten all about tonight.”

For his sake, Nate hoped he was right. The last thing he needed was any awkwardness between his patient and himself. Or, even worse, to have Mr. Anderson swap doctors.

“Be careful, Nate. Goodnight.”

Nate decided to play it safe, so for the next couple days, he busied himself with work and some things around his apartment that he’d been neglecting. One thing, being laundry.

He’d never worried much about his appearance until he’d started working at the hospital. There was nothing worse than seeing a doctor who needed to shave or tuck their shirt in. He prided himself on being neat and always looking his best, even when he was stressed.

Which happened to be the case on Thursday. One of the doctors had had to leave for a family emergency first thing that morning, so Nate and one of the other doctors had found themselves trying to cover for the patients who weren’t able or willing to reschedule their appointments. He could totally

understand why some weren't able to switch on such short notice since many relied on caregivers and family members to get them to their appointments. He tried his best to remain as professional as possible despite the tension headache that loomed.

He'd just sat down at his desk for a quick breather when his phone chirped. "Yeah?" Sue Ellen knew he wasn't feeling well, and he hoped she had a legitimate reason for interrupting the only time he'd been able to sneak away.

"You've got a visitor up front that's insisting they see you. I tried to explain you were booked solid today as well as tomorrow too, but they're being persistent. Can you take a moment to find out what they need?"

"Sue Ellen, you know this isn't the way we handle these kinds of situations," Nate said and rubbed his temples. This stupid headache wasn't getting any better. He knew better than to skip lunch, but there simply hadn't been any time to take a breather earlier.

"I've tried, trust me."

"Fine, I'll be right out."

Taking another long swallow of his electrolyte drink, he returned the cap to the bottle then sat it down on the edge of his desk. "Let's get this over with," he mumbled and reached for the door handle.

No sooner had he stepped out into the hallway, he looked up and right into the prettiest set of eyes he'd ever seen before. Sue Ellen was standing at the end of the hall peering

around the corner. He should've known she'd try and pull a stunt like this.

“Murphy,” Nate began. “What brings you by?”

“One of my classes got cancelled, so rather than go straight home, I decided to swing by the hospital. I was hoping to find that my favorite doctor could fit me into his schedule, but it seems he's all booked for the day.”

“Booked is an understatement. I literally have not had time to go to the bathroom until just a few minutes ago.”

“Are you feeling okay?” Murphy asked, a worried expression suddenly appearing on her face. “You look exhausted.”

“Just a headache is all. Look, instead of standing out here, why don't you come on inside. I *might* can spare five minutes.” Nate placed his hand against the small of her back and led her inside the room.

“Wow, so this is what your personal space looks like,” she said as her gaze traveled around the room taking in all the frames Sue Ellen had helped him hang.

“It's one of the smaller offices, but I like it. Especially since this one has a window. Granted, the parking garage isn't the greatest view, but at least I'm able to have to have some sunlight early in the day.”

Murphy stepped into him the moment he closed the door and pressed her body against his. Wrapping his arms around her mid-section, he breathed in her delicious scent—something light and peachy.

“What are you doing?” she asked when his nose grazed the outside of her ear.

“You’re the cure for my headache,” he whispered into her ear. “I already feel a million times better just having you here.”

“Is that so?” she inquired then opened her mouth for him to slip his tongue inside.

“Do you have plans for this evening?” he asked and lowered his mouth to her neck.

“Well, I could...”

Chapter Fifteen

Nate managed to make it the rest of the day without any complications. He'd just gotten out of the shower when the doorbell sounded. It was too soon for their food to be delivered, and a smile slowly worked its way over his face at the thought of seeing her standing on the other side of his door.

Not wanting to leave her out in the cold for too long, he grabbed the robe from the backside of the bathroom door and slipped his arms through the sleeves. Ordinarily, he wouldn't answer the door this way, but he knew she wouldn't mind. In fact, he kind of liked the idea of teasing her.

Sure enough, the moment her eyes landed on the buttery soft material of his cotton robe, he wondered if he needed to reach out and help her inside.

"Sorry, I just finished taking a shower," he announced and tugged at the belt around his waist.

"I can see," she said and reached up to swipe her hand across his damp hair.

“Oh, god,” he wailed, forgetting all about his hair that needed combing.

“I kind of like the messy look,” she teased then stood up on her tiptoes to kiss him on the lips. “I’m sorry you had a rough day. I hope I didn’t hold you up too bad by stopping by earlier.”

“Let me just say,” he began, a crooked grin quickly appearing across his face. “Had you not, I probably wouldn’t have made it through the day.”

“Why are you grinning?” she asked and slipped her hands inside the top of his robe.

Her hands were warm and soft as her fingers trailed over his chest. “No reason.”

“Are you sure?” she asked again and brushed her thumb over his hardened nipple.

“Positive.”

“I’m glad to see you’re feeling better though. You had me worried.”

Grabbing her hand, Nate led her inside. “I’ve got dinner coming, but it won’t be here for at least another hour. I hope that’s okay.”

“I brought a bottle of wine—,” she said then paused. “Well shoot, I think I walked out and left it at the house.”

“It’s okay. There’s one coming with dinner.”

“You don’t forget a thing, do you?” she asked as she took her coat off and draped it over the back of the recliner.

“I can’t take credit this time. Sue Ellen took the liberty of ordering everything for us. She knew the kind of day I’d had and when I told her you were coming over later, how could I say no?”

“Did you say an hour until it arrives?” Murphy asked and stared intently into his eyes.

“Stop looking at me that way,” Nate teased and brushed the tip of his finger over the end of her nose. “And yes, an hour.”

“What way are you talking about?”

“That way,” Nate said and leaned down to scoop her up. Brushing his lips against hers, he simply couldn’t get enough of her.

“Nate,” she whispered breathlessly. “I need a moment to catch my breath.”

Nate began to blush, oblivious as to how she was really feeling. “You should’ve told me to stop.”

“That’s just it. I don’t want you to. I want you to keep going.” Lowering her hands to his waist, she began to unfasten the loosely tied belt.

“Come on,” he said and pulled her down the hallway to his bedroom. “We’ve got an hour to kill.”

Murphy laid her head back against his pillow then pushed her hair away from her face. Patting the area beside her, she whispered, “Care to join me?”

Nate couldn’t take his eyes off her gorgeous body as he helped to remove her clothes. “Murphy,” he said softly.

“You’re so beautiful.”

“You’re making me blush,” she said and lifted her hand to cover her chest.

“Don’t,” he said and gently pulled her hand away. “I could stare at you all night long.”

Untying the belt of his robe, he pushed it down from his shoulders then let it fall to the floor. He heard her gasp and he quickly crawled up on the bed beside her.

His mouth found hers almost immediately and it didn’t take long before their bodies were grinding against one another.

“Nate,” she whispered. “I never knew I could feel this way about someone so soon.”

“Shh,” he said and placed his finger over her lip.

“I...I don’t have any kind of protection with me,” she said, a worried expression suddenly appearing on her face.

Nate rolled over and pulled a condom from the top drawer of his nightstand. “Don’t worry,” he said as he ripped the foil package open.

Murphy surprised him though when she took the condom from him. “Can I?”

Nate found a comfortable position and watched as she carefully rolled the condom into place. Then, she climbed on top of him and slowly began to slide up and down until he was all the way inside her.

“Wow!” he cried out and arched his back.

“Nate,” she gasped and sucked in her breath. “Nate.”

Placing his hands on the sides of her hips, Nate gently raised her up and down until he could feel the trembling sensation take over his body. “Don’t stop!” he wailed as he lifted his hips off the bed.

Neither bothered to say anything as they let their bodies experience one of the greatest sensations in the world.

Chapter Sixteen

“Sue Ellen did pretty good, don’t you think?” Nate asked as he lifted his glass of wine to his lips.

“This chicken parmesan is amazing,” she said as she stabbed her fork into the last piece.

Nate reached over and dabbed his napkin at the corner of her mouth. “You’ve got a little sauce right here.”

“Oh, thank you,” she said then pushed her plate forward. “Remind me to thank her the next time I see her.”

When they were finished, Murphy helped Nate put away the containers their food had come in and to tidy up the rest of the kitchen.

“Would you like to watch a movie?” he asked as they walked into the living room.

“Sure. I’ll let you pick though.”

“Come on, we’ll decide together.”

A few hours later, Nate woke with a horrible crick in his neck. Murphy was curled up beside him, her head gently pressed against his chest.

Apparently, they'd both drifted off to sleep, exhausted from the busy day they'd both had and from their lovemaking earlier. Nate hated to wake her, but if she were planning to go home, she needed to do so before it got any later.

"Murphy," he whispered. "We fell asleep on the couch and it's getting pretty late."

Stretching her arms out in front of her, she reached up to cover her yawn. "What time is it?"

"It's after midnight."

"Do you mind if I stay here?" she said and placed her hand on his arm.

"Of course not," Nate replied. "But I think we'll be more comfortable if we go to the bedroom."

"Okay."

Nate scooped her up in his arms and carried her down the hallway. Sitting her down on the side of the bed, he pulled the rumpled sheets down and helped her crawl underneath the covers. With her back pressed against his chest, he wrapped his arm around her and held her.

In a few minutes, her breathing slowed, and he knew she'd drifted off to sleep again.

Sometime in the early morning hours, Nate was wakened from the sound of Murphy's phone ringing. The last

he remembered she'd left it laying on the end table and the vibrating sound echoed throughout his apartment.

“Murphy.” Nate softly nudged her shoulder. “Your phone.”

“Huh?” she asked and rolled over.

“Your phone. It's been ringing. Did you not let your dad know you wouldn't be coming home?”

“I told him I might be staying over, but that was all. I guess I need to see who it is.”

Nate switched on the lamp so she wouldn't run into anything. With her shirt pressed against her chest, he watched her rear as she headed towards the living room.

Yeah, I'm one lucky guy, he thought to himself.

He waited for her to return but when she still hadn't come back to bed after a few moments, he wondered if everything was okay. Then he heard her cries as she shouted into the phone.

“No!! Is he okay?”

Nate wrapped his arms around her as he tried to understand what was going on. Murphy was trembling and it wasn't from the cold or from being naked in his living room.

When she ended the call, she turned to Nate. “I've got to go. It's grandpa. He fell off his treadmill this morning.”

“Wait, I'll go with you.”

Nate got them to the hospital in less than ten minutes. Using the associate parking, Nate pulled into the first available

spot and helped Murphy out of the car. “Come on, I can get you in through the back way.”

Murphy hadn't said much on the way over, but Nate could see how worried she was. He also knew how important her grandfather was to her.

Slipping in through the staff entrance, Nate took her hand in his and led her to the emergency area of the hospital.

“He's got to be okay,” she said as soon as they walked through the sliding doors. He just has to be.”

“He'll get the best care here. I promise.”

Nate stopped one of the nurses to see where they'd taken Martin Anderson and to get the most recent update on his condition.

When they finally reached the waiting room where her dad and stepmom were waiting, Murphy let go of his hand and rushed to her father. “I'm so sorry I wasn't home.”

Nate didn't like that she was trying to take the blame for her grandfather's fall. Treadmills were dangerous for anyone, regardless of their age. He allowed her this time with her family and took a few steps back.

“I knew that treadmill was trouble the moment it was delivered to our house. But you know how stubborn your grandfather can be.” Murphy's father did his best to calm his daughter.

Everyone looked up when one of the surgeons walked through the door. Nate reached for Murphy's hand and held on to it while the surgeon explained in more detail about her grandfather's condition.

“Hip replacements are pretty common these days,” Nate tried to assure Murphy and her parents. “Trust me, they’ll have him up and walking by this afternoon.”

“Seriously?” Murphy wiped the tears with the backside of her hand.

“Oh, yes. They don’t play around.”

Murphy seemed to relax as she listened to Nate explain things a little more in detail. “I know you have to get to your office,” she began but Nate put his hand up to stop her.

“Nope. I sent a message already letting them know that I’d be here with you and your family today. Martin Anderson is more to me than just a patient.”

“Oh, Nate,” Murphy said and slid over so she could wrap her arms around his neck. “Thank you. Thank you for everything.”

Chapter Seventeen

“Would one of you like to go back to see him?” Nate asked as soon as he joined them again. “He’s awake now and they’re getting ready to take him to his room.”

For once, Nate was glad he was able to keep tabs on what was happening behind the scenes. He knew the Andersons had been on pins and needles since early that morning and it was the least he could do.

“I’d love to,” Murphy spoke up. “I still feel so bad for not being there with him.”

“You’ve got to stop beating yourself up over this,” Nate assured her and pushed a strand of her hair behind her ear. “It could’ve happened anywhere.”

“I know, but—”

Nate was relieved to see Martin Anderson sitting up in his hospital bed, a cup of ice chips in his hand, when they walked into his room.

“Grandpa,” Murphy wailed and ran over to wrap her arms around him. “How are you feeling?”

Clearing his throat, Mr. Anderson looked up at his granddaughter with heavy eyelids. “I’ve been better, but they say I’m all put back together.”

“I’m getting rid of that damn piece of equipment. You hear me?” Murphy exclaimed. “I’m going to make sure it ends up on the side of the road.”

“Now Murphy,” Mr. Anderson began then closed his eyes. In a matter of seconds, he was softly snoring.

“Come on, your grandfather needs his rest.” Nate nudged her then waited for her to lean down and plant a kiss on Martin Anderson’s forehead.

“Stubborn old man,” she mumbled then slipped her hand inside Nate’s.

“You’re just like him,” he teased.

“You know, I’ve got this gift card to this amazing coffee shop that’s burning a hole in my purse. You don’t know anyone that might like a cup of coffee, do you?”

“Well, I happen to know an amazing doctor who gets discounts at this amazing coffee shop that you speak of.”

“Come on, it’ll be my treat.”

The End

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Clint Parker is one of Eastport, Rhode Island's most recommended pediatricians. He's worked tirelessly over the years building a successful practice and making a name for himself, while letting his love life slip by the wayside. It's not that he doesn't want a family of his own, the right woman just hasn't come along yet.

Or did she come and go so quickly, he never got the chance to find out her name?

Shay Austin never planned on coming back home. The decision to leave Eastport nearly ten years ago was painful and bittersweet, yet it was something she had to do. For her sake as well as someone else's. Life hasn't always been easy, but she tries her best to stay positive while remaining hopeful. Especially since it's not all about her anymore.

When Clint and Shay unexpectedly come face to face again, will they pick up where they left off? Or will they fight to protect what matters most?

For fans of secret babies and second chance romances, Doctor Mistake is about making right all the awkward wrongs.

Are you a fan of firefighter romances?

Be sure to check out my latest *Where There's Smoke Series*.

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0BRQMNXQ4>

Each story can be read as a stand-alone, but you'll be delighted to see the characters you've already fallen in love with make guest appearances.

Playing with Fire

Spark

Twinkle

Glow (Coming Soon)

Saved By You

Surrender

Sacrifice

Surrender

When Tori Champion lost her husband Kyle in a deadly fire one week before their five year wedding anniversary, she knew she could never love another man the way she loved Kyle. As far as she was concerned, she'd live the rest of her life alone.

The next couple years seem to pass in a blur and Tori suddenly finds herself second guessing things. Maybe it's time she ventured out and made a few friends.

But how does someone like her make friends when she's kept to herself for so long?

Watching his best friend perish in a fire was the hardest thing David Lubbock has ever had to endure. But seeing Kyle's wife, Tori, so emotionally distraught days, months, and even years following the deadly accident, is even more difficult.

When David stumbles across Tori's profile on a dating website, he can't help but wonder if she could ever see him as more than her late husband's best friend. Is it even a possibility?

When secrets turn into something more and Tori finds out the person behind the computer screen is someone she knows—someone that's been there for her all along—she runs to the

only place she's ever found solace, her former in-law's
cottage.

Will Tori surrender her heartache to find happiness again or
give up on love altogether?

Get your copy here:

<https://books2read.com/surrenderamystephens>

Sacrifice

Sometimes taking a wrong turn can lead you down the right path.

Dallas Easton, a Gorman Valley Firefighter, knew when his marriage abruptly ended there was more going on than his wife's inability to emotionally handle the duties that come with being a firefighter. Newly divorced, he shifts his focus to the one person that matters the most – his three-year-old daughter.

Letting go, however, isn't as easy as he leads on.

Miranda Moore has been on plenty of dates, and they always end in disaster. Frustrated and single yet again, she decides to move back home until things become more stable in her life.

Apparently, finding someone who's hard-working, dependable, and career-driven is asking for too much, or is it?

Dallas needs someone like Miranda and Miranda needs
someone like Dallas.

How do two people who have shackles around their heart and
struggling to stay afloat find each other? Will they be able to
get rid of their fears once and for all or will the intersection of
Pollard Parkway and 7th Avenue change their lives forever?

Get your copy here:

<https://books2read.com/sacrificeamystephens>

Saved By You

It's been a struggle for firefighter Micah O'Connor taking care of his daughter ever since his wife's fatal car accident three years ago. If it weren't for his sister Beth helping with his irregular work schedule, he's not sure he would've been able to manage his career while being a single parent. When Beth suddenly announces her husband's job is transferring and they'll have to move to another state, Micah's left wondering how he's going to do it all on his own now.

Ashley Macalister is in her second year of medical school. Burned out and uncertain if becoming a doctor is what she really wants to do with her life, Ashley is looking for a sign, something to assure her she's on the right path. When a friend suggests she take a semester off to reevaluate things, Ashley understands she can't do so without having some way of supporting herself during this hiatus.

When Micah posts an ad for a part-time nanny on a Gorman Valley social media site and Ashley is the only person who applies, will he choose her for the position knowing it could only be for a couple months, or will he be forced to give up the only career he's ever known for the sake of his daughter?

Find out what happens when Micah and Ashley realize there's more at stake than just their futures.

Get your copy here:

<https://www.books2read.com/savedbyu>

Spark

Lieutenant Eli Knight is living his best life as a Gorman Valley firefighter. While he's always dreamed of falling in love, it seems the little town doesn't have much to offer in the way of eligible women.

Heidi Drake lives her life day to day. Raising her daughter all by herself, she's come to accept that Joslyn will always be her primary focus, whether she has a man in her life or not.

When Heidi stops by the fire station to inquire about Joslyn's missing lunch box following the school's field trip, there's no denying the spark the first time she sees Eli.

Taking his time, Eli is determined to win Heidi's heart the proper way. And thanks to Joslyn, Heidi finds it nearly impossible to say no to him.

As their friendship grows stronger, will they both finally admit to what they're feeling in their hearts? Or will it take a terrifying moment for Heidi to accept that Eli just might be the perfect man for her *and* her daughter?

Get your copy of Spark here:

<https://books2read.com/sparknovella>

About the Author

Amy Stephens is a 2x-*USA Today* Bestselling new adult/contemporary romance author. Born and raised in Alabama, she lives just minutes from the beautiful gulf coast beaches.

When she's not busy writing, you'll find her reading, going on cruises with her husband, or taking a road trip for a girl's weekend getaway. She's a huge sports fan, but she prefers watching the games at home where she can curl up on the couch with her feline fur babies.

Amy released her first book in 2014 and now has over twenty published works, from sweet and clean, rom-com, sports and firefighters, there's bound to be a hero for all of her readers.

To view her other works and to connect with her on social media, be sure to visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/amystephensauthor>

<https://www.bookbub.com/authors/amy-stephens>

Sign up for her newsletter:

<http://eepurl.com/dq9San>

Also Available by Amy Stephens

The Coming Home Series

Don't Turn Back (book one)

Never Look Back (book two)

Heart of the Matter (book three)

The Falcon Club Series

Falling for Him (book one)

Falling for Her (book two)

Holiday Novellas

The Ride Home for Christmas

Cooper: A Holiday Romance

Christmas with You (Winter 2022)

Owning the Game Series

Delay of Game (book one)

Game Changer (book two) Summer 2023

Thunder Ridge Series

Melted Hearts (prequel)
Renewed Hearts (book one)
Broken Hearts (book two)
Unforgettable Hearts (October 2022)
Forever Hearts (book three) 2023

Cruel Summer

Where There's Smoke Standalone Series

Playing with Fire

Spark

Twinkle

Saved By You

Surrender

Sacrifice

Glow

Stand-Alone Rom-Coms

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Trust Me

Vegas Showdown (November 2022)

Doctor Feelgood

Doctor Mistake (March 2023)

New Mini-Series Coming Soon

No Strings Attached

Tequilas at Sunrise

Pina Coladas in the Rain

Margaritas at Midnight