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# **STRANDED IN COVINGTON**

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**(Scene)**

**KATLYN GRACE**

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Stranded in Covington

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“YOU’RE AN IDIOT.”

“Thanks.”

“That wasn’t a compliment.”

“Maybe not from your perspective.”

“You just totaled your pickup truck for a squirrel and we’re miles from the nearest town! And guess what?” Tess waved her cell phone in the sticky air. Her palm was so gummy she thought her phone would stick to it. “No signal.”

Parker kicked his brown Ariat Rambler leather boots in the dirt and dust went flying. “You’re exaggerating. We *are* in a town...just not a heavily populated one.”

Covington, Texas wasn’t the place she wanted to be stranded. Especially with the man that had broken her heart in high school and moved to Fort Worth afterwards. She hadn’t seen Parker’s square-cut jaw and Roman nose in 10 years, but when the ranch manager had come crawling back to Hillsboro for his inheritance, he’d found Tess already living at the cottage. It wasn’t her fault Parker’s dad always thought of her more along the lines of family than his own son. Tess never would have agreed to tag along with Parker today if it

wasn't for the deserted, private farmland for sale in Covington. She was trying to convince him to buy it instead of him taking her to court for his dad's cottage that she now legally owned.

Tess huffed. She never should have come with him without a realtor. Sure, the gate to the ranch had been open, but now all that extended before her was a one-lane dusty stretch of road. From a map, Covington looked like a speck of dirt. It was only a total of 0.80 square miles...but they had to get to the actual town first to find help. At least Hillsboro had more than one gas station. Her feet already ached for home.

Parker's lips tightened at the edges and he squinted his almond shaped eyes at the sun. "At least the squirrel survived."

The sweltering summer sun baked her already-tanned skin, making her miserable. If the sun was a spotlight, she was the main character on stage. Not a single breeze swayed in the sizzling, late afternoon air. She looked up at the sky, shielding her eyes from the beaming rays. The sky even looked wretched with its hazy, mustard yellow tint over blue.

It bothered her that Parker could be so optimistic as they both walked away from his steaming Ford. He'd always been that way, but now it downright irritated her.

"Yeah," she scoffed with a roll of her eyes. "Your truck doesn't run, and it's buried in a ditch deeper than the Grand Canyon, but at least the squirrel survived."

Parker snorted.

She trudged further in her crocheted Toms down the dirt road. One glance at the shoes had her wanting to scream. The creamy white material was turning brown. Not even the dry desert-like smell of the pasture that planed out for miles, or the crunchy dead grass that was flush with the road on both sides did anything to calm Tess's annoyance.

“I swear if a tornado comes and sweeps us away to the World of Oz, I might kill you.”

“Wouldn’t want the wrath of the wicked witch coming upon us, now would we?” A smug grin tainted Parker’s lips as he kept his focus on the road ahead.

A red-tail hawk squawked above, causing her to jump.

She listened as they walked, because the last thing she wanted to do was immerse herself in a conversation with him. The northern mockingbirds and katydid seemed to ridicule her and the predicament she’d entangled herself in. Tess whacked at a mosquito that chomped at her leg. Why had she chosen to wear a dress?

The *bump ka-thump* of Parker’s boots stopped. He stared a hole in her head as he turned to face her. “Are you okay?” The drawl of his southern accent mixed with the concern in his muddy brown eyes was enough for her to melt in a puddle.

Tess looked away and continued to walk. “Fine.” She had a stiff neck and was hardheaded, but she wouldn’t admit that to him.

The *bump ka-thumps* quickened as Parker chased her down. He tugged on her arm, twisting her petite body around to face him. The short, coppery brown stubble around his mouth and chin weaved back toward his mouse-like ears. “All the years I’ve known you, you think I believe you’re “*fine*”? You’re not, and we’re going to fix this. For starters—” He placed the Stetson that had been on his head on hers, revealing slight curls at the nape of his neck. “You look prettier in my hat. And where are those boots I bought you once upon a time?” He threw his rippled arm around her shoulder, his musky scent mingled with sweat smelled all-too familiar.

She guaranteed the hat didn’t look as good settled on her stringy blond hair she’d pulled back into a ponytail, as it did on his head. Hats had always looked natural on him.

She shrugged his arm off her shoulder. “Gone. Just like

the time you walked out of my life.” She left the Stetson on, mainly because it was shading her eyes. “We won’t make it to someone’s house by sundown if we don’t keep walking.” Tess avoided making eye contact with him.

He didn’t move. “Why are you ignoring me?”

She sucked in a sharp breath and pursed her lips, refusing to speak. Her mouth tasted dry and crusty anyway.

“It’s pretty land.” His Matthew McConaughey type of voice had always soothed her.

Tess glanced out at the property. The landscape reminded her of how the ocean met the horizon but, in this case, it was the unkempt hay scraping the sky for miles. A lonely live oak tree sat atop the flat, brushy terrain; its branches a nimble spider and its canopy twice as wide as the 50-foot height of the tree. Once the overgrown brush was cleared, the live oak would be a magnificent crown.

“I told you.”

“I know you did.” His comment held more weight than it should have.

Tess waited it out.

Parker blew a breath out of puffed cheeks. “I’m sorry.” He raked his long fingers through thick, dark hair.

“Took you long enough.”

He extended his calloused right hand and clasped hers, not taking *no* for an answer. Tess hadn’t felt the rough edges against her smooth palm in ages. The intimate sensation made her insides shiver.

“Here’s the truth, Tess: I came back because of you. I don’t care about the cottage. About the *things*.”

Nature’s sounds filled the silence as she watched Parker attempt to find words. His Adam’s apple bobbed when he traced circles around her palm with his thumb. Tess had never felt so small in such an expansive location in her entire life. She could feel his heartbeat in his fingertips as his

nervous eyes bored into hers. A stiff, humid breeze finally stirred, causing flesh bumps to prickle the back of her neck.

Tess couldn't take much more.

Parker gently tugged her back to reality. "I made a mistake when I walked out on you and my family ten years ago with no reason to blame but my pride. Now my father's dead and I can't do anything about it. So, I came here to make amends because I can't stand to let one more important person in my life vanish before I have the chance to say I'm sorry. Before I have the chance to say I wish I would have tried just a little bit harder. I know it's long overdue, but I'm sorry. So sorry."

Emotion clogged Tess's hoarse throat. Her world spun in circles, and she tried to fan herself with her hands. She'd once loved this man and every little detail about him...but that was before he'd left her numb and all alone. She didn't know if she could love again. She couldn't even look him in the eyes because of the shame pressing on her shoulders.

"I was pregnant...she died in my arms."





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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Katlyn Grace resides in a small town in West Virginia and adores spending time with friends and family. She enjoys writing, photography, music, early mornings, and going on walks. Katlyn also runs a Christian advice blog, "Rosepetalsandfaith." She is the author of *The Lawson Series: Finding Hope, Finding Faith, and Finding Love* (coming soon). Katlyn writes with the intent to inspire others to discover the beauty in following Christ.



