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Table by the Lake

Virginia Hathaway glanced at the clock on her dashboard for the umpteenth zillionth time. The last real vacation she'd taken that hadn't included pulling weeds, deep cleaning, or household repairs had been Spring break her senior year of college. She and her roommates had driven to the white sandy beaches of Florida's Gulf Coast.

Anticipating a modern variation of an old sixties beach movie, they'd been pleasantly surprised to discover a waterfront city brimming with good-looking guys and parties galore. A few of those parties had been a bit more than she and her friends cared to deal with, but most were just fun-filled gatherings with good music, a little booze, and new friends.

After that, she'd gotten a job, worked hard, and within a few years, bought her own house. She shared that house with a couple of friends from college. Her mortgage was lower than rental rates, and with her friends paying her rent, extremely affordable. She'd spent the last couple of years spending all her spare money sprucing up the fixer-upper. Which meant this was her first time on a go-somewhere vacation instead of a fix the house staycation.

She'd been on the road for almost four hours and had a little more than two hours to go. Her best friend Carrie had grown up spending her summers on a lake near the Canadian border. After listening to years and years of Carrie's stories, she, Carrie and her roommate Sheila had decided it was time they head out and see the place for themselves. Once they picked a week when everyone was free, they decided on the perfect waterfront hotel. She could hardly wait.

One of the reasons she'd bought her house was the neighborhood. With mature trees and pride of ownership, the older home nestled amongst a green sprawling lawn and clusters of bright-colored flowers had won her heart. Today, driving the winding roads of New England, her mature trees dwarfed in comparison to the deep woods kissing the side of the winding road. She simply loved it.

Her dashboard sounded off and she glanced at the number. One of these days the powers that be were going to find a way to keep private numbers private. She hit the cancel call button and sent the spam caller into oblivion. One more time she glanced at the clock. Ten minutes less to go than there'd been the last time she'd looked. She was worse than a little kid. If her parents had been driving, she would probably have asked how much longer every five minutes.

What she needed was something to make the last part of the drive go by a little faster. Maybe a play list of peppy dance songs. Not that she could dance in her car, but she certainly could bounce in place and sing. There was always the option of calling a few friends she hadn't spoken to in ages and catching up. There were several people who

came to mind who she would love to visit with, but busy schedules always seemed to be a problem. Now she wasn't so busy. The question, of course, was what about everyone else?

While she debated whether to call her college friend who had moved to the West Coast a few years ago, or her mother who she owed more than one return phone call, movement in the greenery at the side of the road caught her eye. A lot of movement. Taking her foot off the gas pedal in anticipation of needing to slam on the brake if whatever was hiding decided to dart out into the open, she studied the fluttering leaves and gasped with delight when an odd little head peeked out from between two large leaves. What the heck? As more of the head came out, she realized it had to be a baby animal. Lightly tapping her brake, she checked the rear-view mirror for any annoyed drivers behind her, and finding the coast clear, returned her attention to what was now not one, but two babies peering through the greenery. It took a second to realize the two fawns were baby moose. How she wished she could take a photo. Never had she seen anything so darn sweet. She really hated to keep driving, but the waterfront hotel wouldn't get any closer if she stopped to admire the local wildlife.

Her foot on the gas pedal, she blew out a soft sigh and pressed down. One hour and fifty-five minutes to go. Taking a second to wave goodbye to the two little cuties, as if they had any idea what the blob in the big metal box was doing, she suddenly wondered where the heck was Mama? Shouldn't a mother moose be near her babies? She might as well have twitched her nose or done an incantation. No sooner had the thought crossed her mind than a massive furry moose appeared in the middle of the road—smack dab in front of her car. There was no slamming on the brakes fast enough. Mama moose and her front bumper collided hard and her airbag exploded—loudly—in her face. *Awe hell.*

* * * *

“Top of the morning to you.” Katie O’Leary flashed a bright smile at Caleb Frost. Caleb had made it a habit to pop by the One Stop every day for his morning coffee. Every so often, like today, he’d snag a few extra minutes for lunch and head over for one of the woman’s amazing lobster rolls. Or two. “And the rest of the afternoon to you.”

The storekeeper’s grin blossomed from ear to ear. There wasn’t a resident of the small town of Lawford who didn’t know the proper response to the traditional Irish greeting, or love the way Katie’s face brightened when someone used it.

“Isn’t this a pleasant surprise? Twice in one day. What’ll it be this afternoon?”

“Do you have any of your home-made chips?”

Somehow that famed smile spread a little wider as her head bobbed. “Indeed I do.”

“Wonderful. I’ll have a lobster roll and some chips.”

“Coming right up.”

“How nice to see you again Caleb.”

He would have recognized that sweet voice anywhere. Pretty much the whole town recognized that voice. Standing in the doorway with a ray of light shining over her silver hair and brightly colored caftan, Fiona Hart looked like she’d been beamed down straight from heaven. “Always a pleasure Mrs. Hart.”

“Grams.” The older woman’s granddaughter, Poppy, came hurrying in behind her. “Does she have any left?”

“Of course I do.” Katie obviously thought she knew what Poppy wanted, and odds were, the shopkeeper was probably right. The woman’s intuition was infallible. “How many do you need?”

The front door blew open and Dylan Powell, Poppy’s husband, came in. Blinking when his gaze met his wife’s, a slow steady smile took over his face. “Hi.”

A mirror image of sheer delight combined with just enough heat to make even a stranger blush, slid across Poppy’s face. Not a soul on the planet who didn’t know them would have guessed they’d been married for years. “The head of church ministries showed up two days early for his luncheon with Pastor Bob. We didn’t have the nerve to tell him he was here on the wrong day, so now I have to bring lunch and not make it look last minute.”

Katie bobbed her head. “I’d better pack a few of my bud vases as well as the cloth napkins.”

“Oh,” Poppy’s head spun around. “You don’t have to do that.”

“No.” Katie smiled. “I don’t. But I will.”

“Of course she will.” Fiona Hart patted her granddaughter’s hand and winked at Katie. “All will be perfect.”

All will be perfect. The words rolled over a time or two in Caleb’s head. When it came to the Hart family, despite the sad loss of Poppy’s dad many years ago, the family did seem to be perfect. Nine granddaughters had married over the last few years, and all seemed as blissfully happy now as the day they were married. Considering his last two forays into dating had ended rather quickly, and somewhat badly, he almost wished there was another Hart granddaughter available. If for no other reason than to have Fiona Hart for a grandmother.

“Please tell me there are six lobster rolls left?” Fingers crossed, Poppy held her arms up at her side her.

Katie simply nodded. “I had a feeling I should make an extra batch this morning, so I did.”

The deep breath Poppy blew out could be heard clear across the shop. “Thank heaven.”

“Always,” Katie and Fiona echoed, then Katie spun in place to face Caleb, waved an extended finger at him, then at Dylan. “And enough for you and you.”

“You’re the best.” Caleb grinned up at Katie. He’d had his mouth watering all morning for her famed lobster rolls, but of course, would have given his up for the church had it been needed.

“The same to you my friend.” The lilted words were barely out of the lady’s mouth when the sound of rubber screeching across pavement pierced the good mood in the room.

Poppy’s eyes burst open wide, Dylan spun around, Katie frowned, and Fiona Hart’s hand flew to her chest as she muttered, “Uh oh.”

Not wasting any time, Caleb turned on his heel and bolted out the glass door. At the edge of the parking lot the problem was clear, and so was the frantic woman standing by her drooping bumper screaming.

Chapter Two

“Oh, no! No! No!” Virginia couldn’t unsnap her seatbelt fast enough. Fingers fumbling at the thought of that poor mama moose mangled under her car and the cute little doe-eyed fawns as orphans, had her almost apoplectic.

Free from the restraint of the safety belt, she yanked at the handle and threw the driver door open. Scrambling out of her seat and around the bumper, she skidded to a halt. No blood, no mangle, and no bumper.

Looking as stunned as Virginia felt, the moose’s gaze met hers. She didn’t know who blinked first, or who blinked more. The animal seemed to tilt its massive head still staring at her, and all Virginia could think was *how the heck am I going to get you to a vet?* Turning her back a moment to the injured animal, she pulled out her phone and started scrolling. There had to be a vet somewhere out here. After all, even in the mountains, people needed vets.

An odd scraping sound had her turning around to face the fallen moose. To her shock, the massive animal was scrambling to its feet.

“No!” she shouted loudly. “No. No. No. You’ll hurt yourself more!” Waving her arms like an airline employee directing an aircraft on the tarmac, she did her best not to spook the poor thing. “Please, don’t move,” she shouted louder than she probably should have if the idea was to calm the animal.

Wobbly on her feet, the moose shook its head at her and Virginia took a step back. Maybe two or three. The last thing she needed was a pissed off beast charging at her. Another few seconds of staring at each other and the moose strolled off to where the two fawns had come out from hiding and were now simply at the side of the road watching the show.

“Come back.” She came within inches of chasing after the mother moose.

“Not going to happen,” a deep voice from over her shoulder almost gave her the second heart attack of the day.

“She could be hurt.” Virginia focused on the moose now licking the heads of her two fawns, unsure what she should do now. Not that she was fond of the idea of driving into a human being, but at least a person she could communicate with.

“Unlikely.”

“What?” Virginia whipped around. “Of course she’s hurt.”

The man shrugged. “Honestly, it’s almost always the car that gets the raw end of the deal.”

Turning to face her car, she closed her eyes and sighed. How is it possible that an impact that completely smashed her front end could do no damage to the flesh and blood animal that crashed into it?

Not till the man waved at the opposite side of the street did Virginia notice the small-town grocery and the huddle of people stepping off the curb in her direction.

“It’s okay,” he called to them.

“Anything but,” she muttered.

“I’m sure we can—”

“I need a vet.” Once again she scrolled on her phone.”

He leaned over the front of her car, picked up a piece of what she assumed used to be her bumper, scanned the remainder of the crumpled front end and lifted his gaze to meet hers. “How fast were you driving?”

“Not very. I was watching the fawns on the side of the road. That’s why I didn’t see the mother until she was right in front of me.”

“Calves.”

“What?”

“Baby moose are calves, not fawns.”

This was no time for an animal husbandry lesson. “Whatever.”

He bobbed his head. “No blood or fur on the grill. I really think you just dazed her.”

“I don’t know...” She looked at the mom who had shifted her attention to the second calf. Maybe he was right.

“I can call the local vet. Cindy’s great. If anyone can put you at ease, about the moose, it’s her.”

At this point she had no idea what else to do. She nodded several times. “And tell her to hurry please.”

His phone in hand, he tapped a number and frowning at a car who passed by closer than either of them liked, he shook his head. “We really need to get your car out of the road.” He took a few steps closer to the car. “Cindy, hi, it’s Caleb.”

From that point on, he faced where the family of moose were now playing in a small patch of grass behind the shrubs she’d first noticed, and where he was out of ear shot. Straining to hear, she saw him bob his head a few times, then shake it, then nod again, then smiling, he turned in her direction and disconnected the call.

“What did she say?”

“Odds of a car your size hurting a moose are slim to none, but she’s on her way just in case with a vet tech from the sanctuary.”

“Sanctuary?”

“She runs an animal sanctuary. I told you she was great.”

“I guess if I had to hit a moose anywhere in the state, this was a good spot.”

“You could say that. Now about your car—”

“Maybe I can pull over.”

He shook his head. “You’re not going anywhere with that.”

A strong arm held straight out, pointed a finger at her car. Her gaze followed the direction of his finger, trying not to notice the strong forearm exposed under a rolled up cotton sleeve. When her eyes finally focused on her own car, she saw the problem. Her fender, or what was left of it, was smashed up against the tire. Even with her limited mechanical skills, she knew without help this car wasn’t going anywhere.

* * * *

“Let me take a closer look for any more damage before I free the tire.”

The distraught brunette shook her head from side to side as though she were trying to scramble her brains. “No.” She held up her hand. “You’d better not. I have insurance.”

Insurance wasn't going to get her car out of the middle of the road. "That's helpful, but if you'd let me..."

"No." The woman pulled out her phone and began scrolling from screen to screen. "I need professional help."

He was pretty sure his brows had inched up his forehead far enough to kiss his hairline. Professional help? "Miss, if you'd just let me take a peek at the extent of the damage, I'm sure we can get you to Mac's."

"Mac?" A deep-set frown settled between her brows before she shook her head again. "Thank you, that won't be necessary. I have triple A."

"Good thing for a woman driving alone in the country to have, but..."

The way furrows in her brow grew impossibly deeper, he wondered if she was disgruntled with the person on the other end of the phone or if it was something he'd said. For the first time ever, he understood the expression, staring daggers.

"Triple A is a good thing to have for *anyone* who drives a lot."

It took everything in him not to roll his eyes. "No offense intended, Miss. I was just saying—"

"Never mind." Holding a card in her hand, she dialed a number, staring those same daggers at another car that flew past them.

Better them than him. At this point, he'd figured out there was no point in arguing with the woman, instead he leaned against the driver door and watched the pretty brunette. He probably should have introduced himself. At least, now that he was paying more attention to her than her car, or the moose across the road, he suddenly wanted very much to know her name. Not that it mattered. Out of state plates meant she was only passing through.

"Yes," she repeated a few times and nodded.

He liked the way her brown hair bounced along her shoulders as her head moved. A few more bobs and a couple of half-hearted shrugs and she lifted her sunglasses off her face and onto her head. Big blue eyes under long dark lashes stared past him at the moose.

The only thought his addled brain could come up with was *wow*. The second thought was too bad she was a tourist. Now that he was paying close attention, he liked pretty much everything about her. Every movement was slow and graceful. Her face was so expressive he could almost see what she was saying even though he wasn't close enough to hear. And he wasn't going to mention how well those pants hugged her hips or she'd outright stab him with those daggers.

"All set." A hint of a smile on her face, she spun around and slipped her phone into her pocket. "Triple A will have a tow truck here shortly. They'll move me out of the way and take me wherever I want to go." Her cheerful grin slipped. "Except I don't know where to go."

He pushed away from the car. "Mac's is the garage at the end of town. He'll fix you up fast and fair."

"Oh." She nodded. "Good, thank you."

Before she could say another word, his phone rang and he had to fight not to smirk. "Caleb here... Hi Jim... Yeah, I heard ... Uh huh, no problem... I'd say less than a minute ... Yep, I'm at Katie's getting lunch." Finished with the call, he slipped his phone into his pocket and plastering the most casual smile he could muster, he extended

his hand. "Miss Hathaway, I'm Caleb. Triple A would like me to tow your car wherever you want."

"You?" Those beautiful blue eyes popped open wide and round.
He shrugged. "At your command."

Chapter Three

Virginia never considered herself especially lucky, nor did she place much importance in fate. Still, if she could overlook how unlucky she was to hit the most unbreakable animal in the Northeast, it was certainly pretty darn lucky to have a wild animal specialist handy, and a tow truck driver across the street.

The other lucky thing was if she had to wait for an assessment from Mac the mechanic, she couldn't think of anyplace nicer to wait than at a lakefront lunch spot. "I really am sorry I interrupted your lunch."

Caleb shrugged. "No big deal. Town's not that big. Lost less than half an hour dropping off the car and bringing you back to get some lunch yourself."

"You didn't have to do that either. Thank you."

"Mac's a great mechanic, but his service station lacks the creature comforts of home. Or Katie's cooking. I had to come back for my sandwich anyhow, besides, it would be sacrilege to drive through these parts in the summer and not stop for a sample of Katie's café lunches."

"Here you go. Two lobster rolls, homemade potato chips, and fresh blueberry lemonade."

"As in fresh squeezed?" She knew that was a dumb thing to say, but the words just slipped out.

The huge grin on the woman with the Irish lilt's face told her all she needed to know. "You two enjoy. It'll be a while before Mac has any answers for you."

Homemade chip in hand, Virginia paused. How did Katie know that? Was she a cook extraordinaire *and* a mechanic?

"Everything okay?" Caleb reached for his sandwich and paused midway to his mouth.

"Sorry. Just thinking."

"Well, don't think too hard. Just enjoy."

There was no point in mentioning that the other thing on her mind was her two friends waiting for her near the Canadian border. Caleb was right. She needed to not think for at least a little bit and just enjoy. Sandwich overflowing with plump chunks of lobster, she took a small bite and could almost feel her eyes roll back in her head. "Oh, my."

Caleb chuckled. "Yeah, that about covers it. Katie says the secret is in her special sauce, but truth is, everything you buy here tastes better."

"If I lived here, I'd eat these every day. Twice a day!"

"You'd have to settle for once. Katie's only open for lunch and only in the summer when the weather is good."

Virginia savored the sandwich and stared out at the open lake. The splattering of little tables was perfect for enjoying a truly peaceful lunch. She really needed to get out of the big city more often. "Have you lived here long?"

"Born and raised." He took another bite of his lobster roll.

Her gaze dancing between her rescuer and the lake, she wondered if the locals appreciated what they had. “Never wanted to leave?”

Two broad shoulders hefted in a casual shrug. “When you’re a kid, everyone wants to grow up and get away from the confines of a small town. Hard to get away with anything when everyone is in your business.”

“I sense a but coming.”

He smiled. “But the smart ones learn to appreciate the second family. Besides, a lot of people pay big bucks for views like this and we get them for free every day.”

On that she had to agree. How much lower would her blood pressure be if she lived somewhere like this?

* * *

Some days, life had a cruel sense of humor. For the first time in longer than Caleb cared to think about, he’d met a woman who completely captivated his attention. Except she didn’t live around the corner. “Do you come up this way often?”

She shook her head. “First time, but it’s beautiful.”

“It is.”

Her gaze drifted toward the docks and lake. “I’ve already decided, I’m going to escape the real world more often and come visit.”

“You are?” He didn’t mean for his words to carry such excitement. So much for playing it cool.

She fingered a chip, slowly dunking it in Katie’s dipping sauce. A combination of mayonnaise and some bottled sauce from England.

“Probably starting now.” She blew out a small sigh. “No matter how hard Mac tries, he’s going to need time to fix my front end. Either I stay here or rent a car to meet up with my friends.”

Mac was indeed a good mechanic and very caring, but even he wasn’t enough of a miracle worker to turn her car around in a few hours. “You can rent a car in the next town over.”

Her head bobbed, but she didn’t say anything, just fiddled with another chip.

Before he could think up something neutral to say besides, please stay, Katie appeared at their side. “More lemonade?”

“Yes, please.” The smile was back on Virginia’s face. “It’s delicious. I’ve never had lemonade with blueberries before.”

“Sometimes I make it with strawberries, but the blueberries seem to be a town favorite.”

“I can see why.”

“Also, I just got off the phone with Fiona Hart. She’s the woman who was here with her granddaughter when you had your little mishap with our neighborhood Moose.”

“The folks standing near the parking lot?”

“That would be them.” Katie nodded. “Anyhow, the Harts run a lovely inn with the cutest little cottages you ever want to see. She said on behalf of Millicent’s bad manners.”

“I’m sorry. Millicent?”

“Yes.” Katie’s smile broadened. “Mrs. Moose.”

“Oh, I hope there isn’t a Mr. Moose.”

Katie’s head bobbed. “That would be Merlin.”

The poor woman blinked a couple of times before mumbling, "I see."

"Anyhow," Katie picked up the empty plates. "Fiona would like to offer you a stay at the cottage until your car is ready."

The stunned look on Virginia's face made him think that where she came from, folks didn't do things like that. Though he had to admit, they were pretty spoiled by the generosity of the small-town neighbors in times of need.

"It's just down the road," Katie added.

"Oh." Virginia blinked, looked at Caleb then back at Katie. "That's very sweet of her but, it's not her fault I hit the moose."

Tipping her head to one side, Katie shrugged her shoulder. "Technically, our town, our moose. And Millie was probably just standing there, wasn't she?"

Virginia's head bobbed.

"There you go. So it's all settled. I'll tell Fiona you'll be staying at the cottage till your car is ready."

Before Virginia could mutter another syllable, Katie had rubbed her hands together and hurried back inside.

"I can't do that. Aside from the fact that I have two friends waiting for me a couple of hours away, I don't think it's right."

"If you'd met Fiona, you'd understand. The lady is a gem all unto herself." He pushed his chair back. "Let me speak with Katie. I'll be right back."

Virginia nodded and he hurried inside.

"She's not liking it, is she?" Katie held the receiver of an old-fashioned land line in her hand.

"Nope. You'll have to tell Mrs. Hart if she wants the lady to stay, she'll have to come over herself."

"Oh, hell." Katie stared out the window, her eyes somewhere between worried and annoyed.

The second he realized what she'd seen, he muttered something a little stronger under his breath. Merlin was crossing the street and heading straight for Virginia.

Chapter Four

Maybe there was something more magical about this place than just a shopkeeper with a special touch when it came to food. Slamming into a moose with no injuries, a tow truck driver on the scene when you need him, an amazing lunch, and a generous innkeeper.

For months, Virginia had been looking forward to this vacation on the water with her friends. Any other day or time and the thought of missing even an hour of that visit would have had her beyond disappointed and teetering on miserably upset. Now she couldn't help but think if staying on a few days here instead of there meant spending a little more time with one of the nicest guys she'd met in ages, maybe hitting a moose wasn't such a bad thing after all.

A loud huffing sound followed by a snort snapped her out of her thoughts and dragged her attention away from the sunlight glistening on the lake. "Oh, my..." *Do Not Scream.*

If she thought mama moose was big, this beast was not only bigger, his antlers seemed to be as wide as she was tall. And she was tall.

"Don't panic," a now familiar voice called from the One Stop doorway.

At almost a whisper, she looked down and mumbled, "Easier said than done." Somewhere she had read not to look a bear, or lion, or who knew what beast in the eye when confronted by a wild animal. She hoped to high heaven the same held true for a huge moose that was probably mad as a hornet at her for hitting his wife. Did moose even have wives?

The door of the One Stop slammed shut and she could see Caleb rushing toward her from the corner of her eye. "It'll be fine."

"Stay away." The last thing she needed was for someone to play knight in shining armor and get himself killed over her.

"He's harmless."

This time, she turned her head in his direction, opened her eyes, and bit back the urge to ask if he had lost his mind.

"I'm serious." Caleb pivoted away from her direction and marched, actually marched, into the parking lot. "Merlin. You're drunk. Go home to your family."

"Drunk?" Now she knew her nicest guy ever was actually a royal nutcase.

The massive moose actually stopped in his tracks, dropped his head in what could have been interpreted as a gesture of shame, and stood perfectly still.

"You really have to lay off those apples." Caleb stopped several yards away from the beast, and hands on his hips, spoke softly, yet firmly. "Merlin. Go. Home."

She heard another huff and snort and then the animal carefully swiveled around, almost seemed to wobble a smidge, and then very slowly moseyed away from the One Stop. Halfway to the curb, the animal almost seemed to trip over his own four feet before righting himself and continuing on. Could he really be drunk?

* * * *

Of all days for Merlin to be gorging on fermented apples. Caleb took in the stunned look on Virginia's face and the pale color of her skin. "Are you okay?"

The woman blinked, then turned her head. "Was the moose really drunk?"

"He was."

"How do you know?"

"It happens all the time."

She blinked again. "The moose is an alcoholic?"

That made him chuckle. He should have realized a city girl would have no idea what he was talking about. "He loves apple. Somehow he always manages to find fermented apples on the ground. Even when apple-picking season is over. Fermented apples have the same effect on moose, elk, deer and a few other animals as a bottle of gin on a human."

"Oh. I guess you're not a nutcase."

"Excuse me?"

"Never mind. And thank you for coming to my rescue."

He gave a half-hearted shrug and wished he could have really done something heroic to make a good impression. "For a moose, he's pretty friendly. Sort of like a Great Dane, he doesn't know his own strength, so no one wants to get too close, but Merlin has never posed a threat to anyone."

"I see." A hint of a smile teased at one corner of her mouth then slowly tipped the other side upward to match. "So that's twice you've been here when I needed help."

"There you are." A tall slender woman with silver shoulder length hair and a flowing colorful caftan climbed out of a jeep. "I am so very sorry about Millie, and Katie tells me that Merlin has been making a pest of himself now as well."

"He wasn't too bad, but he's going to have to cut back on those apples."

Caleb was going to add, pretty, smart, patient, and now a good sense of humor to the list of reasons why he wanted her to take Fiona up on her offer. He could think of a lot of women who would have run off screaming and found a way to somehow blame him for it all.

"So, it's all settled then. You'll be staying at the Inn. We have a lovely little cabin right by the water available. Unless you prefer to be up in the woods, we have a very private cabin nestled in the trees available as well."

"Oh, I couldn't do that."

"Nonsense. No one is going to use them. I see no reason why you shouldn't. It's the least we can do to make up for Millie and Merlin scaring the dickens out of you."

Caleb bit his tongue and held his breath.

"I don't know." Virginia looked to the water and then over at Caleb.

He figured if there was any chance of convincing her, now would be his last opportunity. "If you stay, there's a great restaurant on the hill with an amazing view of the lake. I'd love it if you'd join me tonight."

"You would?" Her voice came out small and surprised, and for the life of him he didn't know if that was good or bad.

"Very much." He plastered on a smile, and prayed it looked laid back and friendly, not desperate.

A sweet smile took over her face and he hoped that was a good sign. Bobbing her head, she glanced at Mrs. Hart and then looked to him. "I guess I'm having dinner on the lake tonight."