Truly Madly Montana (A Medicine River Romance) By Fiona Lowe

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Truly Madly Montana: "Lowe's storytelling infuses contemporary romance with delightful banter. Will and Millie are an adorable pair with infectious chemistry. Lowe's knack for creating characters who are genuine, everyday people who readers can relate to is the strength of this delightfully modern story."
--RT Book Reviews

Praise for Montana Actually:
"In the first Medicine River contemporary, the charismatic little town of Bear Paw, Mont., hosts delightful characters whose interactions feel deep and real. Chicago doctor Josh Stanton decides to knock off some of his huge student loan debt by working in rural Montana. His fiancée declines to relocate to the boonies with him; heartbroken, he swears off lasting relationships. Nurse Katrina McCade returns to her hometown of Bear Paw to lick her wounds after an unhappy affair. Katrina and Josh are poleaxed by mutual lust, and they decide to become lovers with no strings attached—but as they begin confiding details of their lives, feelings change. The plot twists around medical emergencies, a second romance line involving Katrina’s brother, the troubles of a local youth, relationships between parents and children, and former lovers learning to be friends. All these elements contribute to the comfortable feeling of smalltown life. The witty conversations, family drama, and accurate (but never maudlin) descriptions of loss and grief will have the reader laughing out loud, wiping away tears, and eagerly awaiting future books."—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"This is a funny, sexy, and heart-warming novel that I feel is a must - read and a keeper. It made me laugh. I loved each character, and wish I could visit Bear Paw.”—Catherine Anderson, New York Times bestselling author of Silver Thaw

“A humorous story full of likeable, distinct characters set in the small town of Bear Paw, Mont. Josh is charming and sexy, and his chemistry with Katrina ignites the pages. Lowe's beautiful story-telling sets up a heartwarming romance between two relationship-challenged people who are reluctant to give their hearts. This is a delightfully modern read."—RT Book Reviews

Praise for Fiona Lowe's previous romance, Boomerang Bride:
“With the perfect mixture of romance, sadness and Australian/American wise-cracking, Boomerang Bride is one of the best romance novels this reviewer has read in a long time.”—RT Book Reviews

“Funny, well-paced plus a well-done secondary romance. Go read this book.”—Smart Bitches, Trashy Books

“I really enjoyed this contemporary fairy tale. The love story was sweet and beautiful and I hope to see more of Lowe in the future.”—The Book Pushers

About the Author
Fiona Lowe is a RITA and RUBY Award–winning, multi-published author with twenty-seven novels to her name, including Truly Madly Montana. She’s lived around the world, including very happy years in the USA. Whether her books are set in Wisconsin, Montana or outback Australia, they feature small towns with big hearts and warm, likable characters that make you fall in love.
Chapter 1

As Millie Switkowski drove into Bear Paw for the first time in months, it seemed both ironic and fitting that her continuous glucose monitor, Dex, started beeping wildly. It was like a mocking welcome home message: You’re back where it all started, baby.

“Okay, Dex,” she said to the machine with which she shared a love-hate relationship. “Simmer down. I’m pulling over.”

She’d been late leaving Bozeman because last night instead of packing, she’d panicked and had done last-minute cramming for her microbiology final. As it turned out, the extra study hadn’t been necessary, and she would have been far better spending the time loading the car as per her original idea. For five years she’d worked at making her life a series of well-thought-out plans, and she knew she really needed to trust them more. If she’d had more faith in her study program, today’s road trip would have been divided up into ordered and necessary scheduled breaks rather than her rushing to get to Bear Paw by six and risking a sugar crash.

Parking next to the enormous twenty-seven-foot-high, ten-thousand-pound concrete penguin, which confidently declared that Bear Paw was the coldest spot in the nation, she smiled at the incongruity of it as she often did. She’d always wondered how the brain trust behind the black-and-white statue had both cheerfully disregarded Alaska and the fact that penguins weren’t found in the northern hemisphere. Geography was obviously not their strong suit. She pricked her finger and tested her blood sugar—predictably low—before rummaging through her enormous tote bag until she found a juice box and some fruit snacks.

The last thing she needed was to arrive at Dr. Josh Stanton’s bachelor party with plummeting blood sugar. She didn’t need the drama of feeling like crap. She surely didn’t need the drama of people hovering or, worse still, some well-meaning person telling her parents she’d arrived back in town looking pale and shaky. No, she was striding into Leroy’s and the party like any normal twenty-six-year-old woman just back from grad school.

Truth be told, most normal twenty-six-year-old women probably weren’t invited to their former boss’s bachelor party, but Josh, like everyone else in town, never seemed to notice she was a woman. She was just Millie. Practical, sensible, dependable Millie—one of the guys. Someone who could shoot pool and throw darts with the best of them.

She checked her appearance in the rearview mirror. Pale face, crazy curls springing everywhere and some freckles on her cheeks left over from spring break in Mexico. Without the time or the inclination to spend an hour with a hair straightener, she knew her hair was beyond help. At least in a few minutes the sugar would hit and pink up her cheeks.

She glanced down at her Montana State sweatshirt and gave thanks it didn’t have a ketchup stain on it from the hot dog she’d grabbed when she’d filled up on gas in Great Falls. She gave herself points for clean jeans, kinda clean boots and a clean, baggy T-shirt—the perfect attire for a boys’ night at Leroy’s.
Millie, honey, there's nothing wrong with wearing a dress from time to time.

She quickly swiped on some lip gloss, as if that show of femininity was enough to silence the memory of her mom’s often sad and critical voice. Her mom had wanted a girlie-girl daughter to share her love of clothes. Instead, she’d gotten a son who loved fashion and football with equal fervor and a daughter who couldn’t tell the difference between a Gucci and a Gabbana. Millie was far more Old Navy, last season and on sale, and she felt way more at home in jeans, fleeces and T-shirts. Her brother, Evan, did his best to make up for Millie’s fashion shortcomings and took their mom shopping whenever she visited him in California. Of course, he also took their dad to the football game, so really, he was the perfect adult child. Millie, on the other hand, knew her overriding contribution to the family was a constant source of parental worry.

She drained the juice box with a slurp and sent a text to her mom and dad, who were out of town.

Got home safely. Tell Uncle Ken happy birthday from me. Millie x

With the job of reassuring-the-parents done, she checked her blood sugar. Eighty-six and rising. Awesome. And real food was coming. As Josh’s best man, she’d ordered up big on the hors d’oeuvres—BBQ meatballs, layered Mexican dip, stuffed mushrooms, bacon-wrapped Jalapeño poppers and buffalo wings. If they weren’t serving food when she arrived, she’d ask them to start.

The good and the bad thing about Bear Paw was that most of the older residents and anyone she’d gone to high school with knew she was diabetic. They didn’t comment if she ate at a different time from them, although they often had an opinion about what she ate. As a result, in her life outside of Bear Paw as a medical student, she only shared her lack of a functioning pancreas with people on a strictly need-to-know basis. She made sure that need didn’t arise very often at all, because she had a PhD in horrified and pitying looks, or worse yet—over-intrusive interest from people who saw her as a training specimen. All she wanted was to be known as Millie—although she wasn’t exactly certain who that was, but tonight wasn’t the time to tackle that particular chestnut.

Throwing the car into drive, she shoulder-checked, pulled out onto the road and drove the last mile to Leroy’s. The parking lot was almost full, and some smart-ass cowboy had fashioned a rope noose and hung it over the door next to a banner that said, Another good man all tied up. Ducking to miss it, she pushed open the door, and a wall of noise and the malty scent of beer wafted out to greet her.

“Millie!”

“Millie’s here!”

A welcoming roar went up from the cowboys and assorted businessmen who were gathered around the bar. They turned and raised their drinks to her.

She grinned and tipped her imaginary hat. She knew all of them, either having treated them at the clinic when she’d worked there as a nurse or having bested them here at pool and darts. “Hey, guys. It’s good to be back.”

“Millie, welcome home.” Ethan Langworthy, the librarian, greeted her in his quiet and gentle way.

“Hey, Millie.” Josh gave her a warm hug and a perfunctory kiss on the cheek. It was a sharp contrast to the buttoned-up city doctor who’d arrived in Bear Paw just over a year ago. “It’s great to see you.”

She hugged him back. “And you. Getting nervous?”
“About the wedding?” He shook his head. “Not at all. About my parents spending a week in Bear Paw, yes. Katrina’s dad offered to host them out at Coulee Creek ranch, which probably means I owe him our firstborn child.”

She punched him lightly on the arm. “They can’t be worse than when you first arrived in town with your fancy coffee and stinky French cheeses.”

He gave a good-natured smile. “Your parents always greet me with open arms when I place my monthly gourmet food order.”

“I can’t argue that, then, especially as by default you’re likely contributing to my generous birthday and Christmas presents.” She raised her hand toward the bar and gave the bartender a wave. He’d started at Leroy’s not long before she’d left for medical school. “Sparkling water, please, Shane.”

“It’s a bachelor party, Millie. Moose Drool is mandatory,” he said, filling a glass with the amber liquid. “You can worry about your weight tomorrow.”

And you’re home. Her gut tightened. Half of her was grateful Shane didn’t know about her diabetes, while the other half of her hated that she’d just taken a hit about her weight. She wasn’t obese, but then again, she was hardly willow thin, either. She knew this sort of banter was how guys talked to one another, and she’d never expected them to treat her any differently before. Tonight wasn’t the night to go all girlie on them.

“A beer and pass the buffalo wings, Shane,” she said brightly. As for the alcohol, she’d have to bolus insulin for the carbs and make that one beer last the entire night. Turning back to Josh, she asked, “How’s Katrina?”

“She says to say hi and told me to tell you that you’re not to party too hard tonight because she wants you in good shape at her girls’ night tomorrow.”

“Is that code for me to stay sober so I can keep an eye on you?”

He grinned. “Maybe, although I don’t think I’ve ever seen you even a little bit buzzed.”

And you won’t. She’d been there, done that, years before he’d come to town, and it just wasn’t worth the health risk. She still carried the guilt, and that weighed her down enough.

Pushing the past back where it belonged, she slapped him on the back in typical guy-style. “As the best man, it’s my job to make sure you don’t get injured when you inevitably fall off the mechanical bull, to guarantee no cowboy takes you outside and sits you backward on a horse and, as the designated driver, to get you home in one piece by midnight.”

He slung his arm around her shoulder, the touch easy and friendly. “And that’s why I chose you to be my best man.”

“That and the fact you couldn’t ask Ty Garver no matter how much you want him standing next to you,” she said sadly, thinking about the cowboy who’d fallen in love with Katrina years ago.

“Well, yeah, there is that.” Josh sighed with heartfelt understanding. “And Will Bartlett’s not available. He couldn’t get anyone to cover him at MontMedAir for the weekend.”

And there is a God. Not that she didn’t like Will; she did. In fact, last year, she’d liked the Aussie MontMedAir doctor just a little too much. Heat burned her cheeks at the embarrassing recollections. Having a crush at sixteen was normal; crushing on a work colleague at twenty-five probably got a listing in the
DSM-5. The memory of last spring and summer was still excruciatingly embarrassing, given he’d barely noticed her other than as one of many people he came into contact with through work.

Will was laid-back, easygoing and charming, and he had a way of making people feel appreciated and part of a team. That had been her undoing—being appreciated was powerful stuff, and Floyd Coulson, Bear Paw’s hospital administrator, could learn a thing or two from him. Given all that, she’d read way too much into Will’s generous praise, especially as he often said, “You’re the best, Millie,” when she’d accompanied him on MontMedAir retrievals.

Following him on Twitter and pretending it was because of his #FOAMed tweets—free open access meducation—was borderline stalker behavior, although totally educational. What the guy didn’t know about emergency airway management wasn’t worth knowing. At least she’d come to her senses before clicking on Add Friend on his Facebook account, and for that, she was both proud and grateful. Sadly, she’d undone that bit of clear thinking after a traumatic medical evacuation last August.

It was the fifth time she’d been the accompanying nurse out of Bear Paw, and they were airlifting two badly injured tourists who’d been involved in a motor vehicle accident. They’d flown out between two storm fronts, and the pilot had given her the all clear to check the patients’ vitals. She was out of her seat when the plane hit an air pocket, and she’d been thrown sideways, landing face-first in Will’s lap. She still got a hot and cold flash whenever she thought about it.

He’d gripped her arms, lifted her up and checked she was okay before hitting her with his devastatingly gorgeous smile—the one that radiated from his full lips, creased his tan cheeks and crinkled the edges of his unusual dark blue eyes. He’d quipped something about things moving fast for a first date, which had disarmed her all-consuming embarrassment and made her crush-filled brain totally misunderstand what he meant. When they landed and had handed over their patients to the Seattle hospital staff, she’d suggested they have a drink.

“Great idea, Mils,” he’d said with his sexy Australian diphthong, sounding as if he truly believed the words. Her heart had soared, flipped and high-fived all at once only to plummet to her feet when he’d continued with, “but I’ll have to take a rain check.”

Of course he would.

A rain check that never came. A rain check that made her puce with embarrassment whenever she thought about it.

With his surfer-dude good looks, he was likely very used to nurses—heck, probably all women with a pulse—throwing themselves at him. Only she wasn’t usually one of those nurses or women, because she knew he was so far out of her league it wasn’t worth playing the game. She still blamed the fog caused by low blood sugar along with the addition of a post-emergency adrenaline rush for her out-of-character invitation, because she’d stopped asking out guys in her league a long time ago.

As a twenty-first-century woman, she knew she had the right to ask a guy out, but since giving up her party lifestyle and casual hookups, things had changed and dating had gotten difficult. After a series of flat-out no’s, a few disastrous dates and two truly awful one-night stands, she’d learned from her mistakes. She didn’t ask guys out, period. As a result, her current dating average was zip.

“It’s too bad Will can’t make it, Josh,” she said, trying to sound more sincere than relieved. “But I’m pumped to be your best man, and I promise to get you to the church on time.”
“You’re a good friend,” he said sincerely.

_That’s me. Everyone’s good buddy._ “Hey, it’s way too early to be getting all touchy-feely on me,” she said, climbing onto a chair as much to start the party as to run from her thoughts. Sticking her fingers in her mouth, she blew hard and the piercing whistle silenced the bar.

“Aw, Millie,” a voice from down near the pool table called out, “you’re not gonna make a speech, are you?”

“Hey, Doc, I told you not to choose a chick to be your best man,” Trent Dattner said on a long-suffering sigh.

“Millie’s not a girl,” Dane Aitken heckled before turning and giving Trent a high five.

“Ha-ha.” Millie rolled her eyes, surprised by the dull ache that spread through her. “And to think that Comedy Central hasn’t signed you up yet. For that smart-ass comment, Dane, the bull gets set on high for you.”

The cowboys in the room cheered, knowing full well the sanitation worker wouldn’t last three seconds in the saddle.

She raised her glass. “We’ve got food, we’ve got beer and we’ve got a bull. Let’s give Josh a Bear Paw bachelor night to remember.”

DR. Will Bartlett was on a mission. He was used to missions—he’d flown a lot of miles doing emergency medical air retrieval in both Australia and Montana, but this particular mission was very different. It was also proving to be a hell of a lot harder than intubating a critical patient at twenty thousand feet.

“Brandon, mate, we’re talking twenty-four hours.”

The physician tapped a medication order onto the tablet computer in his hand. “You know better than anyone that a lot can happen in twenty-four hours.”

A lot could happen in twenty-four seconds—hell, his life had been irreversibly changed in less time than that. Convincing Brandon to swap shifts was his last hope, as everyone else who could have possibly covered his schedule had ironclad commitments. The key, though, was making it look like he was doing Brandon McBain a favor, not the other way around, because if people sensed weakness, they zeroed in on it.

“Only last week you were whining”—at Brandon’s blank look, Will immediately translated the Australian—“whining to me that you were sick of treating patients with the flu and prescription drug addicts trying to get meds. You said you wanted more of a challenge and this is it.” He tapped his own chest twice with his fist. “I’m offering you the chance of heart-pumping, adrenaline-racing trauma, the crack cocaine of all emergency physicians.”

“It’s tempting.”

_Yes!_

“. . . but I just got a date for tonight with that pretty brunette from Orthopedics.”

Will knew the intern—he’d enjoyed flirting with her at a party, but she had the look in her eyes of a woman seeking commitment. That was his red card, so he hadn’t pursued it any further. “Jenna will understand. That’s the whole point of dating inside the medical community—they get that work interferes. Promise her a rain check.”
Brandon snorted and shot Will a scowl. “That’s your line, not mine. I actually like her and I want to date her. Unlike you, with your weird accent that seems to make every woman in this hospital think you’re Jesse Spencer and Hugh Jackman rolled into one, I had to work damn hard to get her to say yes.” He walked toward the nurses’ station. “Anyway, I thought you didn’t like weddings.”

He easily matched the shorter man’s stride. “I haven’t got anything against them as long as I’m not the groom. Josh Stanton’s a good bloke and I’d like to be there. How about I work your next two weekends? That’s more than fair. Whad’ya say?”

“I duno.” Brandon stowed the tablet in the charger. “What if Jenna sees changing the date as a chance to cancel?”

He tried not to sigh. Brandon was a good doctor, but he was hopeless with women, and his dating strikeout rate in the hospital was legendary. Maybe Will could get his swap by sweetening the deal and helping the guy out. “You know, if you tell Jenna that you’re delaying your date to help me attend a wedding, you’ll automatically be more attractive to her.”

Brandon finally gave Will his full attention. “How do you figure that?”

“All women love weddings, so by helping me get there you’re doing your bit for love. Plus, I’ll pay for the flowers you’re going to send her as an apology for changing the date and I’ll get you a table at Annie’s. I know the maître d’.”

“Oh, that’s good.” Brandon’s eyes lit up with a calculating light. “If you throw in dating tips so I get a second date with Jenna, I’ll swap.”

“Jeez, McBain. I’ve already given you more than you deserve.”

Brandon casually opened a candy bar. “Exactly how much do you want to be the best man at this wedding?”

The thought of discussing dating’s do’s and don’ts with Brandon was up there with sitting in the dentist’s chair with the sound of the drill buzzing in his ears. Was getting to this wedding really worth it?

You know it is. Josh Stanton was a good mate—one of the few people he’d really connected with this last year in Montana. Even though Josh was a Yank, he totally related to Will’s feelings of discombobulation when he’d arrived from Australia to work in Montana. He’d told Will that for a guy from New York and Chicago, small-town Montana was as strange and different for him as if he’d been the one to move countries. Plus, they shared a passion for emergency medicine, and with Bear Paw’s proximity to Glacier National Park and accident-prone tourists, they’d worked together a lot. Being at the wedding was an act of friendship that he wanted to make.

Knowing he’d probably live to regret it, because McBain would likely continue to seek him out for dating advice long after the favor was done, he clapped his hand on the clueless doctor’s shoulder. “Brandon, the first rule of dating is making it all about her and leaving your neediness at the door.”

“But I can tell her how grateful I am that she came on the date, right?”

“Yeah . . . no.” He shook his head and swallowed a sigh, already tasting regret. “Your job is to ask questions and listen. Be attentive.”

Brandon pulled out his phone. “What sort of questions?”
Spare me. The MontMedAir pager thankfully chose that moment to beep loudly, and he pressed it into Brandon’s hands. “This is your call, McBain. If I leave now, I’ll just make it to Bear Paw for the wedding.”

“You’re driving on no sleep?”

He knew it wasn’t ideal, but he didn’t have a choice. “I’ll drive with the windows down and the music blasting,” he replied, walking to the door.

“Text me the questions,” Brandon called after him.

“Later.” As much as Will respected Josh as a friend, he hoped one of Katrina’s bridesmaids was going to make his weekend worth the frustrations of being McBain’s date doctor.

MILLIE took the short but familiar walk from what had once been her parents’ guesthouse at the bottom of the yard, up toward the main house and her childhood home. Over the last few years, the guesthouse had become her apartment whenever she was living in Bear Paw. She appreciated her parents’ generosity, especially now that she was studying to become a doctor and was required by her scholarship to spend her summers working in Bear Paw.

Through the window, she could see her folks dressed and ready for the wedding and chatting in the kitchen. She’d spent more time than usual getting ready herself, and she thought she looked pretty sharp. As she stepped through the door, she called out, “Hi,” before clicking her fingers and executing a soft-shoe shuffle across the kitchen floor. She finished with a twirl in front of them. “Ta-da.”

Her mother, Susie, dressed in a gray silk shift dress gathered in at the waist with a matching cummerbund and secured with a diamanté broach, stared at her, horrified. “Why are you wearing a tuxedo?”

“Because, Mom . . .” Millie smiled, already prepared for the question. “I’m the best man.”

“You’re the best person,” Susie said in a long-suffering tone, “and in my experience, the women who stand up with their guy friends always wear a dress.”

Stay calm. “I’m sorry you’re upset, Mom, but I did tell you I was wearing a suit.”

“And I assumed you meant something classic like a Chanel.”

She laughed, hearing the tightness in the sound and wishing it wasn’t there. “A Chanel suit is way out of my price range, and besides, it wouldn’t have all these awesome pockets for my stuff.”

“That’s what a purse is for.”

Millie looked at her mother’s tiny clutch purse—the one that perfectly matched her shoes and frock. It was barely big enough to hold a phone, let alone her continuous glucose monitor handset and her test kit. “You know I need more room than that.”

Conflicting emotions warred on her mother’s face, and she let out a sigh. “Yes, honey, but if you’d let me take you shopping, I’m certain we could have found the perfect dress and purse.”

I doubt it. “Mom—”

“You look terrific, Millsy,” her father said, finally stepping into the conversation as he always did just as it was getting uncomfortable. “You’ll put all the other guys in the shade.”
“Thanks, Dad.” She kissed him gratefully on the cheek. “I better get going or Josh will beat me to the church. I’ll see you guys there.”

“At least wear some color,” Susie said, pressing a pretty wine-stained lipstick into her hand. “You look pale. Are you sure you’re feeling okay?”

As a redhead, she was frequently pale, but that wasn’t what her mother meant. “I’m fine, Mom. My blood sugar is my friend today. I promise you that I’ll put on the lipstick just before I go into the church, I’ll spritz on some perfume and I’ll pinch my cheeks, but seriously, all eyes will rightly be on Katrina and Josh, not me.”

*Thank goodness.* As her fingers closed around the door handle, her father asked, “You’ve got everything you need, right?”

For the briefest moment, she rested her forehead on the doorjamb. She loved her parents dearly, but their constant concern wore her down. Everyone’s constant concern wore her down. She patted her pockets. *Dex, keys, test kit, snack.* “Yep. Bye.”

It wasn’t until ten minutes later when she was parking next to Josh’s positively gleaming sports car that she realized she’d left her phone back at the guesthouse resting on the charger. Oh well, she was at the church now, and if Josh needed anything, he could tell her in person. Feeling naked without her heavy tote bag on her shoulder, she hurried over to the steep-pitched, maroon-roofed building. Stepping out of the bright afternoon sunshine and into the dimness of the changing room, her eyes were slow to adjust, and she fuzzily made out the shape of a guy with his back to her.

“Hey, Josh,” she said, moving in for a big hello hug. “Fifteen minutes ’til showtime.” As her arms went firmly around his shoulders, she caught the flash of dark blond hair, the sharp zip of citrus cologne and the glint of amused dark blue eyes.

Josh had brown hair, wore woodsly cologne and his eyes were silvery gray. And as tall as Josh was, her cheek was usually closer to his shoulder than this, and she didn’t remember him feeling quite this broad. Who exactly was she body-hugging?

She was about to step back when she heard, “Hey, Millie.” Josh’s voice filled with gentle amusement. “On my wedding day, you’re supposed to be making a fuss over me, not Will.”

*Will?*

Her brain melted at the exact same moment as her body. *No way! Not possible.* Will wasn’t even coming to the wedding. But as she glanced up into familiar dancing eyes—eyes she’d spent way too much time daydreaming about last year—she knew.

Dear Lord, she had her arms wrapped tightly around Will Bartlett.

Shock dried her mouth and embarrassment made her arms drop away fast from his wide shoulders. She stumbled backward, wishing desperately that she could teleport anywhere as long as it was far, far away from here and Will Bartlett.


*Oh yeah, so smooth.*
“G’day, Millie.” A cheeky grin lit up his perfectly symmetrical face, and she saw the precise moment he recalled exactly their last meeting—the time she’d fallen into his lap. “We have to stop meeting like this.”

Chapter 2

The wedding reception was in full swing, and Will took advantage of the band’s break to disengage himself from a group of well-dressed women in their forties who’d cornered him on the dance floor. According to Katrina’s brother, Beau, they were Bear Paw’s notorious book club, and all men under thirty-five were fair game. It wasn’t like Will to be caught unawares by any woman, but lack of sleep must be catching up on him, because his bum had been pinched by more than one manicured hand, his chest stroked, and during one dance, he’d detected definite rubbing.

Charlie would love it.

He blew out a breath as the accurate thought took hold of him. His twin would have been in his element tonight, and despite the fact they were in their early thirties, he would have dragged Will into a fun plan that would confuse the hell out of these bold women. Back in the day at a function like this, they’d used their mirror-image likeness of each other to fool girls. For years in their dusty, country childhood town where no one could tell them apart, they’d caused chaos. Their mother was the only person who could recognize their minute physical differences, while their father relied on personality when assigning blame for a prank discovered. Sadly, his father didn’t need to do that anymore.

Hey, bro, lighten up! Charlie’s voice floated across his mind. It’s a wedding.

He really should e-mail the grief counselor the hospital had made him see and tell him that his advice about time lessening loss and his comment that Charlie’s voice would fade was total BS. Taking his twin’s advice, he grabbed a glass of champagne left over from the toasts and wandered out of the tent to find some entertainment.

The evening was warm and balmy—even the wind had dropped, and that miracle had to be in honor of the newlyweds, because usually it took a great deal of effort to stand upright in Bear Paw. Will blinked as the horizon seemed to tilt. He shook his head, realizing he was far wearier than he thought. The fatigue was worth it, though—he was very glad he hadn’t missed the wedding.

Josh had worn a goofy grin on his face from the moment he’d turned to see Katrina walking down the aisle toward him on her father’s arm. Will was no expert on wedding dresses, and if he’d been pressed on what the bride wore, he’d have replied, A dress with a lace thing over it, but he also would have added that she glowed with happiness. Josh had told him that Katrina’s mother had died just under a year ago, and her death had hit the family really hard. Knowing that, it was great to see the McCades coming together for a happy occasion and having fun.

Sadly for Will, his plans for a night of fun with one of the bridesmaids had taken a solid beating. As it happened, there was only one bridesmaid, and as delectable as Megan McCade was—and she truly was in that red, figure-hugging dress—she was also Katrina’s baby sister. At twenty-two, she was the classic male fantasy of a nubile college girl, and maybe, if he’d been on vacation, he could have justified a mindless fling, but an annoying voice in his head kept reminding him she was way too young. Adding that to the fact that her father, brother and newly minted brother-in-law would likely frog-march him from the ranch if he dared try anything, and that it would damage his friendship with Josh, he’d been well behaved.
Not that Megan hadn’t been game. She’d openly flirted with him during the bridal waltz, and he’d been momentarily tempted to disregard the decade that lay between them, but then her father had cut in and sanity had prevailed. For some reason, sanity had been prevailing a lot lately, and it was getting in the way of him getting much or any action. He’d been hoping to rectify that sorry state this weekend, but here he was, hiding out from cougars and Lolitas, and he wasn’t certain there were any other possible candidates.

None that he’d noticed, anyway, but he consoled himself that there was still some evening left. He’d been having regular sex since he was sixteen, and this current dry spell was as atypical as it was confusing. It wasn’t like he was short on offers—that never changed—it was just lately, none of the offers tempted him. With the last couple of women he’d been with, he’d felt like he was going through the motions. Given he had no plans to see them again, it didn’t seem fair to only give them average sex, so he’d stopped. He’d thought a few weeks off would fix things, only the weeks had bled into months and not a lot had changed.

_Everything’s changed._

He glanced up to see the moon rising and casting its silvery glow over the pasture and the guests. With the flickering flames of the tiki torches and the white light of the stars starting to pierce the canopy of inky darkness, the night had a magical quality to it. He loved the outdoors, but Charlie loved it just that little bit more.

Just like at home in the outback of Australia, Montana offered Will the great outdoors in spades, only here there were even more opportunities for extreme sports. The mountains offered hiking, biking, rafting, snowboarding, rock climbing—the list was endless. It was also part of the reason he’d stayed longer in the States than he’d intended, but just recently, the call of home had started to deafen him. For some inexplicable feeling he felt farther away from Charlie here, which was crazy, because no matter where he lived or worked, Charlie was unreachable.

Recognizing exactly where his train of thought was heading and fast, he knew he needed to cut it off at the pass with some company. He glanced around at the clusters of people—some standing, some sitting—looking for someone he knew. A group of giggling nurses from the Bear Paw Hospital waved at him, and he automatically gave them a wave in return. They immediately advanced on him, wobbling on high heels that sank into the soft earth with every step they took.

_Idiot! Why did you wave?_ He’d left the tent because he’d had enough of being superficially charming and keeping women at bay. _Find someone, ideally a bloke you know, and avoid this gaggle of women._

He turned his head quickly and the ground tilted again. He swayed, and as he steadied, he spied Josh’s nurse practitioner, Millie, and his fellow groom’s person. _What was her surname? Doesn’t matter._ She was sitting alone at a table with an empty chair opposite her, and she had her head down looking at something in her hand. He assumed it was her phone. He loved social media as much as the next person, but it bothered him how many people spent their time at social functions live tweeting them rather than talking to the people present. It probably answered the question as to why she was sitting alone. Still, she was his save from the attentions of the hammered and giggly nurses. “Mind if I join you?”

Her head shot up so fast that her kamikaze curls bounced across her eyes, which, although mostly green, had an unusual ring of coppery brown around each iris. She quickly slid the device she was holding into her pocket, and he caught a flash of pink in the glow from the cluster of tea lights on the center of the table. Funny. He’d never have picked Millie for a pink girl. Come to think of it, he’d never thought about her in terms of femininity at all. Millie was just . . . Millie. Unprepossessing. Ordinary, even.

A flash of a memory from last year flared. _Not totally ordinary. She’s got a dimple-cute smile._
Only, she wasn’t smiling now. In fact she looked slightly taken aback. “Really? You want to sit?”

The nurses were bearing down on him fast. “Really.”

“Okay, I guess.”

It wasn’t the most welcoming invitation he’d ever received, but he took it anyway. As his bum hit the chair, he heard a loud and collective sigh behind him.


“We thought you were coming to talk to us,” said another nurse who Will thought might be called Marissa. Or it could be Larissa—he really didn’t remember nor did he really care, but he’d never let her know that.

He pulled his mouth into a broad smile and turned his face toward the buzzed group. “And I was coming straight over to you until Millie, here, reminded me that we have official secret wedding business to attend to before Katrina and Josh leave.”

Millie made a definite snorting sound.

He ignored her, choosing instead to press on with the nurses and appease them. “Sorry, ladies. Rain check?”

“I guess.” Cassidy squeezed his shoulder. “But only ’cause you’re cute.”

“So very cute.” A woman he’d never met before gave him a dreamy smile.

“We’ll be on the dance floor,” ‘Issa instructed firmly. “Come find us.”

They smiled and giggled before wobbling their way back toward the tent, and he turned back to face Millie. Her previous wide-eyed surprise had morphed into a narrow gaze. “Secret wedding business?”

“Incredibly secret.” He grinned at her, expecting his smile to soften the critical look she was currently spearing through him. He leaned in conspiratorially and dropped his voice to a low burr that had gotten him places with women in the past. “So secret that if either of us speak of it, weddings as we know it will never be the same again.” He tapped his nose with his finger. “It’s just not worth the risk.”

Instead of laughing, she leaned back slightly, reestablishing the previous space between them. If she’d wanted to smile at what he’d just said, she was doing a great job of hiding it. “Just so you know, Will,” she said matter-of-factly, “the Bear Paw nursing department is known to hold a grudge.”

“No worries. I’ll bring cake and chocolates next time I’m in town.”

She blinked and then shot him an irritated look. “I should turn you in.”

He broadened his smile. “But you won’t. We’re brothers-in-arms.”

Something flickered in her eyes. “How do you figure that?”

“Well, we’re Josh’s groomsmen, or in your case, groom’s person.”

She lifted her chin. “Actually, I’m the best man.”
He laughed. “I don’t think so. I’m the best man.”

She shook her head so hard that her dark auburn curls brushed her creamy cheeks. “I arranged the bachelor party.”

With a jolt of surprise, he realized she was pissed off at him. “And I appreciate that,” he said, starting to regret his decision to avoid the tipsy nurses.

Her spearing look sharpened. “Exactly what did you do apart from arrive at the last moment and look better in a suit than me?”

*Ouch.* What had he done to make her so snarky? And why the hell was she wearing a suit anyway? He really didn’t know Millie very well. Sure, they’d done a few emergency retrievals together last summer, and she’d always been easy to work with—she seemed to know what she was doing and she just got on with the job. She’d always been competent and friendly but without crossing the professional line, and for that he’d been grateful. No matter how great his male colleagues thought it was to have women openly coming on to him at work, it got old fast. Millie had never shown any interest in him, not even the time she’d lost her balance and face-planted in his lap.

He’d helped her up and she’d just laughed, called herself a klutz and gone back to work. Every other woman he knew either would have been massively embarrassed and apologetic or would have used the situation to make a double entendre with a promise of what could happen at a different time and place. Her lack of sexual subtext was both refreshing and a relief. He found it a constant juggle to keep up the status quo at work, because some women got really upset if he refused their invitations, and could go on to make a shift hell. As a result, he was charming to everyone and he’d developed some strategies that avoided a straight-out no and disappointed no one.

Millie had always been friendly, but right now she looked anything but. Why was she so insistent she was the best man and what was with the crack about him looking better than her in a suit? His head spun from fatigue and ached with the task of trying to work out what was going on. Women always had an agenda that came with a bewildering number of emotional items that he usually found as clear as mud. Give him a medical emergency any day—at least it had a logical process.

Before tonight, he’d only ever seen Millie in baggy, shapeless scrubs, and now she was attending a wedding wearing a tuxedo. In the months since he’d last seen her had she come out as a man? In the yellow glow of the tea lights he could make out the gloss of lipstick on her surprisingly pretty lips. Although he was no expert on transgendered people, he was almost certain that if she was now living as a man, she wouldn’t be wearing lipstick. Still, he supposed that didn’t exclude her from being a butch lesbian. Not that he knew much about the lesbian community, either, except from the dissertation he’d been served once by a lesbian feminist patient. His takeaway from that had been that as a heterosexual male he was automatically in the wrong. He’d found the attitude bewildering, because wasn’t it equally as prejudiced?

He’d always considered himself open-minded, and he wanted to try and understand, especially as he liked Millie and, unlike right now, she was usually fun to be around. He added up the evidence in front of him and came to the conclusion that butch or not, she obviously still liked pink and lipstick, and why not? Sexuality was a complicated beast, and in a town this size, her coming-out must have taken a huge amount of courage. He wanted to acknowledge that. “Don’t underestimate yourself, Mils. With your height, you can carry a suit well and you look pretty good.”

Her plump lips pursed. “I don’t need you to flatter me, Will.”
Yup. Automatically in the wrong. “I wasn’t trying to flatter you, Millie. You’ve probably got a girlfriend for that, right?”

His left eye chose that moment to twitch with exhaustion, and Millie’s eyes rounded as wide as an owl’s. Shit. She probably thought he’d just winked at her. He swallowed a groan. So much for trying to be totally PC and showing support.

He tried to cover the faux pas by raising his glass to her. “Sorry. Girlfriend or not, good for you for being out and proud.”

OH. My. God. Will Bartlett thought she was gay.

Millie didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, be shocked and offended or, in some perverse way, relieved. Irrespective of her scattered emotions, it was without doubt the frosting on the cake of an evening that had gone downhill from the moment she’d inadvertently thrown herself at Will. Josh had been understandably thrilled at Will’s unexpected and last-minute arrival, and he’d kept slapping Will on the back, saying over and over how great it was and didn’t Millie think it was great, too.

So great . . . not. She’d felt more than a twinge of jealousy at Will being here, and she hated that. It made her feel needy—like she’d fallen well short of the mark of being a good best man for Josh. In her rational moments, she knew she was being silly. Of course Josh valued her and of course he’d want one of his male friends to stand next to him if they were available. Only all her insecurities screamed louder than her logic and, damn it, while she was left feeling like chopped liver, the only thing missing from Will’s arrival was the white charger and a hero’s welcome.

When she’d left home this afternoon wearing the tux, she’d felt happy and just a little bit smug. She looked good—she knew she did, and it wasn’t often she felt that way. Usually at formal occasions she was stressing about her insulin pump—could it be seen, was it ruining the line of the dress—but the suit gave her a freedom she’d embraced. With Will’s arrival, that feeling had faded fast, and by the time she was standing at the front of the church, she’d just felt plain silly and was berating herself for not wearing a dress.

It was one thing to be Josh’s only attendant and have some fun with the whole the best man’s a woman and wear a penguin suit. It was another thing entirely to stand next to Josh and Will in the suit. Of course, they both looked devastatingly handsome in their starched white shirts and black bow ties. She’d just felt lumpy and ridiculous and had longed to swap sides and be a bridesmaid.

The lovely wedding service had passed in a blur because her mind had been totally taken up with Will, and her thoughts and emotions had ricocheted wildly like a racquetball. First there was fury—how dare he turn up without notice. Then acute embarrassment—good grief, she’d body slammed him with a huge hug. Followed by blissful memories—he’d felt so solid and amazing pressed up against her, and finally humiliation when she’d stuttered like a total fangirl.

The stuttering bothered her the most, because she’d been convinced she was over her crush. For goodness’ sake, she had to be over it. She was twenty-six years old, an experienced RN and one quarter of the way toward becoming a doctor. People expected her to be sensible, mature and upstanding. Crushing on Will was as far removed from sensible as sticking a fork into a toaster.

The guy might be the poster-boy of every woman’s fantasy, but he barely noticed her. She’d accepted that, or at least she thought she had, because, hell, a lot of guys didn’t notice her, but this was the first time anyone had thought she was gay. She felt a hysterical laugh rise in her throat. Will had the wrong Switkowski. Granted, her brother hadn’t announced he was gay, but there were some fairly strong indicators that he might
be. Millie had been waiting for Evan to say something ever since he’d moved to California, but a year and a half had passed without a murmur.

*Set Will straight.*

*Sure! Like that won’t be embarrassing. At. All.* She could just imagine the confusion flaring in his eyes when she said, *Actually, I’m not gay.* It would immediately be followed by pity. The whole episode would be right up there with the time a couple of years back when she’d been carrying some extra weight and a pregnant patient had touched her arm, excitedly asking her if she was pregnant, too.

No, it was just easier to let the whole thing slide. What did it matter, anyway? The wedding was almost over—there was only the throwing of the bouquet and the waving off of Katrina and Josh as they left for their honeymoon. After that, she’d say good night, and if there was any justice in the world, the good folk of Bear Paw would be healthy, not require an emergency evacuation to a bigger hospital, and she’d not have to run into Will Bartlett all summer. And even if she did, she’d be androgynous in scrubs like she always was at work, and he’d never think twice about his assumption.

Decision made, she gave a silent apology to all the lesbians in the world, picked up her glass of sparkling water and clinked his already-raised champagne glass. “Oh yeah, totally out and proud, but can we please not talk about it?”

“Are you sure?”

“Believe me, I’m very sure.”

Two worry lines appeared between his eyes. “It’s just, I don’t want you to think I’m uncomfortable about it or judging you in any way, because I’m not.”

*Shoot me now.* She swallowed a sigh. “No, I get it. You’re an ally.”

A look of relief slipped across his model-worthy face. “So we’re good, then?”

“We’re totally good.” At that moment she wished she had vodka in her glass.

He smiled that devastating, toe-curling smile of his and then casually reclined in the chair, all loose limbed, relaxed and totally gorgeous. Every muscle in her body slackened, and her mouth opened slightly, emitting a tiny pant.

*Stop that. Right now.*

She immediately jerked her head back and gazed up into the night sky, desperate to look anywhere other than at Will. Her body moaned in disappointment at the loss of the tantalizing visuals, and her befuddled, lust-filled mind staged a revolt, emptying on the spot of all conversation starters. All it could offer up was moon, star, star, black sky, star.

It suddenly occurred to her that as an Australian, he’d be used to a different night sky, so she started pointing out the constellations that she knew—all three of them. “That’s Polaris, the North Star, and that’s the Big Dipper, which the Blackfeet call the Bear.”

Will didn’t say anything, so she swung her arm wide and kept talking. “And somehow those faint stars are supposed to look like a giraffe.” She gave a tight laugh. “And now I’ve totally maxed out my astronomy knowledge.”
Still, Will didn’t comment, so she glanced at him. His head had fallen forward, his eyes were closed and he looked to be fast asleep.

_Fan-freakin’-tastic._ Not only did he think she was she gay, but extremely boring, too. Hurt and frustration collided in a hot, hard mass in her chest, and she pushed her foot forward, intending to nudge him awake. Unfortunately, the toe of her boot connected with his shin.

“Bloody hell.” His eyes flew open—dazed and unfocused. “What was that?”

“What was what?” she asked innocently, squashing down her guilt.

He rubbed his now shadow-stubbled jaw. “It felt sharp, like something just bit me.”

“Probably a mosquito. They’re big out here with a vicious bite,” she said airily, despite the fact the wind usually kept them far, far away. An idea hit her that might just make Doctor Charming feel ill at ease and go some way to matching how’d she’d felt most of the evening. “Then again, it might have been a scorpion.”

His now focused eyes gave her a long and assessing look. “I thought the only scorpions in Montana were in the southeast.”

Damn, how did he know that?

“Millie, there you are. Your dad and I have been look—” Her mom’s voice trailed off as she caught sight of Will, who was now bending forward, rubbing his leg. She supposed it exposed the curve of his behind, which she knew was impressive and capable of rendering a woman speechless. She really needed to start searching hard for flaws on his body.

Her cheeks burned at the thought. “Hi, Mom. Have you met Will, Josh’s groomsman?”

In a fluid movement—one Millie begrudgingly conceded was impressive—Will rose to his feet, his height dwarfing her mother. He extended his hand. “Pleased to meet you, Mrs. . . . ?”

“Call me Susie,” her mother almost purred. “How special for Josh that you were able to take a break from saving lives and be here tonight.”

_No, Mom! Not you, too._ All night long she’d watched just about every female guest—from the cute-as-a-button six-year-old flower girl to Mrs. van Dyke, who was ninety-three years young—bat their eyes at the man. And she’d watched Will effortlessly charm them all. Charm everyone except her. With her, he didn’t even try.

“I’m honored to be here, Susie,” Will said, “and it’s delightful to meet you.”

Her mother giggled. “Charming and handsome. Millie, if Will’s the example of how perfect Australian men are, perhaps a trip Down Under is in order.”

Will glanced between her and her mother, looking momentarily perplexed.

Her stomach flipped. _Do something. Do it fast. He can’t find out I’m as straight as he is._ “Daddy might be a bit put out if you run off, Mom.”

Before her mother could reply, she was saved by the _boom-tish_ of the band’s drummer—their sign it was time to return to the tent for an official part of the evening. Slipping her arm through her mom’s, she said,
“Sounds like it’s time for the throwing of the bouquet.”

When they entered the tent, they found everyone gathered around the dance floor—the women at the front and the guys standing behind. Her mom drifted off to join her father, leaving her and Will standing at the back.

Katrina, radiantly beautiful in a strapless A-line lace dress complete with a cathedral train, called out to everyone, “Are you ready?”

Cassidy held up her arms. “I was ready three weddings ago.”

“Practice makes perfect, Cassie,” one of the cowboys said, raising his longneck in her direction.

Will leaned in close to her ear. “You’re not going to hustle for it?”

She badly wanted to hold on to her annoyance with him, but had she been gay, he’d just shown her a sign of solidarity. “There’s no point. Gay marriage isn’t recognized here. Besides,” she said, having some fun, “I’m saving myself for the garter catch.”

He grinned at her, his deep blue eyes twinkling. “Good call.”

Her insides liquefied, and shimmering heat swooped through her from tip to toe, making her knees go weak and leaving her slightly breathless. Noooooo. She wanted to sob. Her head might be telling her she was over her crush, but her body had missed the memo. Right now it was telling Will she was ready, willing and oh so very able.

She knew her pupils would be dilated, her cheeks bright pink, and she could already feel the tingling ache in her breasts as they strained against her bra with her nipples standing to attention. Somehow—but only just—she managed to stop from licking her lips.

Will suddenly slipped off his jacket. “It’s warm in here.”

“Yeah. It is.” She removed her jacket, too, and for the very first time it was a relief that Will thought she was gay. It was beneficial, even, because it effectively hid from him the physical signs of her unwanted but undeniable attraction to him.

Josh counted down, “Five, four, three, two, one,” and Katrina gave her bouquet a pitcher’s toss, sending it sailing over the heads of the leaping and squealing women.

Roses and tulips came barreling straight at Millie like a lethal weapon. If she caught the bouquet, the jokes about her getting married would start, and Will would find out fast she wasn’t gay. If she didn’t catch the flowers, she’d be hit in the face by a pack of sturdy stems and risk a black eye.

A split second before she ducked, Will’s hand shot out, firmly grasping the bouquet and stopping it from slamming into her. The men laughed. The women sighed.

Will held it aloft like a trophy. “Hey, Katrina, how about you throw it again?”

“No, Will,” the bride said smiling at him. “It clearly chose you, and you have to keep it. Looks like you’re next to get married.”

The women sighed again.
“I’d have preferred the garter,” he said laconically.

“No flirting with my wife, thank you very much,” Josh said good-naturedly, taking Katrina by the hand. “Thanks, everyone. It’s been a great night.”

With a big wave, they ran from the tent and out to Josh’s car, which Beau and Katrina’s younger brother, Dillon, had decorated with cans and a Just Married sign.

Everyone followed, clustering around the car and waving good-bye. All the while, the band kept playing, and as Josh and Katrina drove across the pasture, some of the crowd returned to the dance floor while others drifted away, heading home for the night. When Millie walked back into the tent, women once again surrounded Will. His handsome face was impassive, but when he caught her gaze, it was the look in his eyes that struck her.

Did he need rescuing?

She shook away the crazy thought. Will Bartlett no more needed rescuing than she needed a hole in the head.

“Hey, Millie.”

She swung around to see Megan carrying a tray. “Did you get some wedding cake? Shannon made it and it’s to die for.”

Millie knew exactly how great a cook Beau’s wife was, having eaten lunch at the Big Foot diner most workdays last year. “What sort of cake is it?”

“Rich vanilla frosted with chocolate ganache.” Megan smiled. “You know you want it.”

Dex had been remarkably quiet tonight, which meant that she’d managed the juggle of bolusing insulin versus food intake without any unexpected rises or falls. It was no mean feat at a function like this. Don’t risk it.

She no longer took stupid risks, and although eating a piece of the cake wasn’t stupid, it wasn’t totally wise, either. But she could handle it, and after everything that had gone down tonight, she needed cake. And chocolate. “It sounds perfect.”

Chapter 3

“Thanks for helping out, Millie,” Dillon said as he tied the last trash bag and dropped it on top of the pile of post-wedding debris.

“I was happy to help.” She’d stayed back to give the McCades some assistance packing up, because after eating that decadently rich and wonderful cake so late in the evening, there’d been no point going home to bed.

She wasn’t going to get much sleep, because Dex would be beeping at her on and off all through the night as she tried to stabilize her blood sugar. She already had the heavy feeling that came with a high reading—lead weight limbs and a sensation she was hauling herself through chest-height snowdrifts. Plus she was thirsty as hell and needing to pee every thirty minutes.
Told you that cake wasn’t worth it.

Shut up! It was seriously worth it. The ganache was as close to an orgasmic experience as she’d come in a very long time.

“You coming to the barn?” Dillon asked. “Megan’s planned an awesome after-party.”

“Thanks for the invitation, Dillon, but it’s time for me to call it a night.”

“You sure?” Dillon was looking at her as if he didn’t believe what he was hearing. “Legend has it that at college you were the queen of the after-party and always the last to leave.”

And she had been until she’d landed up in the hospital scaring her family and frightening herself. She smiled. “I’m handing over my crown to Megan.”

“Drive safe, then.”

“Will do. Good night, Dillon.”

“Night.” He gave her a wave before disappearing into the dark.

She glanced around the now empty tent and wondered at the deconstruction of what had been, only an hour before, a wedding wonderland. The band had packed up and driven away, all the guests were gone, the tables and chairs were neatly stacked and the white tablecloths stuffed into laundry bags ready for collection tomorrow. Megan and her father, Kirk, had carried the wedding presents to the ranch house, and all that was left of a great wedding reception were trash bags, one abandoned high-heeled strappy sandal, a pretty evening purse and a black suit jacket.

She took a closer look. A suit jacket with a boutonniere that matched hers.

As Josh had left the wedding wearing his jacket, this had to be Will’s. She hadn’t seen him since he’d been talking with Brittany, one of Megan’s friends. Actually, talking was a stretch—it had been full-on flirting. Brittany’s back had been pressed up against one of the marquee supports, and she’d been gazing up at him. Will’s left arm had been raised and his hand flat on the support above her head. With his collar unbuttoned and bow tie untied and draped around his neck, he’d been leaning in and Brittany had been laughing at whatever he was saying. The next time she’d looked for him, he’d been nowhere to be seen and neither had Brittany.

Apparently they’d been so enthusiastic to go someplace more private, Will had left his jacket behind. As she picked it up, she heard a jangle and checked the inside pocket. Car keys and his wallet. He wouldn’t have gotten far without either of those things. Still holding the jacket, she walked outside, wondering if he’d gone to the barn party. As she walked between the back of the big tent and the food service area, she saw a silhouette of a man standing yet leaning, his forehead resting against the corner metal upright of the tent. Everything from his height to the shape of his body left her in no doubt as to his identity.

Was he sick? Drunk? She marched over to him. “Will, are you okay?”

He didn’t move. She walked up to him, reached out and touched his forearm. His warmth radiated through the soft cotton of his shirt, tickling her fingertips. It felt so good—he felt so good—and her heart rate instantly kicked up.

Don’t do this. Don’t think hot and hard solid forearm. Think flexor carpi radialis, extensor digitorum
Sensational idea! *Use him as an anatomy lesson. I bet his rectus abdominis muscles are incredible.*

The image of what his abs might look like slammed her brain, and she swallowed against a dizzy rush of arousal. Okay, so maybe using Latin names wasn’t such a great idea after all.

Coming out of her fog of lust, she realized he still hadn’t moved. This time she gave his arm a shake. “Will?” His only response was a gentle snore. She couldn’t believe it—he’d literally fallen asleep on his feet.

“She’s over. Time to go home.”

Still, he didn’t stir. He’d fallen asleep at the table earlier, and now he’d done it again. She knew about fatigue—she’d worked long hours and back-to-back shifts, and sometimes she’d been so tired she couldn’t see straight—but she’d never fallen asleep standing up. She tried again, giving his hand an extra hard shake.

Nothing. The poor guy must be zonked, because he was totally out. She knew she couldn’t leave him here, but moving him on her own would be tricky. If only she had her phone with her, she could call someone for help.

*Use his phone.* Pleased with her idea, she searched his jacket again, but his phone wasn’t there, which meant it was somewhere on his person. As formal shirts didn’t have pockets, that left his pants. *Just slide your hand into his trouser pockets.* The thought thrilled her way more than it should, because the reality was that touching up an unconscious guy was unconscionable. If a man did the same thing to a woman, he’d be accused of sexual assault.

*Think of him in terms of a patient. Pat his pockets and find his cell phone. Slide hand in, slide hand out. Do it fast.*

Flexing her fingers, she was just about to pat down his left pocket when Dex started beeping incessantly, telling her that her blood sugar was skyrocketing.

Will’s head shot up, his eyes glazed. “Emergency packs! Let’s go.”

“Ah, Will, it’s me, Millie, and—”

He grabbed her arm and started running. “We have to get to the airport.”

*Okay then.* Now she had six feet, one inch and one hundred eighty pounds of walking, talking, sleepwalking Will, who obviously thought Dex was his emergency pager and that they were needed at a MontMedAir emergency. As his hand was firmly gripping her arm, she had no choice but to jog along beside him.

*Think!* She ran through her options. Waking up a sleepwalker wasn’t dangerous, but it wasn’t pleasant for the victim because it left them disoriented and unpredictable. Also, it wasn’t always possible to wake them, as she’d just learned. That left sticking with him to make sure he didn’t injure himself.

“The vehicle’s this way,” she said, pushing him in the direction of her car. At least if she got him inside the car, he’d be safer than running around a dark pasture. He hauled open the passenger side door and got in, sticking his hands out in front of him as if seeking the steering wheel. She remembered that Australians drove on the left-hand side of the road, and in his sleepwalking state he’d reverted to what he was most used to.
She turned on the ignition. “I’ll drive, Will.”

His unfocused eyes moved right then left, and he slammed his hand on the dash. “Chopper’s waiting. Go.”

She eased her car down the rutted ranch road, bumping and bouncing until they reached the relatively smooth blacktop of the highway. As she turned right, she noticed that Will’s head had fallen back against the headrest and his eyes were closed.

With no clue where he’d checked in to stay the night in Bear Paw, and not wanting to risk him rushing into the lobbies of the two motels in town yelling, Incoming, she decided the safest thing to do was drive home. She was grateful the guesthouse had a rear entrance, because explaining to her folks that she had Will in the car would only get their hopes up.

She still hadn’t quite recovered from the excruciating conversation with her mom three years ago when Susie had sat her down with a glass of wine in her hand. Things had gone downhill from there, fast. Susie had told her she wasn’t a prude and she understood that at twenty-three, Millie was an adult with sexual needs just like the next woman. She wanted Millie to know that if she ever wanted to bring a guy back to the guesthouse, she and her father would be okay with it.

Millie had died a thousand deaths on the spot and had mumbled something like, Good to know, and had immediately tried to change the subject. Fast. Very fast. Only Susie, who was by then enjoying her second glass of wine, had hinted that since Millie and Evan had moved out, she and her father’s sex life had improved tremendously.

The temptation to break her relative sobriety that night, wrench the bottle of wine off of her mother and down the contents fast had burned hot and strong. One part of her appreciated her parents’ open-mindedness, but another part knew it wouldn’t be that simple. When her mom said a guy, she really meant a keeper. She did not mean some random guy she might hook up with for occasional sex. On the infrequent occasions Millie did have sex, she made sure it always happened out of town, because Millie had never met a keeper, and Will was certainly not one. A keeper would swim shark-infested waters for her. A keeper wouldn’t assume she was gay.

She killed the engine and dropped her head onto the steering wheel with a sigh. If her mother ever discovered Will thought she was gay, she knew she’d be taken directly to Seattle without passing go and be forced to buy a closet’s worth of dresses. Sitting back, she checked Dex. Her blood glucose was still too high, which bothered her because she’d been confident she’d already given herself plenty of insulin to deal with the cake. If she gave herself more, she risked crashing, and yet the double arrows continued to point ominously upward, demanding she give herself more.

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