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OH, DEAR GOD...

Gloria's vision narrowed, like the shutter of a camera in ultra slow motion, closing in smaller and smaller. Her chest ached as if an elephant was sitting on her and a knot the size of a fist formed in her stomach.

No.

Not here.

Not now.

Carefully, she lifted the big, rough hand from her hip and rolled, or tried to, but her legs were stuck—entwined—between two large, tree-trunk-sized limbs.

"Mmm." A hand slid around her waist and snuggled her even closer to that massive chest at her back. So close, she could feel the sound of contentment rumbling against her shoulder blade, the kind of sound a big, well-fed cat of the king-of-the-jungle variety might make.

With each wriggle she made in an attempt to break free, his ridiculously powerful arms held on tighter.

"Ah, Dillon?" The words were more a gasp than a name.

"Hmm?"

She wriggled some more. No give, whatsoever. "Dillon?"

"Mmm." He nuzzled his whiskered jaw into the back of her neck, placing a sleepy kiss there. Those big, callused hands of his roamed freely across her stomach, one up...the other down.

Gloria pushed herself away and sat up on the edge of the bed, breathing hard, as though she'd just climbed a flight of stairs, not made the simple transition from lying to sitting. Was it the dim light in the room that made her vision spotty? She rubbed her eyes.

No. It was something else.

Panting, she said, "I've got to go."

"To the loo?" He drew a line across her lower back. "Okay, darlin'. Hurry back."

Oh, God.

She stumbled—naked—to the bathroom, found the robe the hotel provided hanging on the back of the door and slipped it on. Her clutch—the one that matched the Valentine red of the bridesmaid dress that lay crumpled somewhere on the hotel room floor—sat open on the vanity counter. She checked the contents: room key, phone, lipstick and a twenty dollar bill.

Good enough. She leaned against the vanity, gulping air, willing herself under control. When she opened her eyes, her gaze landed on the cellophane-wrapped, one-size-fits-all slippers. She unwrapped them and stuck her feet inside—they were miles too big but they'd have to do. When Gloria went to stand up, her head spun and her vision closed in around her, forcing her to sit on the closed toilet seat, the bathroom suddenly a fishbowl, all watery and blurry. Closing her eyes, she focused on breathing. In through the nose, out through the mouth. In. Out. Nice and slow. Unfortunately, images from earlier in the evening decided to replay behind her closed lids to mock and taunt her.

Dillon's big, rough hands on her body. Dillon's big, talented tongue in her mouth. Dillon's big, sinfully male appendage inside of her, so...wonderful.

Wonderful? Really?

If it was so wonderful, why was she sitting here on the toilet seat on the verge of a panic attack? She hadn't had one of these suckers in years. So, why now?

It had to be the cowboy.

Gloria pressed her palms to the sides of her head to try to stop her ears from ringing.

No.

This was not going to happen.

Fumbling for her phone in her clutch, she turned it on and did her best to type a one word message—EMERGENCY!—to her best friend, Daisy. Though whether her fingers actually hit the correct letters, she couldn't tell because her phone was no more than a fuzzy shape in her hand. After a few more deep breaths, she pushed herself to her feet and careened her way to the hotel room door. She paused, listening, but all she heard was the roaring of blood between her ears.

The second she was outside in the hallway, she could breathe again, as if there was more oxygen out there. She still felt wobbly and, with a hand to the wall to keep herself steady, she lurched down the hall because it seemed that the farther away from the room she got, the clearer her vision became. Clear enough to check her phone for a reply from her best friend. Not that she really expected one.

It was Daisy's wedding night.

Shit.

She stopped in front of the elevators and pressed the button, not because she had anywhere to go, but because that was what a normal person did when standing in front of an elevator. Except normal people didn't stand in front of elevators naked under their hotel robe.

Good God, Glo. What were you thinking?

"I don't think I was," she whispered aloud.

The elevator dinged and the doors slid open. A bellboy was inside.

"Having a good night?" the young man asked, with a smirk.

After a deep breath and with her head held high, Gloria entered the elevator. "Yes. Thank you." She turned to face the front where, unfortunately, there was a mirror on the inside of the door, forcing Gloria to face exactly the state she was in—her makeup streaked, her pretty updo no longer up unless sticking out in all directions was considered up.

She groaned. It was worse than she thought.

"Which floor?"

"Honeymoon suite." The words came out before she had time to consider them. The young man pressed the button and Gloria was subject to the longest elevator ride of her life. She avoided his eyes by checking her phone every few seconds, hoping for but not expecting a reply from Daisy.

How on earth had she found herself in this position?

It could have something to do with the fact that it was Valentine's Day and her very best friend in the world just married an amazing man and it was the nicest wedding, *ever*, and while Gloria was over the moon for Daisy, she was also a little bit...

Hmm. Jealous?

No.

Did she feel sorry for herself? Was that why she'd slept with the cowboy?

God. That was sad.

It all started when the cowboy in question, a cousin of the groom, got up to do his speech, but he didn't speak. Oh, no. He had a guitar stashed in the back, retrieved it and sang "Remember When" by Alan Jackson—only one of her favorite country songs of all time. She'd nearly dropped her wineglass. Instead she downed its contents followed quickly by another glass. His voice, deep and smooth, sang, "*Remember when we vowed the vows ...*" It was her fantasy come to life. Except the man in her fantasy sang to her, not to the bride and groom—of all the cracked things one could imagine. Then the dance started and he asked her to dance.

She should have said no.

How was she supposed to know the man could dance?

But he could.

He led her around the dance floor, spinning her, pulling her in close, holding her tight, so sure of himself, sure of his movements, and Gloria knew, she just knew he'd be good in bed.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Because when he wasn't singing and he wasn't dancing, the cowboy drove her bat-shit crazy. From the moment they'd met ten months ago, when he'd purposefully done everything in his power to irk her, she didn't like him. Not one little bit. He was messy and loud and obnoxious and too sure of himself and too big and...ugh!

Every word that came out of his mouth made her want to scream. Everything he did made her want to smack him. Hard.

But, earlier tonight, while in the throes of passion, she'd let him smack *her* on the backside.

That was not Gloria. She did not do that shit.

Ever.

When the elevator finally reached the top floor of the Drake Hotel, Gloria exited with about as much dignity as a cockroach scuttling out of a room when the light came on, finding the nearest crack to crawl inside. Because of the big slippers she wore, her scuttling was more of a shuffle-slide.

"Enjoy the rest of your evening," the bellboy called.

Ignoring him, Gloria checked the screen of her phone. It was 3:17 and still no message from Daisy.

Crap.

She leaned against the wall, trying to figure out what to do. She wasn't about to interrupt her friend on her wedding night, that was for sure. But what were her options? Go back to her room? Tell the cowboy to get out?

Just like that, her vision went all spotty again and Gloria doubled over to keep from passing out. Seriously! What was it about the man that pushed her to the brink of a panic attack *just* by thinking about him? If that wasn't a sign that tonight had been a big, fucking mistake, what was?

She concentrated on her breathing again, following the advice her psychologist had given her a decade ago to keep the sense of panic at bay. But the ringing between her ears only got louder.

Wait. That wasn't between her ears, that was her phone.

"Gloria?" Daisy's voice was soft and slurred with sleep. "What's wrong? Where are you?"

"I'm standing outside your door."

"You're where?"

"Just outside."

"What are you doing there?"

"I don't know."

The phone went dead. Turning toward the wall, Gloria banged her head softly against it. This was ridiculous. Here she was standing outside her best friend's honeymoon suite, on her wedding night.

The door opened and Daisy stuck her head out. At least her best friend looked just as disheveled as Gloria. That made her feel better. And, the fact that her friend was letting her in at all. She had to count that as a blessing.

"What happened to you?" Daisy asked, covering a yawn that looked suspiciously like a smile, as she opened the door wider.

So her best friend should be a little less amused and a little more empathetic, but whatever, she was there. Daisy closed the door, slid her arm through Gloria's and pulled her close. Gloria held on tight, appreciating the simple comfort of having a best friend when she needed one.

"How's the cowboy?"

Some best friend. "How'd you know?"

Daisy's eyes twinkled. "The way you two were dirty dancing out there tonight? Uh, yeah, doesn't take a genius."

Gloria dropped to the big white couch in the sitting area of the suite. Weird how she'd been there only twelve hours earlier, in this exact place, laughing and toasting, never imagining she'd be back. The cowboy never even entering her mind. Well, that wasn't quite true. He'd been annoying the hell out of her all day. Contradicting her, teasing her by calling her *darlin'* and *Red* and other offensive pet names. He was the kind of macho man she despised and avoided.

Until tonight.

Daisy sat next to her and Gloria realized they were dressed exactly the same, both sporting the too-big hotel robes, but Daisy's feet were bare, and her toes painted a pretty pink that matched the icing on the cupcakes that had served as Daisy's wedding cake. Focusing on Daisy's toes seemed like the only way to *not* focus on what just happened.

"Tell me..." Daisy said, patting Gloria's knee. "Is the big cowboy...*big* all over?"

"Daisy!"

This time Daisy didn't even bother covering up her laugh. "Honestly, Glo. What's the problem?"

"I did not mean to sleep with him."

"Hmm." Daisy tilted her head to one side. "Kind of looked like you did."

"I don't like him."

"You don't?"

"No. I've disliked him from the moment I met him. Remember what a jerk he was at your fund-raiser last year?"

"Of course I remember the fund-raiser. I don't remember him being a jerk. I thought he was sort of—"

"No." Gloria held up a finger to stop Daisy. "He's an ass. He may be Jamie's cousin, but he's an ass."

Daisy's brows drew together. "So, why'd you sleep with him?"

"I don't know." Gloria dropped her head to her hands. All she knew was that every time she thought of him she felt as if she was in a tiny, constricted space where there wasn't enough air and she couldn't move and she couldn't breathe and she needed to get out of there as fast as she could.

They sat there for a few minutes, Daisy rubbing slow, comforting circles on Gloria's back. "So," she said eventually. "The sex was bad, huh?"

Gloria didn't answer at first. "Well..."

Daisy's hand stopped moving. "Does that mean the sex was good?"

"No. It was not good." Gloria lifted her head to meet her friend's gaze.

Liar!

Gloria's body—the lower bits—quivered indecently at the thought of *the sex*. Dillon was certainly adept between the sheets. God, the man had owned her body yet took the time to give her pleasure, as well—more than once. It was too much. The way he made her feel so beautiful and desirable and good. The way he'd murmured wicked things in her ear...

"Glo?"

"Hmm?"

"How come you're smiling?"

She wasn't smiling. Absolutely not.

"You're panting, too."

The bedroom door opened and Daisy's husband, Jamie, emerged, hair tousled, eyes squinty with sleep. "Wife, of less than twenty-four hours...what are you doing out here?" He rubbed his eyes. "Oh. Hi, Gloria."

Gloria covered her face and moaned. It was one thing to be mortified in front of your best friend, quite another in front of her nearly naked new husband.

"Hon," Daisy said sweetly. "Go put on some clothes."

"I am wearing clothes."

"Umm...you're wearing underwear and they really don't do a good job of covering up your husbandly junk."

Mortification did not even begin to describe Gloria's current situation. This was a mess, a royal-flipping mess, and if there was one thing she loathed above all else, it was a mess. Gloria pressed the heels of her hands into her eye sockets so hard that stars burst behind her closed lids. So much better than the alternative.

It wasn't until she heard the bedroom door close that Gloria took her hands from her face and fell back against the couch again. "I'm sorry, Daisy. I don't know what I'm doing here."

"You're obviously upset so why don't you stay. You can sleep here on the couch."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. And if you need to borrow some clothes tomorrow morning, that's totally fine."

"I don't mean to be crashing your honeymoon."

"Oh, you're not. We've already..." Daisy wiggled her brows "...*honeymooned*. Twice."

"God."

"Plus, we're leaving for Maui tomorrow, so there'll be plenty of..." Daisy made an obscene gesture that involved hip thrusts and pounding her fist against her hand.

"Yeah, yeah. I get it. Lots of sex."

"*Lots of sex*," Daisy confirmed with the biggest grin ever.

Gloria sighed. Daisy was happy and Gloria was happy for Daisy. But she was a little bit sad for herself at the same time. Things were going to be different from now on. She was going to miss Daisy and the thought made her feel incredibly lonely.

Still not a good reason to sleep with someone, particularly one who just happened to evoke the panic attacks that you thought you'd licked a long time ago.

“Besides, you’d have done the same for me.” Daisy gave her a big hug. “But, what I don’t understand is, why not just go back to your room? Ask him to leave. It’s your room.”

Gazing directly into her best friend’s eyes, she said, “Because, around that man, I don’t trust myself to not make the same mistake all over again.”

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DILLON HADN’T SLEPT so well in a long time. Nothing like a warm feminine form to wake up to after a night of hotter-than-hell sex. He reached for the feminine form in question, with a mind to wake her up properly, a little repeat of last night’s performance, but there was no one there. The bed was cold.

Huh.

He sat up, scratching an itchy spot on his jaw. Light peeked in around the drapes, revealing clothes strewn all over the floor: one sexy, black high-heeled shoe lying on the dresser, the other caught in the ice bucket. He grinned, remembering how he’d asked her to leave them on. Nothing hotter than a woman in lingerie and heels. Then he’d taken them off and chucked them over his shoulder.

Goddamn, the little redhead was a firecracker.

Now. Where was she?

Dillon pushed himself out of bed, groaning, his lower back stiffening up like it always did. Too many bulls, too many rides. He stretched side to side to work out the stiffness.

“Gloria?”

No answer.

Maybe she was in the shower.

Nice. Heat washed over him at the thought. He always loved shower sex and he was willing to bet the bossy little woman loved it, too, because—damn—she pretty much seemed to love it all.

Ambling over to the bathroom, he knocked. “Hey? You in there?” When there was no answer, he turned the knob, but there was no one there.

Huh. He scratched the same damn spot. Maybe she’d gone for breakfast. He wished she’d woken him up first. They could have ordered room service, had breakfast in bed. He would have liked to see her first thing in the morning, sex-messy, ravenous...

Hot.

He’d have liked to kiss her midbreakfast, tasting the flavor of bacon, eggs and coffee in her mouth, her skin warm as he reached beneath the covers. He’d have taken the tray away and made love to her again.

Sounded like a damn fine way to begin the day.

After pulling on his briefs and dress pants, he found his suit jacket thrown over a chair and located his phone inside. She’d given him her number, hadn’t she? He scrolled. Yep. There it was, her whole name, middle name, too. He tapped a message—Where’d you go?—and barely sent it before he heard the sound of a key card sliding into the lock and the heavy hotel door opening.

With a grin, Dillon went to meet her. “Heya, darlin’. I just sent you a message.” He leaned down to kiss her but Gloria turned her face to the side.

Pulling back, he took a better look at her. Her face was scrubbed of all makeup and her hair was pulled back in a simple ponytail. She was wearing some workout clothes that looked a couple of sizes too big. The result was that she looked young, fresh and innocent. Nothing wrong with that. It was the expression she was wearing that was all wrong.

Her face was pale. Her pretty lips pressed together. Her light eyes dark, as if the pupils ate up all the blue.

“I didn’t think you’d still be here,” she said.

“Why?”

“It’s late.” She looked at her phone. “Nine thirty.”

“Nine thirty? Holy shit, you really tired me out.” He grinned.

She frowned.

“What’s up?”

“I think you should go.” Her gaze was on his face but she wouldn’t meet his eyes. Then her gaze traveled down, stopping at his chest before going lower. Red appeared out of nowhere, staining her neck and cheeks, making her glow as she struggled to raise her eyes. “Look, about last night. It was...”

He took a step closer and touched the red in her cheek. “Pretty frickin’ amazing.”

She let him touch her for a split second before stepping out of range. Shaking her head she said, “It was nothing.”

"Nothing?" He dropped his hand.

"It was just sex." She bit her lip. "I probably had too much champagne."

He fell against the wall, his shoulder making a thud. Studying her close, he asked, "You telling me you regret last night?"

With narrowed eyes she said, "I'm not sure *regret* completely sums up the entirety of my remorse over last night."

Holy shit. What the hell? "So when you were crying out, coming all around me, you didn't like that?"

Her eyes were large, the same way animals looked when they were frightened and searching for an escape route. "I didn't say the sex wasn't good."

"Uh-huh?"

"I just..." Her lips parted as she breathed audibly through her mouth. "We don't like each other."

"Uh-huh?"

"At all." She waved between them. "This was just a by-product of that line between anger and passion, you know? Because you drive me crazy."

He nodded. "You did mention that once or twice. Like when I had my tongue in your pussy."

She fell against the wall, breathing hard. Kind of like last night but different. "Stop."

"What's this really about?"

She gazed up at him, pleading. "It was a mistake. Okay?" She gulped air as if it was in short supply. "So, let's just forget it happened and..." She took a long deep breath in and exhaled audibly. "Move on."

Holy hell. She was ditching him. Just like that.

"It's not like there's anything between us."

He moved away from the wall, taking a step toward her. Then another. "Really?"

"Really." The word, breathy and soft, told him otherwise, as did her wide-eyed gaze as he closed the distance between them.

With a hand on the wall above her head, he leaned right down. Her lids fluttered and she tilted her face up, as if she wanted him to kiss her. "This sure as hell feels like something," he whispered.

"It's not," she panted back.

"Felt like *more* than something last night." He wanted to touch her face because there was that blush, spreading like a wildfire up from her chest into her cheeks and he needed to know how it felt.

"It wasn't." She licked her lips in between ragged breaths.

He leaned down and for a second—maybe not even—their lips touched. Then she ducked beneath his arm and scurried to the other side of the small room. "This will not happen again."

"Why?"

"I already told you."

"None of that made sense."

She closed her eyes for a second and when she opened them, it was as though she was a different woman. Her back straightened, her eyes narrowed and pretty lips thinned. "You don't even live in Chicago. Where do you live? Wyoming?"

"Montana."

"Right." She made a hand gesture that said, *You see?* "You're what? A rancher? Farmer? What?"

"A professional bull rider."

She pointed. "Exactly!" She motioned to herself. "And I'm an interior decorator and professional stager." She forced a smile. "I bet you don't even know what that means."

"You make houses ready to sell." He said that last bit with no inflection because the tiny woman was being condescending and he didn't particularly care for it.

"Okay. So you know what I do. Doesn't matter. We have nothing in common."

He arched a single eyebrow, thinking about their amazing compatibility in the sack.

Her eyebrows drew together and a little crinkle deepened between them. "Life isn't all about sex, Dillon."

No. But good sex was a good indicator that life could be pretty damn good with someone...

Wait a second. What was he thinking? He raked a hand through his hair. She was doing him a favor right now. He didn't want forever, especially not with a bossy little fireball from Chicago. He just wanted to share some passion with someone of equal passion. After last night? He thought he'd found it. Clearly she was looking for more. That should be a red flag right there.

The woman bent down in front of him—a spectacular sight—gathering up his belongings: his shoes, his shirt, his tie, his jacket. Once she was satisfied she'd got it all, she shoved the bundle at him. "Here."

He took the clothes. "You gonna help me dress like you helped me take my clothes off last night?" God, he felt like being shitty right now.

Tilting her head to the side, she said, "I'm pretty sure you can manage."

He dropped the bundle except for his shirt. "You gonna watch?"

"Nope." She stalked past him to the door. Before opening it, she called over her shoulder. "Be gone in five minutes. No more."

"Oh, I will be."

"Good." She stood there for a second and then called, "Bye, Dillon."

"See ya around, Red." Dillon curled his fingers into fists at the sound of the door slamming. A part of him wanted to still be there when she got back, just to be an ass. He wanted to remind her of the fun they'd had last night, do it all over again, make her beg him to stay longer. Another part was glad she'd been so clear. He did not need to get involved with a mercurial redhead who probably didn't even think he knew what the word *mercurial* meant.