

## Chapter One

Home.

Caitlin Timberlake exited the Telluride Regional Airport terminal and turned in a slow circle as she feasted on the scene. Colorado's Western Slope was a world of jagged, rocky mountain peaks, of icy-cold streams that bubbled and frothed and grew silvery fish that tasted like heaven when cooked over a campfire for breakfast. The San Juan Mountains in summertime presented a banquet of color—hills of green and gold; red rocks and alpine meadows blanketed in wildflowers of pink, blue, purple, and yellow, all presenting majestically beneath an azure sky.

Home.

She filled her lungs with clean mountain air, smelling pine and fir and forest, and tension melted from her bones like snowfall in spring.

Home.

For the better part of eight years, she'd lived in New York City, hustling and bustling and busting her butt as a textile designer, trying to build a life for herself. She specialized in fabric design for bedding and while she liked the creative aspects of the job, work fulfillment remained elusive. After all, pretty bedspreads would never change the world, and Caitlin wanted her work to matter. She wanted her life to matter.

Caitlin's discontent had been born in the moment when she'd learned that her brother Chase had gone missing in a war-torn part of the world, and it had grown in the weeks that followed. His safe return home hadn't squelched the emotion. She'd discovered too much about herself and her wishes and desires during that troubling time.

Primarily, she'd recognized that she'd spent too much time living thousands of miles away from those she loved. It had taken her some time to figure out what she wanted to do about it and even more time to make the decision to act. A few significant hurdles remained in her way, but she was closer than ever before to becoming her own fairy godmother and making some of her wishes come true.

She exhaled loudly, grinned, and announced, "Hello, Colorado. I've missed you."

She'd have sworn she heard the wind whisper back, *Welcome home, Caitlin.*

"I'm doing the right thing," she told herself. Now if she could only convince her mother of that fact.

Well, that was a battle for another day, one after she'd cleared her hurdles and had her fairy wand in hand. Today it was time to shift into bridesmaid mode.

Caitlin had flown to Denver yesterday after work and spent the night in an airport hotel. This morning's flight into Telluride had landed right on time, and the hotel shuttle was waiting for her. After wrestling with her purse, her tote, her computer case, and two suitcases stuffed to overflowing with necessities for her role as bridesmaid, she wanted to kiss the friendly van driver who introduced himself as he took the burdens off her hands.

The fact that Will Gustophsen was cute and about her age didn't hurt, either.

A year ago when her college friend, Stephanie Kingston, asked her to be a bridesmaid at her destination wedding, Caitlin hadn't hesitated to say yes. She just wished she'd known sooner about all the stuff Steph needed her to bring with her and she'd have shipped it ahead.

"You here for an extended stay?" Will asked as he lifted a suitcase into the back of the van.

"Because I have so much luggage?" Caitlin smiled ruefully and explained, "I'm here for a wedding."

"Ahh. In that case, you travel light."

With the luggage loaded, she climbed into the shuttle and, as the only passenger, had her pick of seats. She buckled her seat belt, then settled back for what should be a short drive to her hotel.

As the driver turned onto Last Dollar Road and headed down the big hill he asked, "Where are you from?"

"Here. Well, not Telluride. I grew up in Denver. But I went to college in Tennessee and moved to New York City after graduation."

"Should I offer my congratulations or condolences?"

Caitlin laughed. "I'm glad I had the experience. I'm ready to come home, though."

"Back to Denver?"

"No." Her gaze focused on the small town nestled into the valley below. "I've developed a fondness for mountain towns."

Will Gustophsen glanced into the rearview mirror and wagged his brows flirtatiously. "Please tell me you're moving to Telluride."

His obvious interest soothed the spot on her heart still achy from a breakup last Christmas. Doug Wilkerson hadn't broken her heart when he dumped her, but he had bruised it. "I doubt it. This place is a little too pricy for me. Besides, I have family in Eternity Springs."

"That's a nice little town, but then so is this. It's possible to live here without breaking the bank. You just need to be smart about it." He launched into a Telluride pitch that sounded as if it had been written by the Chamber of Commerce.

Caitlin couldn't argue with him. The scenery was spectacular and the activities he rattled off sounded inviting. As they approached her hotel in Mountain Village, the pedestrian-friendly, European-style planned resort community built above Telluride and connected to the historic mining town by a gondola lift system, she was anxious to get out and explore. She'd been a kid the last time she'd visited this part of Colorado, and she was sure the place had changed. She had a few hours to kill before meeting Stephanie for a drink, so this was her time to play tourist.

"I get off work at six," Gustophsen said. "I'd love to show you around. Buy you dinner."

"Thank you," she responded, meaning it. Having a cute guy hit on her was nice. "But I'm afraid I already have plans this evening. The bride arrives this afternoon and the weekend is jam-packed from there."

He gave an exaggerated sigh. "Always my luck."

The friendly chatter continued until they arrived at the hotel. After he wrestled her luggage from the van and gave her his number in case her plans changed, she gave him a large tip and thanked him for the hospitable welcome.

Caitlin checked into her room and spent some time answering a few of the unending stream of work-related e-mails. She would miss a few things about her job. The mountain of e-mails that required her constant attention wouldn't be one of them.

With her professional fires put out, she shut her laptop with a satisfied thump, grabbed a hat and sunscreen, and left the hotel. She walked around Mountain Village a bit and was suitably impressed with the style and elegance of the resort town. However, she didn't feel quite at home until she took the gondola down into Telluride and wandered up and down the streets, reading historical markers and inspecting the shops, comparing them to those in another small, historic mining town near and dear to her heart.

Eternity Springs might not have a gondola and ski runs, but the bakery, handmade soap shop, and Christmas store could definitely hold their own against these. People came from all over the country to shop at Vista's art gallery and Whimsies glass studio, and her mother's Yellow Kitchen was the best five-star restaurant in Colorado.

She couldn't wait to be there.

She ate lunch at the Thai spot that her driver had recommended, then indulged in a chocolate ice cream cone for dessert. Taking a seat on a park bench near the gondola station, she savored her treat and people-watched.

The town was bustling this August weekend with tourists and locals alike out enjoying the afternoon sunshine. She grinned as a pair of preteen boys whipped past her on mountain bikes, their mud-caked clothing providing as much evidence of a fun-filled, reckless ride down the mountain as did the joy in their smiles.

Too bad her weekend was packed with wedding activities. She wouldn't mind giving that a try herself. She was impressed by the way the ski resorts had found ways to attract vacationers, athletes, and daredevil fourteen-year-old boys during the off season. Such was the way little mountain towns became tourist destinations and supported thriving economies throughout the year.

She knew that such success didn't happen on its own. She'd had a front-row seat during the revitalization of Eternity Springs and saw how people had worked together to make it happen.

Eternity Springs. It's funny how the little town called to her. It wasn't even home. Not the home of her childhood, anyway. She'd never even visited Eternity Springs until her parents lost their minds and separated after she went off to college at Vanderbilt and her mother ran away from home.

The ringing of her cell phone interrupted her thoughts. She dug the phone from her backpack and checked the number and the time. Stephanie. They were due to meet up in Mountain Village in half an hour. "Hello, bride."

“Hey, Cait. You won’t believe what happened. Our plane out of Logan was late and we missed our connection. We won’t get to Telluride until late tonight.”

“Oh no.” Potential ramifications of such a delay flittered through Caitlin’s mind. “What did you have scheduled for today? What can I do to help?”

“It’s all covered. I built extra time into the schedule, thank goodness. I’m just really disappointed that you and I won’t have our girl-time this afternoon to catch up, and of course, missing dinner with George and Nathan. Nathan was really looking forward to spending some time with you before we dive into wedding business. Tomorrow will be jam-packed.”

Stephanie had been trying to set Caitlin up with her work friend ever since Doug dumped her. However, the guy’s Instagram was a total turnoff and Caitlin simply wasn’t interested. Unfortunately, Stephanie was a terrier when she set her mind to something, and she’d decided Caitlin and Nathan were made for each other—despite the little issue that she lived in NYC and he in Miami.

This plane delay might be a blessing, Caitlin decided. “Don’t worry about it, Steph. You and I will both be at Marsha’s wedding in October. We can have a nice long visit then.”

“That’s true. And maybe you and Nathan can find time to grab a drink together tomorrow. It might fit after our spa appointments and the guys’ round of golf. I don’t want you to miss the opportunity to meet him. Telluride is such a romantic place.”

Caitlin closed her eyes and worked to keep the sigh out of her voice as she said, “Telluride *is* beautiful, Steph. It’s a gorgeous place to have your wedding. And the weather for Saturday is supposed to be spectacular.”

They discussed arrangements for meeting the following day. Before ending the call, Stephanie said, “If you happen to meet a tall, dark, and handsome stranger tonight, feel free to invite him to the wedding. I had six last-minute cancellations, and I’ve already paid for the meals.”

“I thought you have your heart set on me and Nathan.”

“I do, but it never hurts for a guy to have a little competition.”

Thinking about her lack of a love life put a damper on Caitlin’s day. Maybe she should have taken the shuttle driver up on his offer, after all. As luck would have it, as soon as she slipped her phone into her backpack, her gaze landed on a couple about her age, holding hands and stealing kisses as they walked along the sidewalk. This time, she couldn’t hold back her sigh.

She was alone. Again. Still. How was it that she could live and work in a city of more than eight million people and always feel alone? Even when she *was* dating someone? But she *did* feel alone and she was tired of pretending otherwise. Tired of pretending, period. Hadn’t she been partially relieved when after eight months of dating, Doug sat her down and gave her the “just friends” talk?

Thinking about relationships while sitting in a mountain town caused her thoughts to drift back toward her parents. In hindsight Caitlin could see that she shouldn’t have been so hard on her mom when Ali ran off to Eternity Springs. If Ali Timberlake’s feelings back then had been anything like those Caitlin experienced now, then Cait could better understand her mom’s actions. Ali had tried to explain, using

terms like “lack of fulfillment,” “yearning for more,” and “unwillingness to settle.” Caitlin hadn’t wanted to hear what her mother had been trying to say. For a while, neither had her father.

But Ali hadn’t let anyone stop her, had she? She’d left Mac, left Denver, and eventually opened a restaurant in Eternity Springs. She’d made new friends and a place for herself in the community. In proving to herself that she could live without Mac, Ali had realized that was the last thing she wanted to do. Living alone in Denver, Mac had come to a similar conclusion.

“And all was well that ended well,” Caitlin murmured, tearing her eyes away from the lovers. Guess her parents hadn’t lost their minds when they separated, after all.

Caitlin polished off her ice cream, licked her sticky fingers, and decided she’d had enough sightseeing. She’d go back to the hotel, maybe change into her swimsuit and do a few laps in the indoor pool. Shoot, maybe she’d change her clothes and rent a bike and act like a fourteen-year-old boy.

Making her way to the gondola entrance, she took a place at the end of the line. A group of college-age tourists fell in behind her, laughing, talking loudly, smelling strongly of weed.

Caitlin stepped forward and as the gondola attendant opened the cabin door for her to climb inside, the constant stream of foul language coming from two girls behind her put her off. She stepped aside. “I’ll let them go first.”

They giggled and stumbled and f-bombed their way into the cabin. The attendant met Caitlin’s eyes and rolled his, then shut the door.

As she watched the next cabin approach, a male voice spoke behind her. “This is one of the pet-friendly cabins. I hope you don’t mind sharing with my dog?”

Caitlin glanced over her shoulder and saw a tall man with sun-streaked dark hair and striking high, defined cheekbones. But it was his eyes that demanded a woman’s attention. Framed by long, thick lashes, they were the color of a stormy spring sky, and they were mesmerizing. She stared into them just a little bit too long.

What had he said? *His dog*. “I love dogs.”

Embarrassed, she finally jerked her gaze away from those fabulous eyes and toward his dog. Because he’d asked if she minded sharing, she expected to see a big, hairy, scary-looking dog. Instead, she saw a pretty miniature long-haired red dachshund with her hind legs propped up by a doggie wheelchair.

\* \* \*

The hot blonde went gooey. They always did. It was one of the few perks Josh Tarkington had found of being the owner of a dog with a broken back.

“Oh no.” Her moss green eyes softened, her bee-stung mouth rounded. “What’s wrong with him?”

“Her,” Josh corrected as the cabin arrived and the attendant opened the door for them. “She’s a girl. She jumped down from a sofa and hit wrong. She’s paralyzed from the middle of her spine down.”

“That’s so sad,” the blonde said, stepping into the cabin and taking a seat.

“She’s actually a happy girl.” Josh scooped up the dog and wheelchair and set her on the seat opposite the woman. He shrugged out of his backpack, sat beside his dog, and smiled at his gondola companion. “The woman who owned her at the time of the accident said Penny was depressed for about three days, but after that she recovered her usual sunny disposition.”

A large group of children and adults asked to wait for the next cabin since they traveled together, so the attendant shut the door with Josh and the blonde as the only passengers.

“Her name is Penny?” she asked.

He nodded, and when the woman extended her hand to let the dachshund sniff her, Josh noticed she wore no ring on her left hand. “Copper Penny. I’m Josh, by the way.”

She lifted her gaze from the dog and smiled at Josh brightly. “Nice to meet you, Josh. My name is Caitlin.”

“Are you a local, Caitlin, or are you visiting?”

“I’m here for a college friend’s wedding. I live in New York. How about you?”

“I’m playing tourist here this weekend. This is my first trip to Telluride.”

“It’s the first time I’ve been in years. It’s gorgeous here, isn’t it?”

“Definitely.” Josh said it without looking away from her.

Judging by the flutter of her smile and sudden shift of her gaze, his subtle flirtation did not go unnoticed. Caitlin returned her attention to the dog and asked, “So, how long have you had this precious Copper Penny?”

“Not quite a month. Her owner had to move into an assisted living center that doesn’t allow dogs, so she asked our local vet to find Penny a home. I’d gone to the adoption center to get an appropriately manly dog. I’m still not sure how I walked out with a crippled doxie.”

“Obviously, you needed a little good luck.”

Josh needed a couple of seconds to make the connection. “Ah, as in ‘See a penny, pick it up?’”

“And all the day you’ll have good luck,” Caitlin finished.

“It must be working. I get to share the gondola with a beautiful woman instead of the campers standing behind me in line. They obviously don’t have showers at their campsite.”

“I’m flattered.” After a brief pause, she added, “I think.”

The gondola exited the station and started up the hill.

Josh leaned forward and spoke earnestly. “I’m shooting for flattery. I’m not always very good at it, I’m afraid. I have a tendency to put my foot in my mouth whenever I attempt to flirt.”

A smile played at her lips. “Is this an attempt at flirtation?”

“I’m bad at it. I know.” He gave her his go-to sheepish grin. Her eyes went gooey again. *Damn, I’m good.*

But after only a moment of goo, Caitlin's eyes narrowed. "Actually, I think you're probably very good at it."

*Busted.*

"In fact..." She folded her arms and studied him. "I have two older brothers. I know how these things work. Is the dog even yours?"

Josh sat up straight and added an offended note to his tone. "Are you insinuating that I use Penny's handicap to help me pick up women?"

Her eyes glittered with amusement. "Before they met their wives, my brothers would have done it in a heartbeat. Stephen borrowed a puppy one time to attract a girl's attention."

Josh laughed. "Okay, so maybe it hasn't escaped my notice that Penny is a bit of an icebreaker, but she *is* my dog. A high-maintenance one at that."

Then he rolled out the winner. He had yet to meet a dog-loving woman who wasn't impressed by the fact that keeping Penny healthy and happy meant he had to manually express her bladder three times a day.

"Okay, I never would have thought of that," Caitlin said. "That's dedication."

Josh decided to save the daily dog-laundry ammo for later. "She's worth it. She really is a sweet dog. So do you have a pet?"

"No. My apartment doesn't allow anything bigger than fish, and besides, I travel too much with my job."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a textile designer." She named the famous fashion design house she worked for and explained a little about her work.

He was impressed. "So, you're an artist. I'm always intrigued by creative people. Do you work on a sketch pad or at a computer?"

"Both. I usually begin with sketches, but most of the designing is done on the computer."

"I think it must be very rewarding to create something out of nothing. Bet it's neat to see your work in a department store."

Caitlin offered him a brilliant smile. "It is. I was so excited the first time it happened. I knew the date the line was due to be released. My mother flew in and we went to Macy's together." She laughed softly and added, "She bought one of everything and then we went and drank champagne. I think she was even more thrilled than I was. But enough about me. How about you? What work do you do?"

"I'm an engine mechanic. I work for myself. Opened my own shop earlier this year."

"Now *that* is awesome. I dream of working for myself."

"Being your own boss is rewarding, but it's also the hardest work you'll ever—" Josh broke off abruptly when Penny's ears perked and her head came up.

The gondola cabin shuddered, jerked, and stopped its forward movement.

“What happened?” Caitlin asked, alarm in her voice.

Josh looked up and down the line. He saw no sign of trouble, but plenty of evidence of panic. Behind them, children cried. Ahead of them, one of the female partiers screamed.

*I am so glad that wasn't a pet friendly cabin.*

“We seem to be stable,” he said. “I think...”

Static emerged from a speaker above them, then a male voice said, “Attention passengers. Please remain calm. There is no cause for alarm. I repeat. There is no cause for alarm. Your safety is not at risk. Due to a mechanical issue, the main line from Telluride to Station St. Sophia has been halted. We are working to get it back up and running as soon as possible. We ask for your continued patience.”

In the wake of the announcement, Caitlin shrugged. “It could be worse. We could be in the cabin with the potheads.”

“Or the crying kids.”

“I’m not on a schedule. Are you?”

He’d planned to drive toward Delores and find a place to camp, but he could adjust. “Not at all. If you are here for a wedding, I’m surprised you don’t have every minute booked.”

She explained about the bride’s plane delay and confessed to relief about it, considering the woman’s matchmaking ideas. It provided a natural segue into the question he very much wanted to ask. “So, you’re not with anyone back home?”

“No. I’m single.” She reached across the aisle, scratched Penny behind her ears, and casually asked, “How about you?”

“I’m single, too. I live alone now, well except for Penny. This time last summer I lived with a whole gaggle of women, but they wouldn’t quit feeding me and I was getting fat, so I moved into a house by myself.”

At Caitlin’s owl-eyed blink of shock, he laughed aloud. “The look on your face is priceless. Before I decided to open the shop, I lived and worked in an RV park. The average age of the ladies was around sixty, and they liked to bake.”

“So you’re one of those,” Caitlin observed with a roll of her eyes.

“Those?”

“You like to tease.”

He had the sudden vision of curvaceous Caitlin lying on his bed, naked and shivering as he teased the tip of her breast to a point with his tongue. “Oh yeah.”

“Just like my brothers,” she said with a sigh.

That comment managed to pour icy water on his fantasies.



Reminded of thirst, he started to reach into his backpack for his water bottle when the speaker sounded again. "Attention, passengers. Stoppage is due to a mechanical malfunction that does not affect your safety. I repeat. Safety is not affected. The line from Station St. Sophia to Mountain Village will be restarted. That from Telluride to Station St. Sophia will be evacuated by our highly trained team. Again, we ask for your patience."

"Evacuated?" Caitlin asked. "We're a hundred feet off the ground! How will they evacuate us?"

Josh peered through the window, looking straight down. "No more than eighty feet. I've suspect they'll use a rope system. They'll buckle you into a harness and lower you to the ground."

"Oh."

She didn't sound the least bit enthusiastic at the prospect. "Are you afraid of heights?"

"No. Not really." She showed him an embarrassed smile. "When I was in college I went climbing with my brother and one of his friends. To call him a daredevil doesn't begin to describe him. Anyway, his friend missed a handhold and slid into me and knocked me off the mountain. I dangled at the end of my safety rope for the longest, loneliest five minutes of my life before my brother managed me pull me up. I can't say I enjoyed the experience."

"I wouldn't think so."

"How long do you suppose it will take them to get us down?"

"Depends on how big their team is and where they begin. We're about halfway in between the town and Station St. Sophia."

"So we probably won't be the first they get to."

"Probably not."

She pursed her lips and thought about it, then nodded. "I'm okay with that. Will Penny be okay?"

Josh tore his gaze away from Caitlin and glanced down at his dog. "She'll be fine. She's had about all the exercise she can handle today."

Though she could probably use the water he'd been about to pour for her a few minutes ago. He reached into his backpack for his water bottle but his fingers found the Corkcicle bottle he'd filled that morning instead.

"Since it looks like we're going to be here for a while," he said, wrapping his fingers around the bottle's neck and pulling it from the pack. "Care to join me? I have blood orange kombucha."

"I'd love some. Thank you."

He reached back into his pack for the water and collapsible dog bowl, filled it halfway, then set it down for Penny. Next he pulled out the nesting wine glass and the collapsible water cup he carried.

He handed her the wine glass and she assembled it. "Don't tell me. You were a Boy Scout."

“Always prepared,” he quipped. That much was true. Sometimes in certain company, it was easier to drink his own “wine” than explain why he wasn’t drinking.

As he filled her glass, she observed, “You’re the first guy I’ve met who drinks kombucha. Are you into the natural health scene?”

He eyed her speculatively. “See, I don’t know you well enough yet to know how to answer that.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I’ve lived in California and Oklahoma. If I told you I eat tofu and bean sprouts and you’re a California girl, chances are you’d be impressed. However, an Oklahoma girl possibly would dismiss me as a weak little weirdo.”

Caitlin gave him a fast once-over. Dryly, she said, “You’re obviously not weak or little. I don’t know *you* well enough to judge the weirdo part. Personally, I won’t go near tofu, but I don’t hold tofu against someone. Do you eat red meat?”

Solemnly, he nodded. “Every chance I get. Do you eat junk food?”

“I order Cheetos by the caseload.”

“That’s it, then. We’re meant to be. Will you have my baby?”

She almost choked on her kombucha. “Weirdo.”

He laughed aloud and they shared a grin, then the conversation settled into more first-date type of questions. She asked where was his favorite place in the world. He asked her who influenced her most in life. She asked him what made him laugh. As always, Josh deflected questions about his childhood and steered the conversation away from family. They talked quite a bit about dogs.

More than an hour passed before they saw any sign of rescue. Josh didn’t mind the delay. He hadn’t flirted with a woman in a long time and he enjoyed himself. She was witty and intelligent and so very fine on the eyes. Caitlin didn’t appear to mind the delay, either. She flirted right back.

He decided to ask her to dinner. He’d take her to one of the fancy restaurants in Mountain Village. He actually had a suit in the trailer because he’d attended a funeral for the elderly mother of the mayor of Eternity Springs the morning before he headed out on this trip.

While he waited for the right moment to pose that question, he continued the small talk by asking, “So, did you always want to be a textile designer and live in New York?”

She hesitated, a shadow crossing her face. “Not exactly. I’ve been living my mother’s dream.”

“That’s an intriguing statement.”

“She was a stay-at-home mom who wanted to be a career woman. She—*whoa!*” The gondola cabin swayed as a loud thump sounded above them. “What’s that?”

“I think we’re being rescued.”

“Oh.”

She sounded almost as bummed about it as he felt.

A moment later, the cabin door opened and a man loaded down with equipment swung inside.

“Everybody okay in here?”

“We’re good,” Josh responded.

“So we have two adults and a dog to go down? Is the dog paralyzed?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve seen those wheelchairs on Animal Planet. Cool contraption. I have a pet harness. Any reason she shouldn’t go down that way?”

“Not that I know of. She’s a calm dog. She should be fine. It is better to send her down alone than with me holding her?”

“Yes sir. It’s safer for her to go alone. She’ll be completely secured.”

“If that’s best, then let’s do it.”

“Good. We’ll send her down first.”

While the rescuer deployed the rope system, Josh devoted his attention to Penny. He wasn’t worried about sending her down by herself. She’d already proved herself to be a scrapper. So far, he hadn’t found anything that phased her. He dug a dog treat out of his backpack and fed it to her while the rescuer strapped her into the pet harness.

Following a short discussion with Josh, the rescue worker attached the three-pound wheelchair to the rope, too.

Caitlin scratched the dachshund behind her ears and made kissy noises. Josh told Penny to behave, sneaked her one more treat, then watched her ride the rope down. The rescue team on the ground greeted the dog enthusiastically.

“Nothing pulls the heartstrings like a crippled dog,” Josh observed, turning toward Caitlin with a grin that quickly faded. The woman had gone green around the gills. “Caitlin? Are you okay?”

“I shouldn’t have watched that,” she said. “I’m not a cowardly person. I ski black diamond trails. I’ve ridden Class V rapids. But I really, really don’t want to leave this cabin by rope.”

The rescuer frowned at her. “Ma’am, you don’t exactly have a choice.”

“I know. I’ll handle it.” She smiled weakly and added, “I’m sorry. I have this ... thing.”

“You’ll be perfectly safe. Even if the worst case happened and something failed, there’s a backup safety system.”

Josh eyed the harness and asked, “Do you have a tandem harness?”

“We have one we use for children, but adults—”

“She doesn’t weigh a hundred pounds. We can go down together.”

“One-oh-five,” Caitlin corrected, turning a hopeful gaze toward the rescuer.

Josh didn’t know how any red-blooded man could resist that look, so he wasn’t surprised when the rescuer reached for his radio and spoke to his partners on the ground. A few minutes later after the deploying the rope system, a different harness arrived from the team on the ground. The rescuer secured Josh first, then assisted Caitlin. Her cheeks turned bright red when he told her to wrap her arms and legs around Josh and hold on tight.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be a perfect gentleman.”

“Says the stranger with his hands on my ass,” she murmured.

He was laughing when he gave the rescuer a thumbs up and they swung out into the air.

Although they descended the eighty feet slowly, it went by much too quickly for Josh. Caitlin kept her eyes closed and her head buried his against his chest, but her mouth ran the entire time.

“I wish I’d had a glass of wine instead of kombucha. Two glasses of wine. One wouldn’t be enough. It’s humiliating to be so afraid. I’m gonna kill my brother—it’s all his fault. I’m shaking like a baby.”

*And I’m hard as the granite on Mt. Wilson.*

She was soft and warm and she used coconut-scented shampoo. Josh didn’t care for the taste of coconut, but he loved the scent. To distract them both, he said, “So you’re a Denver girl. Someone told me that Mt. Wilson is the mountain depicted on the Coors beer logo. Is that true?”

“What? Oh. The logo. Yes. I think that’s true. The logo depicts the Wilson Group. Mt. Wilson, Wilson Peak, Gladstone, and El Diente.”

“The tooth,” Josh translated. “It does look like a tooth, don’t you think?”

Caitlin lifted her head and looked toward the mountains. “How beautiful,” she said, her head swiveling. “Oh wow. What a view this is.”

When the smile slowly spread across her face, a captivated Josh couldn’t help himself.

He kissed her.

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