

WAYLON FAMILY RANCH

SCARRED COWBOY



RUGGED
MOUNTAIN INK

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
KHLOE SUMMERS

Scarred Cowboy
*Waylon Family Ranch (Rugged Mountain
Ink)*

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Chapter One

Boone

There's something about a woman in black that does it for me. I'm talking head to toe darkness. A short black dress, long dark hair, black nail polish, a natural face, and a line of freckles that dot her nose.

Brushing a hand down over my beard, I turn toward the man to the left of the table. He's a young bus boy, maybe sixteen, with buzzed red hair and braces. "That's Ella Winters, right?"

He nods and twists in the direction of the door. "That's her. Rodeo queen, two years running. You know her?" The kid's eyes light up like she's the Queen of England, not a small-town rodeo.

I swallow hard, glancing down at the paper placemat on the table. Maybe I've misjudged my choice in restaurants. Then again, I'm not sure what other choices we had. It was this, the pizza shop, or the bar.

The kid disappears from my peripheral vision, and I stand to greet the woman in black who's making her way toward me. It's my first attempt at impressing her, and though it goes smoothly, everything after that falls apart pretty quick. She's smiling, but no one's talked for a few beats too long.

"We should go. I can take you to another place. This is ___"

"Are you kidding?" A grin as wide as the Colorado River lights her face. "I love this place. They have the *best* peach pie! I've been thinking about it all day!"

She's gorgeous, *and* she's down to Earth. This is doomed from the start. No woman like her would ever be interested in me... nor should she be.

"So," she tucks into the booth and stares at me to join her, "I hear you were in the military. What did you do?" She pauses, taking a sip of water from the glass on the table,

leaving behind a dark red lipstick stain. Her tone is so innocent it nearly punches me in the gut.

Fuck.

This is a problem. I only agreed to go out on this date to get Waylon and Troy off my back. Technically speaking, I'm not ready to date, and I'm sure as hell not ready to feel anything. It's already bad enough she's hot. She can't have an innocent little voice, too. I'll crack.

"Yeah. That's me... military," I grumble, rolling my eyes toward the older waitress chatting with her friends in the corner. I realize this is a small-town and we're on small-town time, but for the love of God, can we get moving? I'm guessing I have thirty to forty minutes before I'm professing my love and acting like an idiot in front of this woman. Maybe I can blame it on being messed up from years in the sand box.

"We don't have to talk about it," she says, twisting her finger around a lock of her hair as she studies the menu. Her skin is tight and creamy, and her breasts bubble up out of her dress, presenting themselves on the table like the first course.

I look away and will myself to focus on her face. But as she moves her lips again, all I can see is the plump, kissable mouth that's parted as she reads over the specials.

I clear my throat as panic surges through my limbs. I'm not ready for conversations and small talk. I thought this would be a quick date, and nothing real. Can't this just be a dinner?

I thought I'd get the guys off my case and get back to what really matters... the renovations on the cabin and the case of beer in the fridge that's getting too heavy for the shelf. Now, I'm sweating like a long-tailed cat in a rocking chair store, and I can't think straight.

"What do you do?" I manage, slugging back the sweet tea the waitress set on the table back when she was doing her job.

Ella grins. "I'm a psychic."

My face must do something telling because she grins wider and laughs.

“Let me guess? You don’t believe in psychics, and you think the whole thing is some hocus pocus designed to trick the innocent into throwing their money away.”

I tip my head to the side and try to keep a straight face. I should be able to. I spent years learning how to manage my body language around people who couldn’t speak English. Hiding my emotions was part of the job description. “No. It’s not that... It’s just... I’m surprised, is all. I guess I took you for a...” When my pause results in no words, she laughs.

“A preschool teacher? I know. I get that all the time. I think it’s my colorful wardrobe.” She looks up at the waitress, who’s now standing at our table. “I’ll have the chicken fried steak, french fries, and a coke. No, wait, a strawberry shake.” She smiles as she says, “Scratch that. Just the coke. I want to save room for that peach pie later.”

A smart-ass mouth and she’ll have the peach pie with me. My chest tightens. I really need to get the hell out of here if I don’t want to get pulled in by her amazingness.

“I’ll take the same.” I hand the woman our menus and turn my attention back toward Ella, who’s now tapping her pretty black nails against the sugar packets at the end of the table. “How does one go from Rodeo Queen to psychic? Seems like a conflict of interest. Did you know you were going to win?”

Her cheeks pink and her dark gaze draws up toward me. “I was hoping you wouldn’t know about the rodeo thing.”

“Why?”

She shrugs her delicate shoulders and goes back to twisting her hair. “I don’t know. It’s embarrassing.”

“Embarrassing to be the queen of the biggest event in town... *but not the town psychic?*”

When her eyes widen, I figure I’ve said the wrong thing.

Her brows narrow, and that innocence in her tone leaves as she says, “Why would being a psychic be embarrassing?”

“It’s not. I’m sorry.” I hold back a grin. “I’ve lived a very sheltered life and I—”

“You have trouble with your knees, right?”

I stare at her, wondering for a second how she knows my knees are in pain. I haven’t told anyone, and this is the first we’ve met.

“That’s an easy one. I’m tall. Tall men have problems with their knees. I’ve also recently been in combat. That comes with the territory.”

“Yeah, but you fell on something. You were trying to protect them... weren’t you?” She stares straight through me. Dark emerald green eyes scan my soul like two hungry eagles who have no mercy.

My chest tightens and sweat begins to drip. “Aren’t you supposed to get permission before you go rattling things off like that?”

Her grin is crooked. “Technically,” she shrugs, “but people like you always need a push.”

My heart slams against my chest and I flashback to the moment my knees hit the ground outside of the little market near Fallujah. There were civilians everywhere, including two children who got caught in the blast zone. Dust flew everywhere, screaming ensued, and the sound of the bombs rang in my ears for what seemed like an eternity. We were the target of the bombing, but no care was taken for the civilians. I may have some difficulty picking things up from the ground now, but many in that market weren’t so lucky.

My throat closes and my pulse shoots up. I was wrong to think, that for even a second, I was ready for even a casual dinner, let alone one with a party-trick seer. “I should go.” I stand from the booth and toss down whatever I have. “This should cover dinner. Please let me know you’ve made it home okay.”

“Wait,” she says, standing from the table. Her hand lands on my shoulder. From this angle, she’s even more beautiful. Beautiful and *young*, which is harder to hide two feet from her

face. “I was out of line. I’m sorry. I get so much shit for not being *‘real’* that I... sometimes... get defensive, and I do anything to prove myself. I was out of line. Will you finish dinner with me?”

I stare at her, my heart slamming against my chest. So, she’s beautiful and innocent, yet has a smart enough mouth to keep me entertained and still knows when to apologize for her actions. I should definitely keep walking. I’m only going to complicate this night even further if I stay.

“Everything okay?” the waitress says, settling our plates on the table.

I keep my gaze on Ella. “If I stay, I’m not sure I’m going to be the civilized man you’re hoping for.”

She grins and slides back into the booth. “I think we both just learned I’m not the least bit civilized, so we’re on the same field.”

I hold back a grin. “Okay, but you’ve got to turn off that... spy shit.”

She holds up three fingers as though she’s a cute little, round eyed, girl scout, giving me her honor, though we both know it’s a lie. “I’ll do my best.”

I groan low in my throat and slide back into the booth, staring down at the meal steaming up in front of me. It’s been a while since I’ve been out like this. It’s kind of nice to have someone else cooking for a change. Truthfully, I haven’t had *‘real food’* in months. I’ve been living off soup and saltines for the most part.

“I guess I owe you something about me,” she says, taking a bite of her steak with a soft moan.

I adjust in my seat, ignoring the sounds of pleasure as best I can. “Okay, let’s have it then, and it needs to be something equally as private as your vision about me.”

Her eyes squint and she looks toward me with unease. “Are you sure? My most private thing is *very* private. I mean, most of my stories are town knowledge because I have this blog and I write about my life and everything in between. I

can't think of anything people don't already know about me." Her cheeks turn pink. "Except for one thing."

I shake my head, taking another bite of steak. "That's what I want to know then. The one thing *no one* else does."

Her eyes widen. "You're sure?"

I have a feeling this isn't going to be as shocking as she thinks it will. I've seen my share of crazy. I'm forty-two years old. I can't imagine what she'd say that would shock me. "I'm sure."

She swallows hard and sips her coke before speaking. "Okay. Well... I..." she bites her bottom lip and looks away before turning back and leaning in toward me. Her voice is low, nearly a whisper as she says, "I have this thing where I... I like to..." She bites her lips again.

Fuck. Whatever she's about to say has me on edge.

"I'm a virgin," she whispers, "but... I'm also really into the thought of this thing called primal play."

I freeze. I wasn't expecting that. I swallow hard and lean back in the booth, trying not to look shocked. I asked for a deep secret, and I got one. The hot psychic is a virgin. A young, kinky virgin.

Of course she is. That makes complete sense.

My cock attempts to rise, but I stop it.

"What's primal play?" I ask before I think about its consequences.

Ella relaxes, popping a french fry into her mouth. "Oh, it's different for everyone, but I like the aspects of how animalistic it is. Some people like to be chased and wrestled. Others like the hair pulling and the nipping. For some it's a growl." She shrugs and smiles. "And now, you know that I'm strange, too. You're welcome."

I contemplate asking how she knows she likes these things if she hasn't tried them, but I refrain for the sake of my threatening dick. I haven't had Ella Winters, but all I have to

do is think about it, and there's not a doubt in my mind that I'd love every second of it.

Chapter Two

Ella

What the hell am I saying? I could've made up anything. I could've lied. I could've said I jumped from a plane or that I stole a candy bar from the general store when I was ten. I could've told him about the time my mom found me smearing expensive lipstick on my face at the pharmacy when I was six. The owner made her pay for the makeup and I got a lecture all the way home. No one knows that, and it's endearing. Instead, I choose to share the most sexual secrets I have, to a man I barely know.

Seems about right.

Boone looks toward me like a deer in headlights. He's a big, tall man with a scruffy beard and big, strong biceps. His hair is shoulder length and tucked behind his ears. He reminds me of Keanu Reeves in one of those John Wick movies, except on steroids. His eyes are dark, and he seems to have a permanent scowl sewed to his face. The one thing I know for sure about the man is he's a loner, and he has been since he got back from his tour. I'm sure meeting a psychic rodeo queen was enough information for one night. Add in a virgin who's into animalistic sex and, well... I've just given this newly appointed cowboy a whole education on civilian life that I'm not sure he was ready for.

With my ribs aching, I stare toward him, my face scrunched. "Are you okay?" I pause and sigh. "You're embarrassed. I shouldn't have—"

"You were honest and open. I like that." He sips his sweet tea and stares off behind me somewhere.

I can't help but laugh. "You most certainly are not okay."

"Is that your psychic energy coming back again, or is this a guess?"

I squint. "Sorry. It's impossible to stop. It's been something that's passed on between the women in my family

since my great grandmother. So... here I am, four generations of psychics later.”

“So, when you said you could shut it off,” he nods, “you can’t?”

“Not consistently. It’s like trying to put a kink in a hose attached to a fire hydrant. I can slow it down momentarily, but never stop it entirely.”

He slides a french fry into his mouth. “So, you know everything then? You can see what’s going to happen minute to minute?”

I shake my head. “Not really. I read energy and you’re... *traumatic event*... it’s pretty heavy on you. I could see it right away. It plays out like a movie when I look at people.”

He shifts in the booth, uncomfortable with what I’ve told him... which isn’t uncommon. This is my life. I’ve lost boyfriends and some family over it. People either love me or hate me.

“You can’t see anything else about me? Is the bombing on a loop that’s all around me, or can you see past it?”

“I only see the movie once, but I usually have to process it before I can move on.”

“Wow. That’s... interesting. What about the future? Are you limited to only someone’s tragedies?”

“The future is harder to tell. I usually need a really quiet space and direct questions, but it’s not as clear as the past.”

He looks at me with downturned brows as he chews another bite of his steak. He believes me, but he can’t figure how I’m doing it. He needs the how.

“I wish I knew how all this worked. My mom had a bunch of neurological work done with the University of Colorado when she was young. They made a little test subject out of her.” I bite into a fry. “The best they could come up with after a few MRI’s was that the parietal cortex of her brain lit brighter than normal folks. They came to the conclusion that it was hereditary and here I am.”

He nods slowly, studying me. He likes the rationale of it all, the science. “That makes sense. It’s like those people who have an overactive hippocampus. They’re subject to increased risk of hallucinations and delusions. That might be something that you should look into.” He laughs. “Just kidding, of course.”

“Yeah.” I hold back a smile, not wanting to encourage him. “Anyway, it’s made a good career for me and I’m even opening a shop downtown.”

“You have enough clients in this small town for a psychic shop?”

“Don’t say it so sarcastically!” I snarl playfully. “And yes, I’ll give readings and sell all the metaphysical things like crystals and candles that help bring people closer to their center. I just have to open first.”

“You can’t use your *abilities* to see when you’re going to be open?”

The way he says abilities, it sounds sarcastic again. “I can’t see anything about myself,” I continue. “It’s so annoying. I could’ve avoided so much heartache.”

“How so?”

“You really don’t follow my blog, do you?”

He shakes his head. “I don’t do anything with the computer or the phones. I work, I go home, and then I work some more.”

“Well, my pathetic dating life is a depressing story that has captivated the area for a while now.” I smile like I’m posing for a cover shoot. “It’s a compelling read to know why a psychic can’t find love. It’s kind of in line with our talk about seeing the future. I pick up on the energies given off by people. So, a young gentleman suitor who wants to go out on a date has a much different energy than he does once he’s settled into a relationship.”

Boone smiles and nods. I’m going to have to speed this up, as I get further away from the science, if I don’t want to lose my audience.

“Basically, the future is a multiverse of possibilities when it comes to energies. Some things are almost certain to happen while others are a lot more... loose. So... my dating life is more of a study into the future multiverse than a quest for romantic conquest.”

Boone chuckles under his breath. “I have to say, you’re definitely the most intriguing person I’ve met in a long time.”

“Thank you. But one thing I know that’s in both of our futures that can’t be changed, is that we have to eat peach pie right now.” I flag the waitress and hold up two fingers as though she’ll know exactly what I want. She will. I’m in here all the time and peach pie and I were separated at birth.

“Can I talk about more things I see about you?” I bite the inside of my cheek as I stare at him. “Once visions start popping, it’s hard to stop them.”

“No more comments on war,” he says, his face straight.

“Okay. No more of that.” I take in the scent of pine and cedar on his skin, and study the soft wrinkles by his eyes and the calluses on his hands. He’s defined by his work, but that’s not enough. “You’ve never been married, but you’re lonely.” I swallow hard. “You wish you’d have found someone years ago because you’re worried that starting a family this late in life will be exhausting.”

He leans back as the waitress settles two slices of warm peach pie in front of us with whipped cream on top and two clean spoons.

My mouth waters.

“Okay,” he says, slicing into the pie, “but that could be any guy my age who’s put his career first.”

“You haven’t dated much, except for one woman... that was with you before you went on tour. You cared about her, but you both wanted different things.”

He slides the peach pie into his mouth, leaving behind the whipped cream. “That was oddly accurate. Except I did try dating again shortly after I got back from a second tour. That woman wanted to move to New York, and I’m a country boy.

So, I couldn't do that, and definitely not for a woman who prized shoes and purses over everything else."

I nod. "Okay. So, I was close."

"What about you? Why are you all alone?"

No one has ever described me as '*all alone*' before. It stings.

"I'm not *all* alone. I'm alone... which is fine."

"Now, I'm psychic," he smiles widely for the first time all night, "because I know that's a lie."

"Okay, so alone sucks... but I'm fine. I mean, guys my age are really fucking stupid, and I'd never considered older guys before. No offense."

Another grin lifts his face. "I used to be a guy your age."

"Yeah, how'd that go for you?"

He shrugs. "Don't remember much of it. I was too busy working."

"Guys my age aren't like that anymore. They don't subscribe to the hard work thing, or the gentleman thing. I mean, I like to think I'm pretty tough. I have my own place, I fix things, I throw back whiskey, and I drive a truck." I lick the whipped cream off the back of my spoon. "You'd think I was a catch. So, imagine my surprise when I've told the boys I've dated that I've got this annoying neighbor who won't leave me alone... and nothing."

Boone shifts his weight in his seat and rolls his shoulders slightly.

"You see, I've been trying to fix the gate on my property for months and it just won't stay shut. So, my neighbor sees a broken gate as an open invitation and wanders in whenever he pleases."

Boone straightens and rolls up the sleeves of his shirt, exposing dark ink tattoos. My throat goes dry. I didn't think he could get hotter.

“What do you mean? What does he do when he wanders in?”

I try to read this new stance he’s taken, but suddenly, there’s a block that I can’t see through.

“I think most people would call him a peeping Tom. It isn’t constant, but I don’t want him out there... ever.”

Boone’s jaw locks as he stares toward me. “What the fuck? You mean he’s watching you? And you’ve told this to people, and no one has done anything about it?”

“I’ve gotten curtains and whatever, but last week the guy freaked me out worse than usual. I was in the garden and when I looked up, he was there, staring not thirty feet from me.”

Boone shovels the rest of the pie into his mouth. “Well, we’re going to take care of this.”

I narrow my gaze. “*What? Like now?*”

“Like now.” His voice has twisted and a new version of him has taken over. It’s a protective version that’s overwhelmingly archaic. Archaic in a way that’s insanely sexy. A version I can’t read at all.

“While it’s annoying, I don’t want to go too far. I’m like every person in Rugged Mountain, so I’ve got a gun. I just don’t think it’s come to that. He’s creepy and I need help, but I don’t need him killed.”

Boone’s gaze dials in on mine. He leans in toward me. “I won’t be able to sleep tonight worrying that you’ve told me this, and I didn’t do what I could’ve to help. You’re doing me a favor by letting me fix the gate.”

“Really, though, it’s amazing enough that you want to help. That’s all I want in a man. I made this problem by not finishing the gate when I should have.” I eat the last bite of peach pie, savoring the tangy sweetness as I try to quell the urges thumping between my legs. I’ve never felt anything so organic before. We’ve only just met, but there’s an exchange happening on a level I can’t fully understand. It’s like our bodies are speaking, creating chemistry and symmetry where there had been none before.

“You didn’t create this problem. This asshole did,” he grumbles. “You ready?” There’s urgency in his tone as he holds his hand out toward me. His gaze looks extra dark in this light, and his biceps bulge as he impatiently waits for me to stand. Usually, at this point, I’d have read someone’s intentions. But, for the first time in my life, a man’s possible paths are completely blank to me. I don’t know what he’s thinking, I don’t know what he’s feeling, and this wall he’s put up... *is turning me on*. For the first time in my life, I finally get to earn someone’s trust. I get to break down all their walls myself. I can be surprised by a touch. I can be taken off guard by a kiss.

A kiss.

I stare at Boone, glancing from his lips to his dark gaze. For the love of all that’s holy, I hope this man kisses me tonight.

Chapter Three

Boone

“Can you hand me a few screws from that top box?”

Ella fumbles through the toolbox on the back of my truck, shining her light down as she searches. She’s bent over, her round ass facing toward me as she looks. “Sorry. I can’t see very well in the dark.”

I’m tempted to make a joke about her psychic abilities and why they aren’t drawing her toward the screw, but I figure I’ll get a lecture about emotions and vibrations that I’m not ready for.

“Ah.” She stands, disappointing my inner fifteen-year-old, who’s desperate to see more of her skin. “Found some!” She hops from the bed of the truck and strides toward me, proud of her find. They’re too long and not at all what I was looking for, but she’s so proud of herself, I can’t hurt her feelings. Besides, extra-long screws in a gate will only keep that asshole from kicking it in. They still won’t keep him from climbing over it, though.

“Perfect.” I grab the screws from her, our hands brushing against one another as we work. “So, where is this guy tonight?” I ask, working the drill as she shines the light on the latch.

“I think he’s at the bar.” She laughs. “No psychic powers needed there. I just know that’s where he spends most of his nights.”

I nod, taking the other screw from her hand. She’s cold. *Fuck*. I’m an idiot. Of course, she’s cold. It’s forty-five degrees out and her legs and arms are exposed to the elements. I slide off my flannel and wrap it over her shoulders. “Sorry, I didn’t think of that sooner. I’m bad at all this.”

“You’re fixing my gate after ten in the evening. I don’t think you’re bad at this.” She grins, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “I could go start you some coffee. At the very least, I should warm you up a little before you leave.”

I glance toward her, still drilling the final screw into place. Lord knows coffee wouldn't be what I went inside for. My mind is on everything but coffee, and I'm not proud of any of it. It's on her lips, her hips, her thighs, and how cute she looked up in that truck digging around in my toolbox. For a second, my mind wanders to an image of me behind her, thrusting into her tight little pussy as she moans.

Fuck.

Maybe I'd fit right into her animal play. I'm a god-damn monster.

"Coffee sounds good," I lie, latching the gate closed. "You should let me set some redneck traps in the morning. That way, you'd really keep this guy away. Right now, he could climb right over that gate if he wanted to."

She grins as we walk side by side up the steps toward the cabin door. "Redneck traps?"

"Sorry. That's what my dad always called nails in a board. You'd be surprised what a few sharp objects will stop."

"What about the wildlife? I don't want a bear getting hurt because of something I put out."

"A bear's gonna walk right past that thing. Trust me, they're way smarter than people."

She laughs and makes her way into the little kitchen to the left side of the cabin. "Make yourself at home. I'll get the coffee started. Do you like french vanilla?"

"Sure. Anything's good. Do you need help?" I kick off my boots and wander her small cabin, noticing the locks on the windows are old, and the windowpanes are made of real glass. Nowadays, you can buy those shatterproof ones rather inexpensively. "You really should update these windows."

"You're that guy, huh?"

"Who's that guy?"

"The dad."

Oh, God. Did she just compare me to her father? Fuck. This isn't a date anymore. To her, I'm the old guy reminding her to fix things and keep a shotgun by her bed at night. I think that's a territory one would want to steer clear of.

"Sorry."

She giggles, filling a tray with fresh ground coffee. "Don't be sorry. I like it. What kind of windows do you think I need?"

"You know, I think my cousin Waylon has a bunch of windows behind his barn. They're shatterproof. I could bring some by and see if they work."

She wanders toward me, our shoulders touch, and there's a steady brush of our bodies against one another as we stare at the window. I'm not sure anyone has ever given a window this much attention, but I'm pretty sure I'm never moving.

"If you're worried that guy is going to break in," she sips her coffee, "I think he would've already."

"You never know. I think assholes like him are unpredictable. Would you know if he was going to break in? Psychic wise, I mean."

She nods her head. "In the past, I've always felt his presence around, but something as traumatic as a break-in, I'd pick that up rather quickly." The coffee starts to drip, and the warm scent of vanilla bean fills the small space. "Anyway," she works back toward the kitchen, pulling two chipped mugs down from the cupboard, "I've been good here. I doubt he'd do anything that crazy." She purses her lips as though she's thinking through something. "He seems... more lonely than anything. I bet he's just searching for connection."

"You talk about it like it's normal."

"It is," she laughs. "People lose their minds after they come back from war. You know how it goes better than anyone, I'm sure."

"Are you saying I've lost my mind?" I laugh, standing to help her with the coffee.

"Maybe. Time will tell."

“Ha. You can’t tell that in your crystal ball?”

She looks away and sucks in a deep breath before letting it out slowly. “Nope. Guess not. Anyway, this guy has been doing this for years. I’m sure it’s all—”

“Years?” *Shit*. “If you don’t mind me asking, where are your parents or family? They should have been able to help you. Have you contacted the police?”

“My parents are out of the country. Since they retired, they’re traveling the world looking for more river rapids to kayak down. My brother is a coal miner in West Virginia.” She smiles softly. “That’s all the family I have. Besides, they left me with everything a girl needs. I have a shotgun, a lock on my door, and psychic powers.” She laughs at her joke and her nose crinkles in the cutest way.

I realize she can take care of herself. But for some reason, I’m getting the overwhelming urge to do it for her. She deserves to have someone here that’s watching, and making sure that sweet body of hers remains untouched.

“Well, it looks like you’re stuck with me then.” I offer her my best smile. “Do you have any open positions?”

“I’ll let you know,” she snorts, before sipping her coffee. It’s a subtle sound, but it’s sweet and innocent and I want it on replay.

We talk like this for hours, back and forth in easy conversation that swallows up the time. She tells me about her parents’ ranch and the little house her grandmother had up on the hill by the river. I tell her about my family and the horses we raised in Utah. We joke about the way Waylon runs the rodeo with an iron fist, then laugh about the rich having all the power. It’s light, relaxing, and when I feel the night nearing an end, sadness swells in my chest. I haven’t talked to anyone like this since I was a boy. The few women I dated were never this open or real. Truthfully, I hadn’t been either. It’s a little scary, mostly because I’m not sure what any of this means. I’m into her, but I don’t know how to be in a relationship.

“That stuff I said earlier,” she blushes, “at the restaurant... about the animal sex and being a virgin... that was weird. I’m sorry.” She sets her mug on the coffee table and curls her legs beneath her as she leans her head against the back of the couch. “That’s embarrassing and I should have been a little cooler on a first date.”

The move is soft, innocent, sweet, and sexy. It’s exhausting to be in her presence without touching her.

“Nah.” My heart picks up a few beats and my cock lifts, attempting to cross a line again. I readjust on the couch. “You’re good.”

“I hope I didn’t make myself sound like a weirdo or something. I mean, I’ve never even had sex, so it’s not something I know I like or not, but the idea of being, I don’t know, taken over like that, it’s... really sexy to think about. What about you? What are you into?”

For a second, I freeze. I can’t remember the last time I’ve talked about sex this openly.

Never. I’ve never talked about sex this openly.

In the barracks, the guys would go on about women and they’d ramble about how lonely they were, and how much they missed pussy, but that was different. That was the barracks. This is real. This is me, staring at a woman. A young woman. A young woman with pert tits and nipples that break through cotton. A young woman with a scent of flowers on her that’s driving me mad. A young woman with a tight, virgin pussy, a smart-ass mouth, and the biggest, prettiest fucking eyes I’ve ever seen.

Fuck. My cock lifts again.

“Sorry. That was weird of me to ask.” She smiles. “I really need to learn more manners.” She stands from the couch and attempts to return the mugs to the kitchen, but I stop her, holding her arm gently.

She sits back in place, setting the cups back on the table.

I’m not sure what I’m doing. My body is reacting to her, and I’m losing control of it.

“I can answer your question.” My tone is lower than usual. “I’ve never thought about sex like you have. Nothing crazy, anyway.”

“Really? So, you’ve never spanked anyone, or played with wax, or...”

I shake my head. “Never. I’d guess you’d have to trust someone to play like that. I’ve never been that close to anybody.”

She nods thoughtfully. “Me either.”

Worried that I sound inexperienced, I keep talking. “I could see the point you’re making about the primal thing, though. I don’t know anything about it, but it seems natural. Is the point to act on impulse?”

She nods, biting her lower lip as she leans in slightly. “Yeah,” she whispers, her gaze on mine with a look I haven’t seen in ages. It’s dark and beautiful. “Like... if you have any urges, you just act on them. It’s supposed to be raw and natural.”

We linger in this moment for a while before her gaze drifts to my cock, which is clearly hard and riddled with the uncontrollable urges she’s speaking of.

Her gaze draws upward to mine before she stands and bends her round ass toward me. She’s playing coy, reaching for the mugs, but it’s purposeful. She’s giving me permission. She’s inviting me in. She hasn’t pulled her skirt down since she was sitting. Her white lace panties hug the swell of her ass, and her plump cheeks spill out below the lace.

Dark, dirty thoughts of squeezing her, licking her, touching her, and fucking her enter my brain. My throat goes dry, and my mind runs a mile a minute. We’ve just met, and she’s young. Not only that, but saying I’m not fucked in the head would be an understatement. I’m working through piles of mental shit that this innocent young woman doesn’t need in her life.

Then again, the conversation is easy, and the chemistry is undeniable.

Ella stays bent forward, collecting every piece of clutter on the table, biding her time as though she's desperate for me to grab her.

My chest aches as dark hunger gnaws inside of me, aching to release itself, desperate to grip her hips and thump her against me. My mind tries to grasp the cliff of rationalization, but she turns before I find it, pulling her skirt back into place.

"Do you want another cup?" Her tone is sweet, and those girl scout eyes are back again.

I shut my eyes and hold my breath before letting it out slowly. If I'm here a second longer, I'm going to do bad things to that girl. There'll be no stopping me.

Chapter Four

Ella

I don't know how much more '*on the nose*' I could be. I'm practically throwing myself at Boone. There's something about him. He's caring and protective, but he's also rough and a little harsh in the way he talks.

I like it. He reminds me of a man's-man. A man who's lived a life of pain and heartache. A man who works hard and doesn't stop to think about himself or his emotions, except for when they're overwhelming him.

He stands from the couch and looks toward me. His gaze is dark and ominous. Usually, I'd be able to tell his intentions, but whatever state he's in, I'm still blocked. The entire night he told me stories I was hearing for the first time. Stories that I couldn't see coming. Everything was a surprise. I love it.

Like the time he fell off his horse riding to the ice cream store when he was a kid. He broke his ankle and his wrist. He spent all summer in a cast and couldn't do anything with his friends. That's the summer he learned to love reading. If my abilities were working, I'd have seen all of that three minutes before the words left his mouth... but I didn't. I didn't see a thing, and right now, as he stalks toward me, I have no idea why he's coming.

I can guess, though. He has to be turned on after I was bending over in front of him. My pussy aches at the thought of doing it again. This time, I imagine he grabs me. I imagine his big, rough hand on my skin, squeezing my ass and growling... biting... licking.

My breath hitches and my heart swells as his hand touches my face. "I'm not sure you know what you're asking for when you say you want a man to let his urges run freely." His voice is dark and low when he talks.

My clit throbs. I don't speak.

He leans into my ear. The warmth of his breath sends a tickle down my spine and into my groin. "If you keep saying

that, girl, I'm going to lose control. Then what are you going to do?"

I bite my bottom lip and stare up at him.

His nostrils are flaring, and his gaze is narrowed. "I'm going to become that animal, Ella. Do you even know what that means?" He's talking as though he's a different man, as though his mind has entered a space where hormones have taken the lead. He's a midnight wolf, howling at the moon.

God, I want him to fuck me. I've never wanted anything more.

"I told you," I moan, "I want you to lose control."

He grins, looks away, then back again, dragging his dark gaze up my frame like a crazed beast, hungry and impatient. "You don't even know what that means."

I stand taller, a little insulted by his statement. "I do!"

"You don't, girl. You really don't."

"What does it mean then?"

He grins. "Once I tip over this edge, I'd chase you down, and I'd get to you by any means necessary." Images of him biting, pulling at my hair, and growling come to mind. "And once I have you," he groans, "I wouldn't waste my time. I'd tear off your clothes and I'd fuck that tight little pussy like I own it, and I'd never let you forget who the fuck it belonged to."

Every hair on my body stands on end as Boone stares back at me. I'm alive in ways I never thought possible and there isn't a cell inside of me that isn't aching to be taken by the big, scarred cowboy.

He grips my chin in his hand and drags it down to my throat, guiding me against the back wall. "Consider this a warning, baby girl. Stay away unless you want to lick your come off my cock. Otherwise, I'll be back tomorrow with new windows." His lips graze mine in a whisper. One wouldn't have to be psychic to know that he's holding back because he's afraid of what letting go means.

Truthfully, I'm glad he's holding back. I don't know if I can handle him. I thought I wanted a big, rough man, but he's extra big and extra rough, and not being able to see any of that coming is a complete mind fuck. In the restaurant, Boone came off as a quiet, wounded soldier, unsure of himself and his future. Here, with his blood all rearranged, he's intense, wild, and everything I've ever wanted. He turns toward the door handle, unlocks it, and closes it behind him, leaving me in a puddle of my own desire. There's no way I'll get through the night without coming. My panties are already a sopping wet mess.

With the doors locked, I shut off the lights in the house, and make my way back to the bedroom, pulling my vibrator from the bedside table. Usually, I turn to porn or read some dirty book. Tonight, though, I have something far better.

Closing my eyes, I imagine Boone chasing me through the field. Even with his bad knees, he'd catch up with me in seconds. I'm a terrible runner. Besides that, I want to be caught. He pulls at my clothes, tearing them off me as his teeth sink into my neck lightly.

Growl after growl leaves his throat as he kisses and nips at my skin. The soil beneath us scrubs at my back and a stick pokes at my shoulder. Every sensation is a match striking against my skin.

Boone yanks down his jeans and presses inside of me. It's not careful or timed. It's needy and desperate.

I twist the vibrator back and forth over my clit, moaning and sighing as the pulsations work their way over my groin.

I'd give anything to feel him inside of me. Anything to make him feel good. Anything to feel his weight on my body, and his rough hands against my skin.

Aching sighs turn into an orgasm as I remember the words he'd said earlier. *'Stop right now unless you want to be tasting your come on my cock.'*

I sigh and let out a holler so loud, I'm sure the folks down on Main have heard me. My body relaxes and I'm brought

back to Earth, as movement in the window catches my eye.

My heart stops and my gaze is drawn toward the man staring back at me. His mouth is open, and his eyes are wide. He's holding a cell phone.

Oh my God! How did I not remember to shut the shades before I laid down? A gnawing ache takes over as my stomach turns. I grab my shotgun and slide from the bed, holding my sheet in place. I need his phone. Who the hell knows what he'd do with that video, pictures, or whatever he was doing?

Swinging open the front door, I step onto the porch, and stare out into the dark night. There're trees everywhere. There's no way I'd find him.

"I can sue you!" I shout out the threat, like some rich girl from the city who doesn't have a gun in her hand. No one around here cares about being sued or calling the cops.

A branch snaps and I hear the sound of my neighbor jumping the fence. I aim toward the field and let out a warning shot, then step back inside, locking the cabin door for the night, my heart slamming against my chest. I've never wished for a man before, but tonight, I wish the man playing wolf a few minutes ago, was still here next to me.

Chapter Five

Boone

“Stealing my windows now, huh?” Waylon laughs as he makes his way toward me. He’s a big guy with dark features and tattoos covering most of his available skin. I like ink, but I’m not sure anyone likes it as much as Waylon.

“Ah, figured you wouldn’t mind. There’s a girl up on Elk Ridge that needs something sturdier than what she’s got now. I know these have been lying around for a while. I think a few will fit.”

Waylon’s brows raise as though the conversation just got more interesting. “Good to hear. You’re talking to someone? Who is she?”

I refocus on the white framed windows. “Ella Winters, but I’m sure you know the Rodeo Queen. Anyway, she’s got a peeping Tom. I just want to make sure she’s safe.”

Waylon’s eyes widen. “*The fuck?* Who the hell is bothering her?”

“I think it’s Nick Andrews. I checked the mailbox on my way off the mountain last night, then looked him up online. He’s got a few prior arres—”

“Back up, back up, back up.” Waylon holds up a hand. Cousins and all, I know the man pretty well, and I was thankful that he gave me a job out here after Iraq, but I’m not interested in answering the questions I know are coming. “You were at her house last night? A little young for you, don’t ya think?”

“Don’t read into it, man. It was nothing.”

His brows wrinkle. “Must have been something if you thought enough to Google a man afterwards. I wasn’t even aware you knew how to use that feature on your phone.” He laughs because everyone gets a kick out of my lack of technological knowledge.

“We had a date, and she mentioned a broken gate, and a peeping Tom. So, I went to help her and noticed more things needed to be fixed. That’s all. Nothing else.”

I’ve never been a good liar, and this is no exception. Even as I say the words, I’m thinking about her round ass in my face again.

Waylon tips his head back slowly, laughing to himself as he helps me with the last of the windows. “I’m happy for you, man. It’s good to see you out and about. She know what a handful she’s getting?”

I know he’s talking about the mental health issues I’ve been managing, but instead of wondering how I’d fix them, my mind goes to the vulgar things I said last night before I left Ella’s house. I’ve never even *thought* of saying things like that before, but something about her brought me to life in a way I’ve never been. I want that feeling again. *I need it*. She may as well be heroin because after one hit, I’m addicted.

I’m sure there was a question Waylon asked, but I don’t remember what it was. I open the truck door. “You need anything from Nichols? I have to stop for weather stripping.”

Waylon shakes his head and lifts the tailgate to the truck back in place, knocking twice on the back to let me know I’m safe to go.

I’m thankful for his help, and I know we need to spend more time catching up, but I’ve been thinking about Ella nonstop since last night and the thought of wasting another second away from her is damn near excruciating.

The way she felt in my hands. The way our bodies felt pressed against one another. *Fuck*.

It was just a light brush, but I was on fire all night, desperate to touch her again. I wonder if she felt the same way. I wonder if she tucked into her bed and touched herself to the thought of us the same way I did.

My cock goes hard at the thought of her rubbing that innocent, swollen clit to us.

Us. God, I need help. There is no *us*. She doesn't even know I'm on my way. She could've been repulsed by what happened last night. She could've thought she wanted something, then realized when it was happening how terrifying it was. More than likely, that's the reality.

I lose myself in this pattern of sick perversion and real talk the whole drive, until she's staring back at me with a smile.

She's more relaxed than yesterday, wearing a short blue skirt and an oversized sweater. Her legs are long and bare, and so are her feet. Her toes are painted black to match her nails. If I were acting on instinct right now, I'd already be on top of her.

"I figured you'd be hungry," she says, inviting me in. "I hope you like spaghetti. I made garlic bread, too."

"It's my favorite. My mom used to make it every Sunday growing up. She'd call it our family recipe, but I'm pretty sure it came off the side of a tomato can."

Ella snorts and my heart warms the same way it had last night when I'd first heard the noise. "Well, this is a recipe from my buddy, Mr. Ragu, so I hope you love it. I'm not the greatest chef. In fact, I don't usually cook at all. Boiling water is, ten out of ten, the best I can do."

I laugh. "You're so connected to everything. I pictured you as the type to sniff all your ingredients and layer them accordingly."

She shakes her head. "Uh, no! I think the closest I get to sniffing ingredients is making sure the milk hasn't gone bad."

I sit at the small oak table and stare toward the woman I want to skip dinner for and devour. "Anything new going on? You any closer to getting your shop open?"

"Well," she sighs, "the shop is ready to go. I think we're going to open on Friday. That's the good news. *The bad news...* Nick, my neighbor, he came back last night shortly after you left. He has a video of me now that I'd like to get back, though he's not answering his door."

My chest tightens and my jaw locks. "*A video?* Of what?"

She twists her dark hair into her index finger and glances away, biting into her garlic bread before looking back again. “It’s private.”

“He has you showering?”

She shakes her head. “No. Worse.”

“Worse than one with you fully nude with soap all over? What’s worse?”

A deep breath releases from her lungs. “He... I... this is only going to make you feel weird again.”

“I should know what I’m going after.”

“You don’t have to go after anything.” She reaches toward my hand. “That’s not why I was telling you. I just—”

“I’m going after him. What does he have?”

Her eyes dart around the room, then settle back on mine with a downturned expression. “I was masturbating, and he has it on video.”

Every alarm system in my body goes off at once. For one, she was masturbating to the thought of us together. She had to have been. Immediate possession takes over my thoughts. It’s irrational and not at all a modern way of thinking, but for the first time in my life, my body doesn’t ask for justification. It’s hooked on Ella, and no one else can have her. No one else can think of her. And no one else can see her like that... ever!

This thought, however, undoubtedly leads to the next set of alarms. She’s got a fucking asshole probably jerking off to her right now, and I can’t let that happen.

I push back from the table and look toward her. “Thank you for dinner. It’s lovely, but I can’t sit here knowing that guy has a video of you.” I slide my boots back on and head out the front door, jump in my truck, and drive toward the asshole’s house, trying to manage the blood popping beneath my veins. I can’t remember the last time I’ve been this turned up.

Ella follows behind on foot. The houses are only a few hundred feet apart, but I’m in a hurry. This son of a bitch isn’t getting away with this shit any longer. End of story.

I expect to break his door down, but he leaves the house before I've even knocked. The irony of his posture over my trespassing has me laughing. His shoulders are wide, and his gun is drawn. "Who the fuck are you?"

I pull my gun from its holster, and he jumps back. It's an aggressive move because technically I'm on his land. If he wants to shoot, he'd be within his rights. But this asshole needs to know I'm serious, and if that means a shootout right here and now, that's what it means.

"You have a video of me," Ella shouts from down the drive. "I want it back!"

His eyes are on her, hungry, like a dog. An unstable, fucked up dog that needs to be put down.

I'm sick to my stomach as I think of him staring at her.

"Give me your phone!" she barks, holding her hand out toward him as she arrives next to us.

He laughs, looking toward me with the pointed gun, and then Ella. "Whatever." He hands her the phone.

She erases the video then tucks the phone into her pocket. "I'm taking it to Sheriff Woods, and he'll have Detective Arrows dig through every inch of it. You're not getting away with this."

Nick rolls his eyes. "Seriously, you're going to get fucking Arrows? I took a video. I didn't kill someone."

He's a skinny guy with buzzed hair and tattoos on his forearms. His teeth are so yellow, they trigger me to slow down.

"Where do you work?" I bark. He handed over his phone too easily. He's doing something else with those photos.

He narrows his gaze and shakes his head. "Get the fuck out of here, the both of you, or I'll call the damn sheriff myself."

I stare at Nick a moment longer, then twist back toward the truck, reaching for Ella's hand. I don't want her walking back without me. I want to know she's where I can see her.

I've seen men like Nick before. Men who've had a rough time at war. They come home in pieces and turn to drugs to heal them. It's not ideal, but it fixes a problem quick... by creating another one.

"I don't get what his problem is." Ella buckles herself in and stares toward me. "He's a psycho. I've never seen him act like this. I mean, sure, he'd pop over and stare, but I've never seen him take video, or get that agitated. How the hell am I going to sleep here alone?"

"You're not going to." I reach my hand out toward her, squeezing her shoulder tight.

"I can't ask you to do that for me, Boone. We just met. You don't owe me anything."

I stay quiet until I've pulled the truck back to her lot and we're officially in the warmth of her cabin. When the door's closed behind us, I step forward and put my hand back on her throat where it belongs. Against my thumb, her heart is beating rapidly.

My teeth scrape against her shoulder. "We're all animals, protecting what's ours." I breathe her in. "I'm here protecting what I want." The statement is aggressive and over the top... but it feels right.

"Okay," she whispers, squeezing her thighs together for reasons I hope to God mean this turns her on.

"Good." I bite the lobe of her ear gently and grab my phone out of my pocket. "I'm going to call Sheriff Woods and get him in on this. Maybe they can scare Nick off before he does something stupid. In the meantime, why don't you look through the search history on his phone and make sure he hasn't shared any of those videos he took."

Her gaze widens before she leans into my chest. "Why can't I see any of this? My visions, they're blank. I thought it was you, but it's everyone. When I was with Nick today, I didn't get a reading from him at all."

"It's about you, though. You said when something has to do with you, it's harder to see."

She pauses for a long moment, breathing slow against my chest as she whispers, “I’m so glad you’re here.”

I brush my hand down over the back of her head, losing my fingers in the silk of her hair. “I am too, baby girl. I am, too.”

Chapter Six

Ella

If I was a prisoner of war, receiving brutal torture, I don't think I'd be sharing as much info as I do with Boone. It's embarrassing how loose lipped I am with this man. He knows everything. He knows every detail of my life from birth to now. He knows I get off on caveman-like energy and he knows I was masturbating to him last night. *What else is there to know?*

I sigh, staring down at Nick's phone as Boone pulls out my bedroom window. We're still waiting for Sheriff Woods. His car has been parked at Nick's for the better part of an hour.

An hour!

What is there to say for an hour? You'd think it would be a very simple request. Don't video tape your neighbor. That's pretty straight forward.

"Can you hand me that caulk?" Boone hollers from the back room.

I stand and make my way into the bedroom, handing him the caulk gun through the open window. It's nearly dark, but the man seems to like fixing things under moonlight.

"What did you find on his phone?"

"Just a bunch of texts. Nothing important. His search history was cleared."

"Did you check the trash can? Sometimes the history stores there."

"Look at you, knowing things about phones and the internet." I grin, and scroll through Nick's phone looking for the trash can.

"I don't use the phone, but I know how it works," Boone grumbles under his breath as he knocks the window into place. As he does, the front doorbell rings, and our gaze matches one another.

“Whatever he says, we’ve got this. Okay?” Boone flashes me a smile. “I’m going to caulk this quick. I’ll meet you up front.”

I nod and suck in a deep breath, letting it out slowly as I make my way to the door. Sheriff Woods stands on the porch in tight blue jeans, a button-down shirt, and a Stetson with a star in the center. He’s a thick man with what I’d call a ‘*dad belly*.’

“Ma’am.”

He’s barely gotten the words from his mouth before Boone is standing with us. My heart swells and contentment washes over me knowing he’s there.

“Well,” Sheriff Woods says, taking off his Stetson, “Detective Arrows searched the man’s computer, and it’s confirmed that he has videos of Ms. Winters in... *compromising* poses.” The sheriff looks away again, darting his gaze everywhere but toward me.

My face flames and my cheeks burn at the thought of the detective seeing that video, at the thought of *anyone* seeing that video!

“Wait? Did you say *videos*, as in more than one?”

“I’m afraid he’s been watching and recording for a while, ma’am. I’ve taken the hard drive from his computer and I’m sending it into the city for someone to analyze. Mr. Andrews is in the truck now. I’m going to hold him until we can get a hearing.”

“*What?* So, are the videos online or were they just for him?”

The sheriff looks down. “Thankfully, they look to be more of a personal collection, but we’ll do some further research and get back to you with a confirmation on that.”

I nod slowly, trying to process the invasion of privacy. How did I not know this was happening? What has he seen?

My stomach turns and Boone pulls me in, holding me tight against his chest. “Can we expect to hear from you

tomorrow?”

Sheriff Woods nods, brushing his big hand down over his beard. “Tomorrow evening we should know more. I’ll keep you both up to date.”

With my mind rocketing a hundred miles an hour, I pull away from Boone and pace back and forth, unsure what to think, what to do, how to act.

“You need a cup of tea and a movie. No... a book,” Boone says, helping me into the house. “Start the kettle. I’ll be back in ten minutes. I just want to check the gate behind the detective.”

I nod and head inside, thankful that Boone is here, and that he knows what to say, and when to say it. If I didn’t have his support right now, I’d be a basket case, trying to will myself out of the corner.

My phone rings in my back pocket. It’s Junie. We met at a farmers’ market in Whiskey Falls a few years back and we’ve been friends ever since. I already know why she’s calling. She wants to wish me luck tomorrow with the shop opening. I should answer. It’s nice of her to call and I need the distraction.

“Hey,” I say, running warm water into a kettle, “what’s up with you?”

“I just had the strangest day. Do you have time for a quick reading?”

I was off about what she wanted. Maybe I’m losing my ability all together. I’ll be the one Winters woman that has no psychic talent whatsoever. Great time for that considering I owe the bank every other part of me.

“Sure,” I lie. “What’s up?”

“I just put in an application to a mail order mountain man website.”

“Okay...”

“Well, I feel supremely dumb now. Like one, what if I’m not matched with anyone? Two, who gets a mail order groom?

Three, can you see me being with anyone, or getting married, or *anything*?”

I love Junie, I really do, but I’m not sure I can handle this right now. Sweat drips from my forehead and my heart bounces against my chest. I lean against the counter and focus on my breathing, but even the drip of water in the kettle is overstimulating. Every breath is labored, and my ribs hurt.

“Ella!” Junie laughs. “Are you there?” Her voice is like nails against a chalkboard and I snap.

“I can’t do this! I’m sorry.” I hang up the phone and slide down to the ground, holding my knees to my chest as I stare at the bottom of my vintage refrigerator. It’s wide, dented, curved, and bent. I follow the slope over and over again.

How did my mother do this? Why did I agree to do this? How am I ever going to maintain a career giving people readings day in and day out when I can’t find the answers? Hell, I didn’t even see the man who was stalking me. I didn’t see why Junie was calling. I couldn’t see anything about what Detective Arrows would find, and I can’t see anything about Boone.

Honestly, this isn’t about Boone or anyone else. *This is about me.* I’ve lost my gift, and tomorrow morning at nine, I’m screwed.

Chapter Seven

Boone

I've seen too many breakdowns not to know what one looks like. The tears, the inaudible mumbling, the shaking limbs, the racing heart. Ella is in a classic meltdown.

I lift her from the ground and carry her to the bedroom, resting her on the bed, before grabbing a washcloth from the closet. She keeps a stack of them neatly folded next to a few bottles of soap that have pictures of various flowers on the label.

"You're okay," I finish, wetting the cloth with cold water. "This will pass."

She shakes her head, as tears fall. "I don't think it will. I think I'm stuck like this. I can't see things anymore. I can't see them happening. I don't know what's wrong."

Fuck. I'd give the world to help her with her problems, but I'm not versed in psychic abilities and have no idea what to tell her.

I place the washcloth on her forehead. "Let's start from the beginning. Has this happened before?"

"No."

"Okay. Well, you know for sure the abilities are connected to an overactive part of your brain. We also know that structurally speaking, your brain did not get damaged. We agree that physically your brain is the same, right?"

She sucks in a deep breath and nods. I get the sense that she likes the rationale, so I continue.

"It stands to reason that without a physical change, you're dealing with a self-made block."

She nods again.

"When did this start?"

Her teeth sink into her lower lip. "Somewhere around mid-dinner last night. We were talking and around the same time I

told you about the primal thing... I just... I lost it. At first, I thought it was you blocking me somehow, then it wasn't working at all."

"You knew Nick was on the property before. You said you felt it."

"But not last night. I didn't feel anything."

"Okay, what about meditating? You said that helped you before."

She nods and closes her eyes, sucking in a series of deep breaths before letting them out slowly. I lay beside her and follow her lead, letting the soft sound of her breath soothe us both.

Her hand slides into mine and I hold her safe as she does her reflection. Many service men and women use meditation in both combat and post combat healing. I've tried it more than a few times myself, but I don't have the patience to wait, and always get frustrated that some work isn't getting done.

After ten minutes, she opens her eyes and stares toward me. "Think about something. Something strange."

First thing that comes to mind are her soft lips, but I refocus and shift my energy toward a tree I've been growing on my property. It sits in a field with the horses. They love the shade, but lately it's been losing leaves and I can't figure why.

Her gaze holds mine for a long while, but she says nothing.

"What do you see?"

She shakes her head. "Nothing," she sighs. "I told you I'm broken."

"You're not broken." I squeeze her hand and grab my phone off the table, pulling up the search tab I've never used before. *'How to clear your mind for psychic energy.'*

"Google is going to make a joke out of you. It's times like this, I wish my mom was easier to reach."

Scrolling down the page, there are two options. Meditation and chakra clearing. “It says here that your energetic skin can collect debris, just like your actual skin. When was the last time you did a salt scrub?”

“A salt scrub?” Her brows turn down as though she’s never heard of it.

I nod. “It says here, you should use a salt based scrub to cleanse your skin, and make way for new energy.”

“That’s it? Just soak in salt?”

“Not just soak. It says you should scrub. Areas of importance are the neck, back, heart, throat, and bottoms of your feet.”

“Okay.” She hops from the bed with renewed vigor, looking beneath the sink for what I assume is salt scrub. “Do you think Epsom salt will work? It’s rose quartz.” She sets the giant bottle up on the counter and starts the tub. “I bought this when it was on sale and I haven’t even used it yet.”

“I think that’s perfect.” I lean into her head, kissing her gently before turning away. “I’ll give you a few minutes to get scrubbed. If you need me, just yell.”

“I need you,” she says immediately. “I was hoping you’d help... unless it’s weird. I mean, it’s not your—”

“I want to help,” I say, reaching for the washcloth.

“Okay. I’ll put my bathing suit on, and we can do this right.”

The thought of Ella in a bathing suit has my cock going stiff again, but I ignore it, and stay focused on the task at hand. She’s got a big opening tomorrow, and I know she’s relying on this scrub to work. I’m not sure how salt clears an *invisible skin*, but I’m all for the placebo effect. Out on tour, if a man needed Tylenol and we didn’t have any, we’d give him a Vitamin C drop, and his headache would go away every time. Last I checked, Vitamin C has little to do with caring for migraines.

Ella disappears to another room as I fill the tub with warm water and salt, stirring the bath periodically to release the purities inside the tiny crystals.

“I’m really sorry about all this,” she says, stepping back into the room in a black two piece that has my heart doing cartwheels.

Fuck.

“I’m pretty sure any guy in his right mind, would take this job willingly.”

“Your flattery is appreciated, but not necessary,” she says, bending forward to test the water, the bottom of her bathing suit, swallowed up as her ass cheeks plump outward.

Fuck me. My mind travels back to the dark, carnal parts of myself that are in line with hers, and for a second, I wonder if a good hard fuck would bring her abilities back.

I swallow hard and watch as her tits go buoyant in the water.

Focus, man! I’ve been flipped on my back, waterboarded, and kept more focus than this.

I dip the washcloth into the tub and work circles at her neck, then down her back to the very base of her spine.

Moan after moan escapes her lips as the soft, warm salts work over her skin.

Her eyes close and her head tips back instinctually. I rub her throat and let the water drip down her chest as I scrub the cloth in small circles over her shoulders, her stomach, and then her thighs, slowly polishing my way to the bottoms of her feet.

The touch of her creamy skin against my palm is surreal. I’m desperate for more.

“Should I rinse now?” She tilts her gaze back toward me, splashing water up onto her shoulders.

I nod and stare for a second too long before grabbing my phone off the nearby counter. “Right.” I scroll down. “It says

you should rinse with cool water, then root yourself back to the Earth.”

She narrows her brows. “Root myself back to the Earth? How do I do that?”

I scroll down more fully until I’m at the bottom of the page where the comments live. The first few are ridiculous reviews of the article.

‘I scrubbed my aura, but the devil is still following me. Now what?’

‘Where’s the spell for realignment? I’ve been dizzy since my scrub.’

The third comment is something more useful. “This person says they ground by,” I clear my throat, “standing nude in the garden and planting their feet in soil for ten minutes.” My chest squeezes at the thought of that very scenario.

“Okay.” She stands from the tub and turns on the spray, quickly rinsing the salts off her skin before reaching for the towel I’ve hung on the rack. “Let’s go.”

“You want me to go? What about the nude thing? Besides that, what if that asshole has more cameras around here? It’s too dark for me to go looking right now.”

Her eyes widen as she looks toward me. “My shop opens tomorrow. I don’t have a choice. We can look for the cameras in the morning and delete whatever they caught. Right now, I need to be rooted, and I don’t want to go out there alone.”

I nod, watching her breasts bounce as she steps from the tub. “And I’m not sure I can see you naked and not howl at the moon, baby girl.”

She turns back toward me and grins. “Maybe that’s what I’m going for.”

Chapter Eight

Ella

Well, this is a first. I never thought I'd be standing naked in the garden with my feet tucked under the soil like a scarecrow. Maybe I've officially lost my mind. I should be happy if someone is video taping this. I could go viral and pay off the loan I owe to the bank when my shop inevitably flops tomorrow.

"You can turn around. You don't have to look away." I stand shamelessly uncovered, airing my every flaw to the universe as I beg for my visions to return. Something tells me, this isn't going to work.

"You sure you're ready for what happens if I turn around?" Boone stands ten feet away as though I'm diseased. He faces the cabin, his big arms crossed over one another. He's fighting with himself. He has been since I put on the bathing suit and got in the tub. I like it. I like the struggle on his face as he watched my body move, knowing he couldn't maul me the way he wanted to.

I'd be lying if I said my clit weren't throbbing. It has been since last night. Even with the drama, I'm still thinking about what Boone's weight would feel like against me. It's nearly all consuming.

"I am," I whisper, wondering what box I've just unlocked. The way he acted yesterday, the words he said... could he mean them? Could he be that guy? Right now, I can't imagine it. He's too protective, too nice, too...

His rough hand grips my jaw from behind, and his hot breath is low in my ear. "Say it louder so I can hear you. Tell me you want this. Tell me you want me."

My breath hitches and I begin to pant as his strong arms hold me in place. His cock is already hard and pressed against my back. "Touch me," I beg. "Yes. I want you to touch me. I want you inside of me. Raw with nothing between us." It's a risk to let him inside without a condom, but I don't want

some packaged version of him. I want to feel every inch of him inside of me. I want to feel every degree of his heat.

He lets out a heavy breath along the side of my neck and nibbles the lobe of my ear. "You're sure?"

I nod and twist toward him, burying myself against the warmth of his skin. In my head, I'd imagined him chasing me, tearing off my clothes, and pummeling me to the ground. Now, I don't want him to leave my side.

A low growl rumbles in his throat as he stares down at me. "You're mine after this. Understood?" There's no room for wavering, only compliance, and I like that. I want him to own and possess me.

Take me, Boone. I want everything you've got. The rough, the possessive, the gentle, the aggressive... I want it all.

My fingers weave through his dark hair. "Gladly."

He grumbles low again and snarls his lip up as he tears off his shirt and tugs at his jeans.

I stand in awe of him, watching as the crescent moon above highlights his large frame. The night is cool, but I've lost all sense of temperature when I'm against his body. There's no other reality.

He's not poetic or careful with his touch. He's rough and hard, squeezing my waist, pinching my nipples, tasting my lips. Groaning and growling, he paws over me, raking a tingly trail of heat across my skin and between my legs.

His touch takes me out of my head, and I love every aching second of it.

I rock against his frame and grip my hand over his long, thick cock. He's huge. It's so big, that I stop for a second and wonder how I'll ever take it all inside, but before I can figure the angles, I'm on my back in the dirt, and his head is between my legs.

His fingers slide inside of me, thrusting hard as he growls into my pussy. Heavy and hard, he licks me up, nibbling on my outer folds as he flicks my clit. The soil is cool

and a few stray roots scrape at my back as he works his tongue up and over the throbbing center of my pussy.

He's magic.

My toes curl, my eyes squeeze shut, and I scream out in desperation. "I need to come! I need to come... now!"

"You're really ready for this cock?" His voice is low and deep as he looks up at me, his thick fingers still inside exploring.

Truthfully, I'm not sure I'd ever be ready for a cock the size of Boone's. "I'm ready," I pant, thrusting up toward him.

A dangerous grin lifts onto his face and he pulls his fingers out slowly, licking them clean before he strokes his big cock.

I'm not sure what to do. I'm new to this. Should I kneel? Should I suck his dick? Should I stay where I am and wait?

He doesn't keep me wondering. He takes the lead and lifts my leg onto his shoulder, twisting my body to the side as he nudges his cock inside of me.

I know this is going to hurt, but I don't care. I refuse to scream out in pain. I refuse to give him a reason to stop. I want him to fuck me so hard in this dirt that when I stand it's dripping down my legs.

Boone's face turns dark as he thrusts inside of me. "Fuck... you're so fucking tight." He grips my hips and pumps, slapping his large frame against me like an out-of-control animal.

My clit swells and my lips draw open as the pain sets in.

I really thought it wouldn't be this bad, but it is. He's so big, and I'm so small.

"You okay?" He slows for a second, his face changing from wild to concerned. I don't want that. I want the wild.

"I'm fine," I whine. "Really... don't stop! Go harder!"

“You’re in pain. I’m going to stop.”

I grip his arm, and hold him in place, my eyes on his. “Fuck me, Boone! Don’t stop!” I must look as serious as I sound, because Boone drives into my body with a fervor he’s been holding back. He lands his thumb on my clit and twists in circles as he presses inside of me.

In between his thrusts, I can see the soil starting to accumulate on his arms and legs as he tears us through the garden. I don’t remember what was planted here before, but Lord knows it’s not going to hold up to Boone.

Between the cool dirt pressing against my back, the wild stars above, and the sound rumbling in Boone’s chest as he thumps, I’m not sure I’ll make it either. “I’m going to come,” I whimper, lifting my hips instinctually toward him. “I’m going to come so hard, Boone.”

“Come for me, baby girl. Let me have it. Come hard on this cock so you can lick it off.”

There it is again. Those words. Those dirty, filthy, delicious words.

Boone’s jaw tightens as he rubs my clit faster, thumping against me with speed. His thick cock spreads me wide and the racing pulse between my legs explodes.

He’s ruthless, as I come hard. My body clamps down on him, tightening the already tiny hole.

“Fuck!” His growl sends a shock wave through me that’s natural and open.

My body stiffens and convulses beneath him as my toes curl into the soil under me. Heat floods my skin and all at once I fall apart, dragging my limp arms down his and into the dirt.

His hand lands on my face. “You look so fucking good when you come.” He’s panting as he thrusts, and his eyes are desperate.

“I can’t wait to lick me off you,” I say, holding his rough hand as he continues to explore my depths.

Again and again, we move together against the rough dirt. My hair is covered, my fingernails are filled, and I'm sure I'll be scrubbing the Earth off me for days, but watching Boone rock back and forth against me in the moonlight, is an image I'll never forget.

His expression is raw and wild, and I'm an electric wire, desperate for his current. I never want it to end. I've finally found a big, sweet, rough man and I'm not letting go.

His weight presses against me harder, burying me in the dirt, before all at once he fists into my hair and growls.

It's loud and unabridged... feral and free... blissful and hard.

"Fuck," he groans, thumping against me slower now that he's released. We stay like this for a long moment before he settles beside me in the garden, still breathing hard. "You okay?" He kisses my head gently. "I lost myself there. I—"

"It was perfect." I roll into his shoulder and twist the hair on his chest with the tip of my finger, dragging my body to his freshly enjoyed cock.

"Oh, baby girl, you don't have to. I was—"

I dip onto his dick, forcing him to choke on the end of his sentence. His hand digs into my hair as I bob and lick, gagging on his length, devouring what we've created.

Thick sounds of approval gather in his throat as I lick his dick clean.

"Fuck me, baby. What the hell?" He pulls me on top of him, moaning before kissing my wet lips.

"Maybe this is awful, but I hope this is on video. I want the recording for myself." I smile and lay against his strong chest. We're sweaty and sticky despite the cool air and I'm pretty sure we've turned the soil enough for spring planting.

He laughs and kisses my forehead. "Can you tell I was thinking the same thing?"

I suck in a deep breath of night air and stare down at the man I'm most certainly in love with. "I see everything." I grin. "Also, you're wishing you had a ring for me. If you did, you'd ask me right now. Do you know what I'm thinking?"

He smiles and brushes my hair from my face. "You're thinking I don't need one. That if I ask, you'd say yes."

I can't help but grin. "Maybe I should get you a job in the shop, too. We could be a team."

Leaning up from the garden dirt, he holds me in his arms, then lowers to one knee, still nude in the light of the moon. "A few days ago, you were a stranger. Today, I can't live without you. I don't know how that works, which as you know, is incredibly frustrating to me, but I do know I'm willing to spend the rest of my life figuring it out. Will you marry me, Ella?"

He's not a poet and the timing could be better, but I see past all that. I see what he's thinking... *what he's feeling*. This man *loves* me. He genuinely, truly loves me. He'd do anything for me. He wants to protect me, hold me, and savor me. He wants to buy me a ring and have a family. He wants love, and he wants to grow a garden, right here where we stand.

Tears fall from my eyes and my hand shakes as Boone holds me close. "Yes, yes, yes!" I fall into his arms, and he presses a kiss into my neck.

My heart squeezes and my clit throbs again as his hand wanders to my lower back. I know where he's going with this, and the future never looked so good.

Epilogue

Boone

Six Months Later

Junie and Ella sit beside the garden, pulling weeds. They've been talking about some mail order mountain man for the last hour or more. Apparently, Junie has had a number of bad dates and she's wondering if there's a good one coming anytime soon.

"I see a guy," Ella says, yanking up a dandelion, "but he's a lot older than you, and he's got a past."

"Oh, great!" Junie rolls her eyes. "The last thing I need is another man with a past."

"I get the feeling this one works out, though," Ella says, drawing her attention to the spinach. "Give this one time to develop."

The sour look on Junie's face says she doesn't believe the advice Ella's giving her. I never realized how complicated being a psychic would be.

"Be careful with those eye rolls," Ella says playfully, "or the big guy will kick you out. He's got a reputation now, ya know."

Junie laughs and stands from the dirt, dusting off her bottom. "I hear." She looks toward me. "Sorry, boss. I'll keep it in line."

Ella snorts and blows a strand of hair from her face. "It's not a joke. He's brutal. I was giving a guy a reading a few months ago, and the man went berserk because he didn't like my answers. Boone went full-on maniac and kicked the guy out. If he hadn't been there, I don't know what the psycho would've done."

"A local?" Junie asks, staring down at Ella who's kneeling next to the garden.

"No, some out-of-towner. No local would act like that, at least not on Main Street." She sighs. "Anyway, that's nothing compared to the whole Nick thing. We just finally got all that settled."

"Oh yeah?" Junie says, fluffing back her hair. She doesn't seem to be the gardener that Ella is. Junie would rather do something less dirty and more refined. "What happened with all that?"

"He got six months in jail and two years of probation. We found cameras all over the property."

“Which we took the footage from,” I add, helping my girl up from the garden. “It was a mess, but he moved to Colorado Springs. So, we bought his property. We’re tearing down the house and building a barn so we can move all my horses here. Right now, we’re back and forth everyday taking care of them.”

Junie twists her ginger hair to her shoulder. “Did he share the videos anywhere or...”

“Nope. They were just for him.” Ella twists her lips. “So weird.”

“Well,” Junie sighs, “at least you don’t have to worry about any of that now. But in a few months, you’ll be nothing but worries when the new baby comes.”

Ella smiles gently and leans into my chest. She fits perfectly there, like she was made for me.

“Well, all your love is making me jealous, so I’m going to go.” Junie laughs. “Wish me luck with this mail order man thing. I think I’m going to need it.”

“You won’t need luck.” Ella smiles gently. “This one is good. Trust me.”

Junie smiles as she makes her way back to the car, but I can tell she’s not convinced this meeting is going to go well. I’m not sure I blame her. A mail order anything sounds sketchy. I have a hard time trusting mail order catalogues, let alone a mail order spouse.

“You think she’ll be okay?” Ella snuggles into me. Her little round belly has popped recently. I rub my hand over the top of it. It’s funny how fast this has become one of my favorite things.

I stare down at her dark gaze, watching the pitch-black strands of her hair blow in the breeze. “She’ll be great, and you know it... *literally*.” I laugh.

“I know, but sometimes people get their own way and the future changes. I worry she’s one of those people.”

I kiss her forehead. “Right now, I’m wondering what you see for our baby. You said you knew the sex, right? Care to spill?”

She nods. “*A girl*. I’m sure of it.” Ella’s face lights as she says it.

“Okay, so... that means she needs a name.” A shot of excitement shivers through me at the thought of having a little Ella

to raise. I imagine her telling us the thoughts of all her schoolmates and reading my mind before bed to trick me into one more bedtime story.

“You want to name her Mabel, right? I like that!” Ella grins and kisses my lips gently.

At first, I thought this whole psychic thing was a downfall. I had trauma I hadn’t resolved, I wasn’t ready for love, and civilian life was a complicated maze I didn’t have the energy to work through.

Then, I met Ella. A raven-haired woman whose visions showed me a future I couldn’t resist. Ten days after we met, I married her beneath an oak tree, next to a creek on a cool spring day. It was a day that me, Ella, and the garden will never forget.

[Thank you for reading! Check out Junie’s story next!](#)

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