

Excerpt from Chapter 2:

While Cutter and Mr. Potter were negotiating high finances the following day, she was visiting with Melinda. Lexie was the bearer of a much larger container of baked goods this time. She also purchased two large glasses of tea, complete with accordion-necked straws at the cafeteria on her way in. A peek inside at the contents of the huge vessel sent her friend into peals of laughter.

“Wow! Are you trying to put me into a diabetic coma?” Mel inventoried the confections: oatmeal cookies, brownies, chocolate chip cookies, and macaroons. “When did you bake all of this, Lexie?”

“Last night. I couldn’t sleep, thanks to a certain Texan’s twisted sense of humor. All my online work was caught up, and I was too agitated to read, so that left baking. Anyhow, you don’t have to eat it all at once.”

Mel was intrigued; it was unusual for any man to have much of an effect on Lexie’s focus.

“What did he do?”

“Just as I was ready to snuggle under the quilt Gram made at her quilting bee, the one she gave me for my birthday when I turned twenty-one, he calls, and ends with ‘sweet dreams’. I mean he...knew damn well I wouldn’t be able to sleep after that.”

Mel was munching on a nut-filled brownie while contemplating exactly what she was hearing.

“That doesn’t sound so bad. Why would that keep you up all night?”

Lexie stared at her friend, selected an oatmeal cookie, rationalizing it as the breakfast she’d skipped, and then washed it down with a long drink of tea. She set her drink back on the adjustable bed table they were sharing and gave her friend a very graphic description of the scene in the drive the night before.

“I told you he was here for more than one reason. But no, you didn’t want to acknowledge the hot looks cast your way. Well, Lexie, you can’t hide from the truth any longer. You’ve found Mr. Right.”

“Cut the Mr. Right crap, Mel. It wasn’t anything other than pure animal magnetism. The man is loaded with it.”

“So, you admit you’re attracted to him.”

“I don’t deny that. Still, it’s no excuse for losing control. Thank God I don’t have to see him, or try to avoid the prospect today. I don’t think I can face him.”

“Aren’t the two of you going to dinner with Mom and Dad tomorrow night?”

“Don’t remind me. Actually, I was thinking of taking a trip up to Kelly’s Island, and keeping a large part of Lake Erie between us until he goes home.”

“Come on, Lexie, you’re not a coward. Are you going to let him get away? You’ll regret it the rest of your life if you do.”

“Mel, I know you’re a hopeless romantic, but let’s get real here. Cutter and I are diametrically opposed. I mean talk about opposites attracting! We would be at war constantly.”

“Are you sure? The two of you looked pretty comfortable together the few times I have seen you in his company.”

“All that aside, Mel, there is no way in hell that I am ever going back to Texas. I hate the place.”

“You can’t hate the whole state, Lexie. You only saw a small part of it during the worst drought in a century.”

“Do you watch the news at all? It’s not only the drought and wildfires; drug traffickers run their poison unchecked across the border and onto private farms and ranches. They threaten the owners and their families. ”

“Lexie, you know we have more than our share of crime in Ohio. Instead of drought, we have flooding of rivers and creeks, but we have a lot of the same problems.”

“Stop trying to rationalize things, Mel. We don’t have rattlesnakes, or Maria Rodriguez.”

“I know. It is kind of a role reversal. You’re usually the rational one trying to keep me from over-reacting. Who, the hell, is Maria Rodriguez?”

Lexie caught her best friend up on the events leading to her quitting her bookkeeping position at the Rocking R. She stayed until mid-afternoon, when Mel’s Mom showed up. On the trip home, Lexie decided to splurge and spend part of the recompense from the Rocking R on a new dress for the following night. She blew the whole wad and then some, and she still had a hair appointment that was not in her short-term plans or budget.

Back home again, she showered, climbed into her long-neglected bed, and blanked out, not surfacing again until Gram sent Skip to retrieve her for dinner. Halfway through the meal, Gram burst her hard-won tranquility.

“Alexandra, do you think that it is appropriate to carry on with your cowboy in our drive? If you can’t control your baser instincts, at least seek some privacy. I am sure you are the talk of the whole neighborhood today.”

“God, Grandma, it’s not like we were humping in the damn drive!” Lexie was really hoping that no one, especially her grandmother, had caught last night’s performance.

“Don’t use that tone and nasty language with me, young lady! You will have to atone to the Lord for using his name in such a context.”

Her mom glared at Gram. Then Mom inquired what she had done with herself for the day, after her pre-dawn baking spree.

“I spent most of the morning as well as the early afternoon with Mel. Then I went shopping and blew a lot of money I don’t have to spare on a new dress for tomorrow night. It had to be altered in the bust and shortened, so I have to pick it up in the morning.”

“Oh, I wish you would have called me. I could have taken a long lunch and gone with you.”

“Sorry, Mom, it was a last minute decision. Mel kind of talked me into it. I really was thinking of canceling the whole thing; you know how I hate dinner at the Potters’ country club.”

“It wouldn’t be very hospitable to leave Cutter in the lurch when you’ve already accepted as a couple, and if he went alone, I’ll bet he wouldn’t stay that way long.”

“Yeah well, if someone wants him, they can have him. Actually, I’m still thinking of taking a vacation trip alone, and coming back after he returns home.”

“You don’t want to do that, Lexie. You will regret it the rest of your life.”

“Now you are starting to sound like Mel.”