

Chapter 7

Cody

Tess caught me off guard, but not in a bad way. Her lips are sweet and the connection ignites a fire in me. One hand automatically wraps around her back to rest on her side, while the other holds her soft cheek. It's an awkward position, especially the way she's sitting, but neither of us are complaining. The feel of her against me is comfortable and right like she belongs here. I lean in to kiss her with fervor. Her lips part and her hand reaches around to hold the back of my head, her fingers skimming my short hair.

I don't know where it comes from, but an animalistic growl sounds from deep within my chest. She must like it because her body reacts, pressing harder against me. My hand on her cheek pulls her face closer, I don't even know how that's possible. My lips crush against hers, making the kiss more demanding. My tongue delves into her mouth, tasting her. She's not timid and her tongue chases mine around like a game of tongue tag. My hand spreads against her rib cage, my thumb caressing just below her breast, then travels downward to her hip.

At the sound of water splashing into the hob, we suddenly jerk apart. "Shit." I rush to lower the flame to calm the boiling water. I don't know what came over me just now, I can't believe I did that, I kissed an almost perfect stranger. Tess really is almost perfect and even though I only met her this morning, she doesn't feel like a stranger. She feels like she belongs to me. That's not right. No, it feels as if she's a part of me. That's crazy, Cody, you don't really know her.

I shake those thoughts away and use this time to get a hold of myself. After the fork test, I pour the hot water into the sink then turn on the cold water to allow the potatoes and eggs to cool. Once finished, I turn around to face her, not knowing what to say or how she'll react. Her eyes watch me like a hawk, possibly awaiting my reaction to the situation.

What exactly is this situation? I'm completely into Tess, and I may be hopeful, but based on that kiss, it seems like she's into me. She already told me she wanted to get to know me. I came out here to focus my mind, to pull myself out of my emptiness. Tess isn't the first woman I've come across since Audrey, but she's the first one to pique my interest. Then again, I was never really looking for anything before. Now, it's not just an idea to start dating, it's an actual possibility. I hope this isn't just the Florence Nightingale effect. I need to think this through.

I see the steaks still marinating and use them as an excuse to give me time to think. "I'm going to cook the steak. Do you have everything you need for the potato salad?"

"I'll need a bowl." I nod and grab the mixing bowl to set on the counter next to the rest of the ingredients she already asked for.

"Utensils are in the drawer just under you." She opens the drawer to pull out a paring knife. With a nod, I grab the steaks and some vegetables to take outside to grill. The idea of just leaving her really bothers me. I stop just in front of her to place a soft kiss to her forehead. "I'll be just outside. Call me if you need anything."

She softly smiles. "I'm sure I have everything I need. Medium rare, please."

"You got it." I wink then force myself out the door.

Okay, Cody. Think this through. It's been a few hours and you're already thinking seriously about this girl. Sure she's hot and easy to get along with, but am I rushing things? This morning I'm chopping wood then I

hear a scream. I see a gorgeous woman gritting in pain only to see she's injured. So yes attraction was immediate. Then what? Oh yeah, she bit me and I got so turned on I could barely think. Okay, so clearly it's not the Florence Nightingale thing. Feeling Tess in my arms sets my body off like nothing else before, except Audrey. Audrey was the same. Her touch was enough to make me go crazy.

Oh, hell. I'm reading too much into this. There's no way the perfect woman is going to just show up out of nowhere in the middle of nowhere... except she has. Tess wants to spend time with me. Hell, she wants to come to my fight. I get she needs time away from her life, I did too which is why I came out here in the first place. But she's willing to go to Vegas with me and just hang around. What happens after the fight? Do we just go our separate ways? I hate the idea of her going back to her tribe while I go back to my life with my daughter. That's another thing; Tess has no problem that I have a kid. In fact, she shows interest in Willow.

The steaks and vegetables are finished cooking so I turn off the gas then head inside. Tess smiles up at me from her spot at the island. She took up the bar stool her foot was on and the ice pack is on the counter next to the cutlery. "I would've set out plates, but I didn't think I should be hobbling around."

I shake my head. "That's fine, I don't want your leg getting worse. Do you want a beer with dinner?" I ask as I grab the plates and set them before her.

"Sure." She sets out the plates then begins filling them. I sit beside her as we eat. "Your steaks are perfect." She says then reaches her free hand down to rest on my thigh. It feels so natural with her it's almost alarming. Normally, from what I hear from my buddies, women who act fast only want a one-night stand or are completely mental. I don't think that's the case for Tess. "Cody?"

I look up to her concerned eyes. "Hmm?"

"If it's too fast I can slow down." She moves her hand away and instantly I miss the connection. My hand is itching to touch her, so I wrap it around her back. She glances up at me with a soft pleasant smile and returns her hand to my thigh. "Tess. This might sound crazy and wild since we just met and we barely know each other, but I want to be in a relationship with you." I blurt out of nowhere.

She places a soft kiss on my cheek. "Good. Because I do too. If you're not comfortable just say something. I'm not one that's easily offended."

"Same. I want you to be open and honest with me." I couldn't handle it if my partner felt she couldn't rely on me for anything.

Tess lets out a breath. "I do have something about me that's rather important to tell you, but I can't just yet. I promise when the time is right I'll tell you everything. Are you okay with that?" "You're not sick or dying, right?" That's the only thing that enters my mind.

She shakes her head. "No, I'm not. But what I have to tell you is pretty big, however, it's not just about me so it's important I wait to tell you." My head is reeling with possible scenarios. "It's nothing bad." She quickly states.

She promised she would tell me when the time is right, so I need to be patient for whatever it is. "Okay. You tell me when you're ready and I'll try to be open-minded when the time comes." I move my hand to her hip to hold her tighter to me. She closes her eyes as I place a gentle kiss on her forehead. Unfortunately, I have to let go of her so I can clean up dinner, but then I pick her up and set her on the couch, this time I sit beside her with her legs across my lap and we talk the rest of the evening.

"My dad will be here first thing in the morning. He's bringing me a bag for Vegas" She tells me. I remember having a conversation earlier about him sparing with me.

"Isn't it a little fast to be meeting the in-laws?" I tease and she rolls her eyes with a smile on her lips. "What are his styles?"

"Krav Maga, Taekwondo, Muay Thai, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and Judo. He also trained me to use kunai."

"Okay that, you'll have to teach me," I tell her.

She smiles at me. "Most definitely."

Wow, she's so beautiful. Her eyes are dark but have a sparkle to them. Her hair is so silky and smooth, even without a brush to run through it. Her skin is that coppery color of most Native American people. Her features are soft with plump, soft lips. Lips that are begging for me to nibble on. Her body is lean, firm, and fit like a skilled fighter would be.

"You're staring." She says with a slight smirk on her pretty mouth. Her eyes watching me with just as much interest.

"So are you."

"I'm not staring. I'm remembering what you look like without that shirt." She challenges with a brow raised and I remember what she looked like without hers.

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I clear my throat and look down at her sexy legs. "I wasn't thinking about that until now."

"I don't mind. I'm usually in a sports bra and shorts anyway." I grunt then look back at her face. "I'll stop. It's too much for you." She teases.

I grab her around the waist and pull her so she's sitting on my lap. "Oh, really? Too much for me, huh? You know how to get your way don't you, Darlin'?"

She adjusts so her legs are straddling my lap. With a challenge in her eyes, she takes the hem of my shirt then pulls it up over my head and tosses it beside us on the couch. "Of course." She glides her hands over the shin of my chest. "You didn't have hair in the picture."

"I used to wax it before fights. I had a trainer that thought it was better for publicity." Her fingers curl into my chest hair. "I like this better. What happened to the trainer?"

"I dropped him. Literally. The guy was an asshole and he was skimming money off the top. I kicked his ass then had him arrested." Tess lays her head on my shoulder then inhales. I wrap my arms around her then start running my fingers through her hair. "That's the main reason I agreed to meet your dad. I haven't had a trainer in a while, so I haven't had a chance to spar except with a few buddies, but we know each other's moves."

Tess hums. "My dad will work with you." She places a kiss on the groove between my neck and shoulder. I naturally tilt my head so she has better access. She begins to nibble then suck down, marking me with a hickey. I'm not usually a fan of hickeys, but the idea of it being her mark excites me. "Tess. Keep it small, Darlin'." I tell her.

She pulls away to look at her work. She looks satisfied to have marked me, but disappointed with its size. "I'm going to have to do that over and over again because it's going to fade too fast." She runs her fingers over the mark with a longing I can't quite place.

I tilt her head to the side. "I don't mind as long as I get to return the favor." Her eyes steam so I lean in to lick the same place she marked me. I nibble on her skin and begin to suck, but the desire to really sink my

teeth in overwhelms me. Instead, I pull back to see a soft purple mark no bigger than my thumbnail. I like seeing my mark, but it's too small.

I shake my head. What am I thinking, I don't like hickeys. I kiss her mark then pull back to see the satisfaction in her eyes. Either she is really easy to read, or she has the best poker face on the planet. "You like that I gave you a hickey, don't you?"

She smiles. "Without a doubt." I chuckle then lay on the couch so she's on top of me. After talking a little longer, her eyes begin to get heavy. I lay her head on my chest and she peacefully begins breathing rhythmically. I pull the throw over us then begin to drift off to sleep.