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Faith leaned out the open window of Hope’s truck as they approached the Victorian house on the edge of Paris, Arkansas. “I still think you should have done the whole wedding here. Imagine, getting married in Paris. You could have wedding pictures at the Eiffel Tower.”

“That’s not my style at all. Besides, it’s not the real Eiffel Tower, sister.” Hope laughed as she stopped in the gravel lot and powered up Faith’s window. “Let’s just get these things unloaded. I want to be home before the rain pours down.”

Faith jumped out of the passenger door. “Yeah, riding in a pickup cab in pouring down rain is not my idea of excitement, especially with your sister.”

Inside the front door, she scanned the parlor, soaking up the opulence. Candelabras of every description shared tables with crystal vases of fresh flowers. For a moment, she forgot they were in small-town Arkansas. This store was incredibly out of place, but amazingly perfect at the same time.

“Hi ladies. Good to see you both again.” Emma Peterson emerged from a side room with her curly auburn hair pulled

back in a bandana. “Did everything turn out well at your wedding?”

“It was amazing. I wish you could have been there.” Hope reached out to hug Emma’s shoulders.

Faith had never imagined her younger sister getting married first. Somehow, though, she had always known Hope would end up with O.D. The two of them just belonged together. Without Faith’s help, the wedding would have been sensible, but plain. Hope needed Faith’s prompting to make her dream wedding a little dreamier.

“There’s so much going on this time of year. Since your fiancé had picked up the chandeliers, I just sent the guys down in the van with the flowers and candles.” Emma looked out the window toward her storage barn. “They’ll take care of unloading for you.”

“Where do you find all of these things?” Faith reached her fingers toward the crystals hanging from a table lamp.

“We get some from estate sales. Lots of folks appreciate nice things, even out here in the hills. The newer stuff is shipped in from the cities, New York, Chicago. I even get a few things from the other Paris when I can afford the shipping.” Emma walked to a side door and waved at some young men outside. “Thanks for letting us use some of your wedding pictures on our website. That’s the best way to attract new customers. I hope you’ll send your friends for their dresses too.”

“For sure.” Faith leaned through the door of the display area for the beautiful gowns Emma was famous for. “I would love to just stay and look at them. I guess I haven’t grown out of playing dress-up.”

“Me either.” Emma laughed.

“Sorry, you two.” Hope walked toward the door as the two helpers approached the porch. “We need to get these huge

light fixtures out of my truck. You can try on dresses another day.”

Faith followed them out onto the porch. Even though she was dressed modestly, Emma somehow fit here just as naturally as the brocade wing-back chairs.

Faith’s phone buzzed in her pocket and she took it out to check the text message as they stood behind the truck’s tailgate.

“Who’s that?” Hope handed Faith a box containing two vases.

“Just spam.” Faith balanced the box on her hip and finished reading the message before replacing the phone in her pocket.

What’s up beautiful?

Not spam exactly. Ty Porter was a local dee-jay she’d met on Black Friday when his station helped to promote the Caldwell Family Rodeo. He’d handled the music for Hope’s wedding reception, and they’d been out for a supper date after that.

“I’ll take this inside.” Faith hefted the box, setting it down just inside the front door.

She pulled up Ty’s message and answered it.

In Paris at the moment. What’s up with you?

Paris. If only it were France. Ty was a city boy, and he seemed to understand her longing to see other places. On their first date, he’d entertained her with stories of his fast-paced life, especially before coming to the Arkansas River Valley.

Outside the window, clouds joined forces. Yes, this was still Arkansas. That sky was looking mean. They needed to get back to Crossroads before the rain made driving difficult.

Had John K. gone home with his dad and brother? Was he camping in this weather? Did he prefer being alone that much? Why was she worried about him? After all, he'd survived serving in the military, and even being missing in action for a while. He could take care of himself.

A message alert from her pocket startled her.

Paris? Ooh la la.

It was almost as if Ty knew she was thinking of John K. She had gotten over the crush she'd had on her hero neighbor long ago. No harm in hoping he stayed safe, right?

Paris, AR, goof. Returning the rented items from the wedding.

Gotcha. See you when you get back to town?

He wanted to see her? Like tonight? Her heart raced. Well, that might be exciting.

Depends on the weather.

That sounded like an old lady talking. She followed with another text.

It's supposed to rain a lot tonight.

Will you melt?

Another message flashed in immediately.

I'll keep you safe and dry.

Faith's face flushed. They'd just gone out for one dinner.

He'd been on his way to work at the radio station that night. He'd crossed her mind once or twice since then, but ...

“Put the phone away. Your fan club can wait.” Hope peeked in from the porch. “The guys are going to use a forklift to unload those huge contraptions. You need to help us watch. I don't want so much as a scratch on that truck bed.”

Faith's phone buzzed again. “I'll be right there.”

So, see you soon?

Another text from Ty?

Faith grinned.

I'll talk to you when we get back to town.

Her finger shook a little as she sent the reply.

She thought of the smile that would just be visible in his red beard, the twinkle in those blue eyes. Her own smile warmed her cheeks.

She ignored several pings from her cell phone while watching the forklifts unload the two crates from the back of Hope's truck. O.D. had packed them exactly the way Emma wanted them. The guys on the forklifts knew what they were doing. Why was she even needed here?

Hope signed the paperwork Emma had prepared to finalize the rental agreement. Faith slid into the passenger side of the truck as thunder rumbled, and rain began to fall.

“Ready?” Hope started the truck and pulled away from Emma's house into the downtown area. “This is a great little town. Maybe we can come again when the weather's better. There is a little bakery with tables in front like a French café. I'd like to do more than just drive by next time.”

“Yeah. Sounds cute.” Faith scanned the messages Ty had been sending. He was persistent, for sure.

I've been thinking of you a lot.

Do you like Italian food?

There's a great little place with killer ravioli.

Come on, can't I get a response? Are you up for some great food tonight?

She might as well answer. It would be good to see him again.

Sure. Sounds like fun. I love Italian food.

She typed the response as the sky let loose its heavy burden of rain.

Cool! See you about 7:00.

Did he even know how far she lived from town? She had met him at the restaurant last time. Oh, well. Hopefully, this rain would slack up before then.

Faith was grateful Hope had to concentrate on the road and the weather as they navigated the winding roads.

I hope you get back from Paris in time. Trans-Atlantic flights can be killer.

Ty's text came as Hope turned her windshield wipers up to full speed, battling the waves of water in front of her.

You are insane.

She laughed aloud as she responded.

“Having too much fun over there.” Hope leaned forward.

“Just a bunch of silliness.” Faith turned the phone upside down on the seat. Ty’s texts could wait. She adjusted the defroster, hoping to help keep the windshield clear.

“I’m glad you came with me. No fun driving these mountain roads in the rain.” Hope reached over to pat Faith’s knee.

“No problem.” Faith sighed. She knew Hope thrived on days like this. Her job at the Cedar Ridge Therapy Center didn’t allow her to get out of the office often enough. Driving around in the Ozark mountains made Hope happy, even in terrible weather.

“Do you ever get tired of living here?” Faith settled back in the seat as the rain slacked up.

“What brought this on?” Hope laughed. “It doesn’t rain every day.”

“I know. It’s not the rain. It’s just, I don’t know, we have never really been anywhere else.” Faith looked to her right, watching the trees passing by her window. “Don’t you ever wonder what it’s like to live in a city?”

“Sure.” Hope smiled. “I guess it would be fun to take a vacation now and then. But I would always want to come back home. Especially now that O.D. has our house almost finished.”

“Yeah. I guess it makes a difference when you get married. I’m just not ready to be so settled.” It was useless trying to explain how she felt to good old steady Hope. She had enjoyed the past few months so much, as she and their cousin Kayla Grace traveled around the state to rodeo events. Serving as Miss Crossroads Rodeo with Kayla as Miss Teen Crossroads had added some spice in an otherwise ordinary world.

“Well. Sorry I can’t provide any more excitement than driving through a tsunami on a slippery road.” Hope laughed.

Faith picked up her phone again. Ty was still texting. He had sent a picture of the real Eiffel Tower, then one of Venice. Then, a menu from the restaurant he wanted to take her to. Yes, much more exciting than riding in her sister’s pickup truck. She began to picture the outfits in her closet that might impress this fascinating guy.