

In Darkness Retreat
Alice Winters

Author's note: I worked really hard on my title. I hope you appreciate it. Please do not share this short. This is just for the members of Alice Winters' Wonderland for our 500 member mark! I hope you enjoy!

"Do you know how excited I am?" I ask Lane as I slow for a stop sign.

"No idea," he says dryly. "You've only told me about fifty-two times."

"Do you have a problem with that?"

Lane leans toward me. "The only problem is that I want to hear it at least fifty-three times."

I smile at him and pat his leg. "You're a good boy."

"Thanks."

Copper, hearing stuff about "good boys," stuffs his head between the seats to remind us that he's also a good boy, so I reach back and pet his head.

Lane's sister had plans to go on a couples retreat with a friend of theirs. It was a three-day couple's bonding extravaganza, at least according to their website. I was on the website long enough to see that they would feed us three times a day, and I jumped on board. I didn't even bother to ask Lane before agreeing.

"We're going to be the best couple there," I assure him as I turn into the parking lot of the resort.

"I... don't think it's a competition."

Sometimes, I pity Lane's narrowminded thinking. "It most definitely is a competition and we are going to annihilate them. World's greatest couple."

"While I agree that we are, I still don't think it's a competition."

"Annihilate," I whisper.

He shakes his head, but there's a grin on his face as I park the car. Lane's sister Jenny and her husband Robbie drove separately since they decided to drive up and do some sightseeing yesterday, and we couldn't make it. Lane had sent her a message, so as soon as the car is shut off, she creeps up to Lane's door and beats on it.

He doesn't even twitch. He's so used to my antics that I've basically sacked him out. He sighs, clearly disappointed in his sister's failed attempt. "We're definitely better than them."

"That's the spirit!" I say as I get out of the car.

Robbie rushes up and grabs me in a hug. "I'm so excited you guys are here! They were trying to make me do weird things earlier and it was just scary."

Jenny savagely snorts. "It wasn't that bad. You were just being dramatic. There's a session starting in an hour I want to get to though."

"We have an itinerary?" Lane asks as he hooks Copper's harness.

"I thought we were going to relax but they won't let us," Robbie cries.

"Oh shush," Jenny says as she snatches our bags and hurries off without any help from me or Robbie.

"You got our bags, Felix?" Lane asks.

I look down at my empty hands. "Yes... I'm carrying them all. You should feel my bulging muscles as I strain against the weight of them. Hurry, Lane, feel my bulge!"

He does not try feeling my bulge. "Jenny's carrying them, isn't she?"

“Hands down. She’s like a plow horse.”

Jenny looks back at me and glares.

“What? I love horses. That’s like... an awesome compliment.”

Robbie whistles. “You got a thick ass like a plow horse.”

Jenny starts shaking her ass as she walks into the place.

“Your sister is responding by shaking her ‘thick’ ass,” I inform Lane.

“I really don’t need that described.”

Clearly, that means that he wants me to describe even more. “She’s wearing those stretchy pants, so you can see it *all*.”

“Felix, please.”

“Please, what?”

“Stop.”

“Fine! You didn’t need to bite my head off for trying to be your eyes.”

Jenny takes us to our room which has a king-sized bed and a whirlpool tub that I’m positive we can find plenty of uses for. We get no time to enjoy any of it before she whisks us off for the next adventure.

“What are we being led off to?” I ask Robbie as Jenny nearly skips ahead. She seems to forget that part of a couples retreat is being a couple. Instead, it looks like she’s thriving in the single life and Robbie’s been joining us for a menage a trois. “I think your wife left you, so we will welcome you in. Do you want to be the bread or the meat?”

Robbie’s nose scrunches. “What?”

“Middle or end,” Lane translates.

“Felix looks good in the middle,” Robbie decides, so I take his hand in my left and Lane’s in my right.

“Now sandwich me and ravage me,” I growl as we head down the hallway.

When neither do either thing, I yank them closer until they’re squishing me in-between. There’s nothing like two men pressed against both sides of me to make a great start to the day.

When we reach the elevator, Jenny is shaking her head at us. “You’ve pulled him to the other side, haven’t you?”

“I’m just showing him how green the grass is. Robbie, feel Lane’s muscles, you’ll never want to touch a woman again.”

Robbie reaches over and wraps his hands around Lane’s arm. “Ooh.”

“Right?”

Jenny sighs as she hits the button for the first floor. “You two are embarrassing.”

“Never.”

She savagely pulls Robbie away just as we reach the first floor. I’m not sure what assets she thinks she has that are better than Lane’s, but I’ll let her pretend since she *did* invite us. We head into a room where people are filing in and getting a seat. We find a table with four chairs still open and sit down. I sit between Lane and Jenny—since she won’t let me near her man—and turn my attention to the woman at the front of the room who is smiling at everyone as they walk in.

“Alright, it looks like we have everyone who signed up!” she says.

“We signed up?” I whisper.

“I signed you guys up for *everything*,” Jenny assures us like that’s a good thing.

The young woman smiles at the room of about twenty as she holds up a paper. “Good afternoon, my name is Dani. So, for this activity, we’re going to find our inner creativity. I’m

going to give you a prompt, and then you guys are going to write a sensual scene to share with your partner.” She seems to notice Lane and me, which makes her hesitate before looking down at her paper. “Um... or you can pick a different scene if this scene doesn’t... work... for you.”

I lean in to Lane. “Ooh... sensual. I can be sensual.”

Lane snorts, so I glare at him.

“What’s that mean?”

“I’m excited to see what you write.”

I’m positive that’s not what that means, but I pretend, because he’s going to be blown away by my masterpiece.

Dani begins to pass out the papers until she gets to our group. She looks at Lane and me before giving us a huge smile. “You guys can change the prompt... if you’d like.” Then she sees Copper and looks horrified. Probably realizing that Lane’s blind. “Um... You can...”

“It’s okay,” I assure her. “We’ve been training the dog to write for him.”

She stares at me, clearly falling in love with my witty humor, then quickly walks away.

I lean into Lane. “Ready for the prompt?”

“No, that’s okay, Copper will read it to me,” Lane says as he feels around for the paper, picks it up, and holds it in front of Copper.

I grin as I start reading the prompt in what I feel like would be Copper’s voice. “Finish the scene: It’s Nicole and Jeffery’s ten-year anniversary. They decided that they were going to each do something new and different to make the night exciting.”

“Oh my god... Copper’s an Australian gangster?” Lane asks in clear shock.

I glare at him, knowing that he can physically feel my glare. “He’s sophisticated and British.”

“That was neither of those things. And why wouldn’t he be German? He actually knows more German than either of us. Now where’s a pencil?”

“Ask Copper,” I say snidely.

He chuckles as I put a pencil in his hand by stabbing the pointy tip into the middle of his palm. When I look up, the instructor is staring at me in horror, so I give her a charming smile.

“The instructor thinks I’m abusing you.”

“She wouldn’t be too far off.”

I stare at him in shock. “You’re joking, right? Right? I poke you with a pencil and you... what? Drag me into car chases, get me shot at with guns, make me kidnap people?”

The couple in front of us turn around and stare at us.

“He’s talking about video games,” Jenny says.

“Hear that, Lane? Our life is comparable to a video game.”

“Too bad I can’t press restart.”

“On what? Me?”

He starts laughing. “No! On this conversation. Now where’s the paper?”

I sigh but direct him to where the lines on the paper start.

“I’m so excited about this,” I say.

Now that everyone is situated, Dani claps her hands. “Alright, I’m going to give you ten minutes! Feel free to uh... change the names! Time starts... now!”

I quickly get to work and realize quite fast that I honestly should have been a writer. There’s no doubt I would rival the masters of literature. There’s only one issue... I can’t remember the names of anything.

“Lane...”

“What?” he asks as he keeps writing.

“Do women need lube?”

Jenny lets out a squeal of laughter.

I glare at her. “Shush it, Jenny, I didn’t ask you. Lane?”

“I…” Lane hesitates. “Ask Jenny.”

I turn to her. “Jenny?”

“I thought you wanted me to ‘shush’?”

“That was before I found out that Lane is useless. So?”

She smirks at me. “Use your imagination.”

“Dammit.” I decide that a tub of lube would suffice and return to writing before I quickly run across another word I can’t remember the name of. I *know* I know it. “Lane?”

“What, babe?”

“What’s the name of that thingy?”

“What kind of thingy?”

“That thingy women have.”

“Breasts?” Jenny inputs.

I sigh. “No, I know what breasts are. That other thingy. That boingy-boingy thingy you see in the movies. It’s like a… switch… a… button you press and then she’s going crazy.”

“Oh my god,” Lane whispers.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Robbie says.

I eye him. “Well, maybe that’s because you don’t know how to use it properly.”

“He’s… talking about the clit, isn’t he?” Jenny asks.

“Ooh! That’s it! Clitoris! Got it!” I say eagerly before turning back to my story.

Robbie leans past Jenny like he’s going to snoop on my work. “I don’t even know if I can concentrate on mine. I just want to see what Felix is writing.”

Lane reaches for me before setting a hand on my thigh. “Babe, please don’t forget she said *sensual*. Make it sexy. Maybe stick with what you’re good at… men.”

“Oh, I’m in too deep at this point. Like balls deep, Lane. There are so many holes but I’ve got it in one of them.”

Lane groans and not in a good way. “Robbie, about that threesome, what do you think about just you and me?”

I look at him in shock. “You know it’s bad when Lane’s trying to get with someone who has fingered his sister.”

If words could kill, I think I would have KO’d both Jenny and Lane with that one. Robbie thought it was funny and as long as one person laughs, that’s all that matters.

I dutifully return to writing while the rest of them try their hardest to even come close to my superior writing skills. Honestly, I feel bad for them.

“You guys have two more minutes!” Dani announces. Clearly, she doesn’t understand that a masterpiece takes more than ten minutes.

“Lane?” I whisper.

“Oh no.”

“Don’t be so dramatic. Since a woman doesn’t have a penis to rub… are we supposed to rub elsewhere while having sex? Do they rub the clit with their fingers? Or are her breasts like the gateway to Pleasureville?”

Lane turns to me as Jenny leans in, eager to hear his answer. “The first question is, why do you think *I* know all about the female anatomy? And straight sex?”

“Hmm... Jenny?”

“I refuse to answer,” she says.

“Why are you guys like this?” I raise my hand deciding that the teacher should know, but before anyone comes to my aid, Jenny yanks my arm down.

“No! You’re not allowed to ask her!”

I stare at her in disbelief. “Why?”

“Is he trying to ask that lady?” Lane asks, weirdly horrified.

“Alright! Pencils down!” Dani says.

“What? But no one got to come!” I cry.

Everyone turns to look at me as Lane tries to shrink in his seat and Jenny turns to Robbie like she’s not with us. I’m so glad they invited me.

“Alright, now that everyone is finished—”

“Not my characters!” I stick my hand in the air.

“Yes?”

“Felix, please, *please* don’t ask to read it out loud,” Lane whispers.

“Can I read mine out loud?” I ask.

She opens her mouth, then closes it and smiles. I know she’s still flustered about giving us the prompt earlier, so she’ll likely let me do whatever I want. “You don’t want to read it just to your partner?”

“No, I want to share it... with *everyone*.”

“Okay... um... I guess, go ahead.”

I grin. Oh, they’re about to be blown the fuck away. I dramatically clear my throat, take a sip of water and begin. “It’s Nicole and Jeffery’s ten-year anniversary. They decided that they were going to each do something new and different to make the night exciting. As Nicole walks through the door after a long day of work, she questions if she even has the energy to pleasure her man. Strangely, all the lights are out as she takes her coat off. ‘Jeffery!’ she calls, wondering if he ended up working late.

“That’s when the bedroom light flickers on. She rushes for it, body quivering in anticipation. There, standing in the middle of the room is Jeffery! His twelve-inch schlong pushing the thong he wears to its limit. She can hear the tiny cries coming from the fabric before saying, ‘Oh, Jeffery! Fuck me in my honey pot!’”

“Oh my god,” Lane groans.

“Shush, Lane, it’s beautiful,” Jenny whispers.

I have my audience enraptured, so I quickly continue. “Jeffery grabs his wife who has been reinvigorated by the power of his penis! He tosses her onto the bed, his spray-tanned muscles bulging. His wife cries out, ‘Oh! Plunge your meatsicle deep inside my rabbit hole!’”

“It’s worse than I imagined,” Lane says.

He seems to be the only one who thinks so since everyone else is clearly enjoying it. “She dives at his thong as her clitoris quakes in anticipation. She reaches out and grabs the thong in her teeth, tearing it from his body and freeing the rod of ecstasy. It springs out, stabbing her in the eye, but even that doesn’t deter her. With a black eye, she marvels at its girth and purrs with satisfaction as he tears her clothes off her body. As her shirt falls away, her breasts flop out—”

“Why are they flopping?” Jenny asks in concern.

“He grabs the tub of lube, dipping his horn of manhood deep inside until the lube drips off. She spreads open the moist lips of her pubic area. ‘Plunge that destroyer of labia into my

tunnel of love!’ Using two hands to heft his massive penis, he pushes inside her, making her cry out in delight. And sadly... you stopped me before I, or *they*, could finish.”

“Wow,” Dani says, clearly enthralled by my talent. Robbie starts clapping and the rest of the group follows.

“Look, Lane, they love me!”

Jenny starts clapping too. “I’m clapping for Lane for being able to put up with you.”

“Thanks... um... thank you for sharing,” Dani says. “Now, go ahead and share with your partner.”

“I’m not sure I can top that,” someone says, and I smirk at Jenny.

“Alright, Lane, let’s share.”

“I’ll have Copper read mine,” he says as he holds it in front of the dog. Copper sniffs it over to make sure it’s not edible before going back to sleep.

I stare at him in shock. “That was beautiful.”

He grins at me. “Thank you.”

As the rest of the group heads outside for some water activity that sounded fun to torture Lane with, Jenny tells us that Lane wanted to do something else and heads toward the car.

“Why aren’t we splashing in some water?” I ask, slightly disappointed.

Jenny shrugs. “We thought we’d find something that Lane can do.”

I stare at her in disbelief. “Lane can’t swim? Lane swam with me tucked under one arm while bullets rained down on us. I think we can handle some normal swimming.”

Lane shrugs. “I wanted to do something else.”

“What is it?” I ask Lane.

“Secret.”

“Orgy?”

“Why would I take my sister with us to an orgy?” he asks.

“I don’t know. ’Cause you’re kinky?”

“Not that kinky.”

“I suppose. This better be awesome.”

“I... hope,” he says. “As long as it goes better than story hour, I’ll be happy.”

“You didn’t like my story?” I ask like I’m offended.

He thinks about it for a moment. “Well... let’s say... it was unique just like everything about you.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” I say.

The drive isn’t too long, which is great since after the two hour drive here, I wasn’t ready for another long drive. The entire time, Copper lies on my lap, belly to the air so I can pet him.

“Copper is the greatest thing I’ve ever stolen besides your heart,” I tell Lane.

“That’s strangely sweet,” he says.

“Why can’t you ever take a compliment? Why’d you have to add *strangely* to it?”

“Because there’s usually a second part to it that’s not as sweet.”

“There’s nothing like that. Only sweetness.” That’s when I see a pretty horse in a pasture along the road. “Lane, there’s a horse!”

“No, we can’t buy it.”

“Can we steal it?”

“No.”

“...Why?”

“I want you to figure that one out yourself.”

Robbie starts to slow the car and I stare at him suspiciously. “Is there something in the road?”

He turns into the driveway of the farm and I smack Lane right in the nipple.

“I did *not* buy you a horse,” he says, taking the words right out of my mouth.

“But I can steal one?”

“No, you can *ride* one.”

I stare at him in disbelief, excitement overwhelming. “Oh. My. God. You do love me. I actually get to ride one?”

Lane smiles at me. “You can do whatever you want with them besides take it home. If you just want to pet it for two hours, I’d prefer that.”

“No! We’re riding. I’m so excited,” I say as Robbie parks in front of the barn. I’m out, leaving Lane behind to fend for himself as I look for the closest horse to pet. There’s one just outside a fence that I rush over to. “Lane, he’s so majestic.”

A woman steps out of the barn and smiles at the group of us. “Good afternoon.”

“I already love your horse,” I tell her.

She smiles at me. “Thank you. I’m Esme.”

“I’m Felix, that’s Lane with the dog, Jenny, and Robbie.”

“I talked to Lane on the phone then, right?” she asks.

“You did,” Lane says as he tells Copper to find me since I left him. He’s used to it.

“And who is the handsome helper?” she asks as she smiles at Copper.

“That’s Copper,” I say which makes him wag his tail.

“Well, it’s nice to meet all of you. Want to come meet the horses you’re going to be riding?”

“If we have to,” Lane says.

What I don’t understand is how apprehensive he looks. “Lane, you’re not excited?”

“About getting on a thousand-pound creature with a brain of its own while unable to see? Not really.”

“I promise that I got you a horse that will take the best care of you,” she assures Lane.

He still doesn’t seem convinced. “Eh... awesome.”

“It is,” I breathe.

She leads us into the barn where five horses stand cross-tied. “I’ll introduce you to each horse. So this first one is the one I’ll be riding, his name is Pepper.”

The horse is whitish-gray with dark hairs speckled throughout. He stretches his muzzle out to her, so she pets him. He’s already saddled and brushed. “The next horse will be for you, Jenny. His name is Turbo.”

“Is he really fast or something?” Jenny asks, sounding worried.

She smiles as she shakes her head. “The only thing he does fast is eat,” Esme assures her.

“Oh... you two will be a perfect match,” Robbie says.

Jenny glares at him.

I grin. “Ooh, you better be careful Robbie or food won’t be the only thing she’ll be eating.”

Esme heads to the next horse which is a stout red mare. “Lane, this one will be for you. Her name is Gemma, and I promise she’ll take good care of you.”

“Ooh, is the last horse mine?” I ask eagerly.

“Yes, this is Count,” she says as she walks up to a huge bay horse.

“He’s so tall! I’m going to be tall for the first time in my life!” I say as I rush up to greet my new love. I hold my hand out and he nuzzles it, surely looking for a treat. “Hi, Count. Will you love me?”

His whiskers dance over my hand.

“Let me show you how to brush them,” Esme says as she gets a curry and a brush. “You curry them in circles,” she says as she demonstrates on Count’s neck, “and then brush it away with the brush.”

As she gets Jenny and Robbie situated, I go over to Lane. “Thank you so much for this.”

“Well, you’ve been torturing me by reading me horse books for the past few months, I thought you could see if you learned anything.”

“I’m a horse whisperer, Lane,” I say as I take Copper from him and command him to stay in a spot that is out of the way. Then I grab Lane’s hand and pull him over to Gemma. I set my hand against the back of his and push his hand toward the horse until his fingers are against her neck. “She’s red. So... she’s either chestnut or sorrel... I don’t remember the difference.”

“All red?”

“Completely red.”

He runs his hand down her neck. “She’s soft.”

“Isn’t she? My horse is a giant. I will be taller than you.”

“It’s your dream.”

“It is. I love this so much.”

He smiles at me. “I’m glad.”

I take his hand and slide it over her halter to her cheek, then down to her muzzle. “Feel her whiskers.”

She wiggles her lip against his hand before licking it.

Lane jerks back in surprise. “She’s going to eat me.”

“She just licked you.”

“That’s how they get you. First a tiny lick, next they’ll be eating you.”

“I’m pretty sure the last thing the horse is going to do is eat you.” I move him down to her right side and let his fingers run through her mane. “Her mane is as red as the rest of her.”

I slide his hand over her back as he follows me. “There, now you know what a horse looks like.”

“I already knew what a horse looks like.”

“Shush, no you didn’t. You’re blind. You don’t even know what a horse is.”

“Ah, you’re right. I forgot about the long-term memory loss that came with my eye loss.”

“I know you did, that’s why I felt like I needed to remind you.”

“Thank you.”

I put a brush in his hand.

“I’m scared I’m going to jab her somewhere I shouldn’t jab her,” Lane says.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine. I think she fell asleep.”

“Is she?”

I look at her head that’s held up only by the ropes attached to her halter, like she’s too lazy to even support the weight of her own head. “Like you’re lulling her to sleep.”

“Maybe her and I will just wait right here for you guys to come back.”

I shake my head. “No way. You’re going with us, and you’re having fun whether you like it or not.”

“I’ll consider it. You can brush your horse if you want.”

I look back at Count who’s waiting with his foot cocked. “You’re sure you’re good?”

He continues to brush the same spot. “I’ll just make sure this area is spic and span.”

I rush over to Count and start brushing him. He leans into the curry, lips twitching, and I realize that I will steal this horse even if I have to ride him the two hours home, which will take *way* more than two hours to ride.

Esme meets up with us and shows us how to pick their hooves and saddle Gemma. Then she throws the saddle up onto Count’s back and shows me how she fastens it. By that point, a helper has come up and helps put bridles on the horses.

She looks over at us. “Alright, is everyone ready?”

“I am,” I say, not caring about the others.

“Felix, you were ready to jump on a horse the moment we pulled into the place,” Lane says.

“I do like riding things,” I whisper since Esme’s attention is on Jenny.

“I hope you’re better at riding a horse.”

I smack his gut. “I am excellent at riding a dick.”

They take Jenny and Robbie out and put them on their horses while I wait with Lane. When Esme returns I point at Copper. “Do you want us to put Copper somewhere?”

“If you don’t think he’ll be bothered by the horses, you can let him go with us.”

“I’m sure he’ll be fine,” I say as I pull his harness off and lean it against the wall. He shakes, and I release him from his spot. He eagerly wanders off to see what’s going on.

She leads Gemma outside as I pull Lane after us.

“This is such a bad idea,” Lane groans.

“I see that your weaknesses are haunted houses and horses.”

“They are very similar.”

“They are not!”

He grins. “I’m not... scared. I just... think this is a bad idea.”

Oh but chasing after a criminal organization wasn’t. Sometimes I wonder what’s wrong with his brain.

Esme leads Gemma up to the mounting block where the horse patiently waits.

I slow Lane in front of the first step. “You have steps leading up.”

“There are steps on the horse?” Lane jokes.

“It’s a mounting block.”

“It’s not very sexy using a mounting block, is it?” Lane asks

Esme grabs the stirrup and holds it out as I get Lane to the top of the mounting block. “It’s actually better for the horse. When you get on the horse from the ground, you’re putting a lot of pressure on the horse’s back by hoisting yourself onto them. Okay, the first thing you’re going to do is grab her mane.”

“Won’t that hurt?” he asks as I take his left hand and set it onto the horse’s long red hair.

“Nope, you can hold onto it all you need to, you’re not going to hurt her.”

He grips onto her mane as I pick up his left foot and direct it toward the stirrup Esme is holding out for him.

“Just the ball of your foot... perfect. Now you’re going to swing your right leg up, you can let it drag over her butt if you want so you can feel what you’re doing, and sit.”

“Esme, it’s a good thing you’re here, because I don’t trust Felix at all. He would throw me on the back of a bull just for a good laugh,” Lane says.

“Oh my god. That would have been so funny,” I realize.

He lifts his leg and swings it over the horse’s back very slowly. Esme is already on the other side to catch it and feed it into the right stirrup.

“And there you go! You’re riding a horse. Now she’s basically going to follow the others if you don’t do anything,” she says as she adjusts the reins in Lane’s hands. “But you want to leave your reins nice and loose. If you want her to stop, you say ‘whoa’ and gently pull back. She neck reins, so that means that if you want her to go right, you’re going to drape the left rein over her neck, if you want her to go left, you do the opposite. Right now, I want you to click and say, ‘Gemma, walk on.’”

Lane looks gorgeous as fuck on top of a horse. Even if the horse in question isn’t like the mighty black Friesians from the movies and is trying to take a nap.

I quickly get out my phone and start snapping multiple pictures of him, not caring if he’s falling off or anything as long as I get a good shot of it.

“Gemma, walk on,” he says, and Gemma dutifully starts walking. He immediately pulls the reins back and she stops.

“Well, that was enough fun for one day!” he says.

I smile at him. “You’re doing awesome, Lane!”

He sighs. “Gemma, walk on.”

She starts walking again and this time he doesn’t quickly stop her.

“How do I know I’m not going to run her into something.”

“Why would she run into anything? She has two huge eyes,” Esme assures him. “I bet you couldn’t *force* her to run into something. Now turn her to the left, and she’ll turn around and come back to us.”

He carefully does and she unquestioningly walks back.

“If you want to play around with it, ride her on the driveway. You can hear the noise her shoes make on it, and then when you step off it, you’ll immediately notice.”

“Okay,” Lane says, but I think he’s completely happy not moving while we go get Count.

Esme lets me lead Count to the mounting block and stops him. “So have you ever ridden a horse before?”

“No... I’ve ridden those mechanical ones in the front of the grocery store before though. The ones that cost like a penny. So if you need any pointers, let me know.”

She laughs. “This will be a little different.”

“Costs way more than a penny, doesn’t it?”

She grins. “A little bit. Now you saw how I had Lane get on, you’re going to do the same thing. We will need to shorten these stirrups up for you.”

“He does have tiny legs,” Jenny inputs.

“Shut it, Jenny,” I say as I grab the horse’s mane, stick my foot in the stirrup, and swing onto his back. “I’m in love. I keep my heels down, right?”

“Exactly.”

“Oh, I’m so tall,” I say as I look around.

“Do you have any questions?”

“Can I keep him? I’ll trade Jenny for him.”

Esme grins. “Sorry. We don’t really have much use for humans. They don’t do a very good job carrying people.”

“Lane does. We have this unspoken agreement that whenever he wants to go for a run, he has to carry me.”

She looks over at Lane, probably wondering why the blind man has to carry me, but honestly, our relationship is too complex for words.

As I pet Count’s dark brownish-red neck, she gets onto her own horse. “Does everyone feel comfortable?”

“Yes!” I say loud enough that it’ll override the others’ complaints. Surprisingly, everyone agrees. Well, Lane grunts, which I take as a huge agreement.

Her horse starts walking and the other horses fall in line without prompt like well-greased machines. Her helper gets on his horse and takes up the rear behind me as I sit tall on my giant and marvel at how much taller I am than *everyone*.

“Are you alright, Lane?” I ask as Copper jogs to catch up.

“Yeah. It’s a little... creepy. Like... will the horse leap off a cliff? Will it scrape me off on a tree?”

“She’s not going to do either of those,” I say as Esme leads us down a path to the wooded area behind the barn. The property must line the state forest because there are signs directing us toward a bridle trail.

“Everyone still doing fine?” Esme calls.

“I’m good,” I say as I hold the reins tightly in one hand and run my fingers over the horse’s silky-smooth neck with the other.

She leads us into the narrow path cut through the trees and the horses dutifully follow. I’m positive they’re bored out of their minds and would likely still follow the same path without a rider, but I don’t care.

“Lane, I’m taller than you.”

“Are you?”

“I am. We’re in the wooded area right now. All you’d be able to see is your sister’s butt since she’s right in front of you.”

“Wait a minute, I want to trade spots,” Robbie says.

I grin. “Nah, it’s nice back here. We’re going to go down a little hill, Lane. Are you good?”

“I’m still on.”

I can’t help but laugh. “Well, I would count that as an accomplishment!”

“Trust me, I am.”

I wonder if I could get my phone out and snap a picture of him without dropping it? I *really* love looking at his broad back as he tensely sits atop the horse. I decide that even if the phone ends up trampled, it was worth trying.

I really have no reason to worry, Count dutifully moves along as I take picture after picture of Lane and the back of his head. I wonder if Esme would let me get pictures of Lane with his shirt off posing with the horse when we’re done. I mean, there’s no way she *wouldn’t* enjoy it.

Count reaches a tiny log on the ground and carefully steps over it. I feel like we soar over the two-inch branch. “I love you, Count,” I tell him as I rub his neck.

As we ride through the woods, I’m honestly not sure I stop grinning. Anyone who would take a moment to look at me would swear I’m a lunatic, and I’m not sure I even care. The trail opens up into a larger one, and I look back at the guy behind me. “Can I ride him next to Lane’s horse?”

“Sure,” he says, so I carefully pull Count out from behind Gemma and ask him to walk up next to Lane.

“Are you doing good?” I ask.

Lane looks over at me, and I realize he’s smiling. “This is awesome.”

I’m honestly surprised. “You like it?”

“It’s... oddly freeing. I guess I’ve gotten used to moving around without sight but there’s always this feeling that you can’t just... move because you have to be conscious of what you’ll be moving into.”

“Unless I’m leading you, right? Then you feel free as a bird!”

“Free as a bird off to the butcher. When you’re leading me, I’m just prepared to smash into something and if I don’t, I’m thoroughly shocked.”

“I would never do that. I take utmost care of you when I’m in charge of leading you.”

“You do? I would hate to see what happens if you slacked off.”

I grin. “I would too. I’m really glad you’re enjoying this.”

He gives me a smile that brightens up his entire face. “I am too and no, we can’t have a horse.”

“Dammit, Lane. Why?”

“What would we do with a horse? I already let you have a cat, dog, *and* pig in the house. A *PIG* in the house. It needs to go outside.”

“Brigadier Oinksalot will *not* go outside.”

“It’s a *pig*.”

“A *cute* pig... Don’t try to distract me from the matter at hand. Why do you think you get to call the shots anyway?”

“Let’s see... because I’m making logical sense.”

“Well, maybe I’ll just get rid of your exercise equipment.”

“I’m not worried.”

Dammit. He knows I’m weak to watching him work out.

“Fine, I’ll take away all your clothes.”

“Now you’re going to torture me?”

“Yes, in a way I’ll enjoy.”

“But think of all the other people who will also enjoy it.”

“That doesn’t bother me.” I rub Count’s neck. “Lane, Count loves me.”

“I bet he does. I would love you too if I was used to carrying humans on my back, and then one day they put a half-man up there. It’s probably a good break for him.”

I scowl at him. “People wonder why I run you into things. It’s payback for moments like this. They just add up and add up after a while until I just snap. Count, will you adopt me and love me more than my current man will?”

“Where are all your animals going to go when you marry the horse?” he asks.

“Are you jealous? Are you going to marry me instead?” I joke.

“Maybe someday I’ll just settle for you.”

I start laughing. “Settle? Don’t use too many kind words. They’re painfully bright and filled with love.”

“Someday.”

I look over at him and realize he’s still talking about the marriage thing and it makes me smile. He knows I would follow him to the ends of the earth until the day I died. I know I don’t need marriage to show that, but the thought is strangely satisfying. “When someday comes, I

would like that. We will arrive in a horse-drawn carriage and you will whisk me away atop a mighty steed! You'll be naked, of course."

"Of course."

"You'll have taught him to rear, so as he rears straight into the air with the sunset in the background, you will look back at the wedding goers and say, 'I will taste Felix's sweet seed tonight.' And with that, we will ride away."

"Oh god," he groans. "Why'd you have to ruin it?"

"That's what I do, Lane. It's like my trademark to take something sweet someone says, be unable to handle it, and turn it ridiculous so my brain can comprehend it."

"I suppose that's true."

"Did I tell you I was taller than you?"

"You have a couple times now."

"Want me to tell you again?"

He reaches out, so I take his hand.

"Look how high up I am. Look with your hand, since your eyeballs suck."

"My hand eyes suck too."

"So does your mouth, am I right?" I ask suggestively.

"You're right."

The trail guide takes us deeper into the woods. And while my ass is getting sore by the time I see the fence line, I'm disappointed when it's over with.

Esme gets the others off first, probably because I look like I won't come off unless at gunpoint. Even then, I think I'd take my chances riding away. I stroke Count's neck and whisper words of love and adoration into his fuzzy, black-tipped ear.

"Felix, while we want to leave you here, we can't," Lane says.

"I know," I say with a sigh before following Esme's instructions for dismounting. I lead Count into the barn, and she helps me untack him. I brush him down as Esme comes up and holds out some treats.

"You want to give him a treat?"

"I do!"

"Hold your hand flat so he doesn't accidentally grab your fingers."

I do and he quickly takes them from me. "Thank you for carrying me around, Count," I say before kissing his muzzle. "I will always love you."

"You'll need to come back again," Esme says.

"Definitely. Every week. Lane, we're driving the two hours here every week."

"Yeah... I'm not sure that will happen, but I'm sure we can come back again someday."

We thank her, and I give Count one last hug before heading out to the car.

"What'd you guys think?" I ask eagerly.

"I think my balls got smashed and will never dispense sperm again," Robbie says.

"You already have one creature... I mean child, you don't need another," I tell him.

"I honestly had fun," Jenny says. "I wasn't sure about it, but I enjoyed it. What about you, Lane?"

"I surprisingly liked it, and not just because it made Felix so happy." He smiles as he says it and I literally want to squeeze him until he understands just how much I love him.

"You two are so cute it's gross," Jenny says.

"Don't be jealous that we had fun and Robbie just sat on his balls the whole ride."

“Your balls don’t hurt? Maybe I have bigger balls than you two do. They are pretty impressive, aren’t they, Jenny?”

I lean into the front seat. “Let me see, and I’ll tell you.”

He reaches for his pants, and I’m honestly not sure if it’s jokingly or not, but Lane pulls me back before I can find out.

I look at Lane. “Why would you stop me? I’m a ball expert.”

“No, you’re not.”

“That’s not what you were saying when I was fingering them last night.”

“Please stop,” Jenny cries.

“I can’t.”

I manage to thoroughly make Jenny hate me by the time we reach the retreat which I would say is a job well done. Since it’s an hour until supper, we head back to our room. I rush over to the bed and flop down on it. “Oh, I know what my dreams will be filled with tonight.”

“Horses or balls. I’m not sure what you talked more about on the way back,” Lane says as he reaches down and feels the bed, then proceeds to accidentally sit on me.

“My face!” I cry.

“Oops.” He sounds more amused than sorry as he scoots next to me.

I pull him down so he’s lying beside me. Then I grab onto him, tossing my left leg over his and squeezing onto him. He wraps his muscular arms around me, dragging me in tight.

“Thank you so much for today, Lane. It was absolutely amazing.”

He smiles as he leans down and kisses the top of my head. “I’m really glad you enjoyed it.”

“I did. I loved it so much, and I loved it even more when I realized you were enjoying it. How could I have ended up with someone as perfect as you?”

“It’s because you’re love blind.”

I snort. “There’s not a thing about you that I don’t love.”

“I’m too *sweaty*, I didn’t turn the heating blanket on, I won’t let you have more animals, I make you *run*—”

“Shush, my sweet angel. Let’s just blissfully remember how sexy you were on the horse. Dammit!” I shout.

“What?”

“I forgot to have you take your shirt off and pose with the horse so I could get a picture!”

“There is no way I’d pose with the horse.”

“It’s an excuse to go back is what it is. I’ll ask her if we could have an extra half an hour for you to just pose without a shirt on. Do you think they’d lend us a pair of chaps? Ooh, shirtless with chaps on. Sounds *sexy*.”

He sighs. “I will not pose with the horse.”

“Yes, you will. I’ll make you. I’ll just accidentally tear your shirt off your body when you’re not paying attention.”

“Why do you act like that’s an easy feat?”

“Chew it off if I need to. When I’m determined I *will* get what I want.”

“Fine,” he says.

I grin at him. “Good.” I lean up on my elbow and kiss his lips gently. “And you will love it.”

“That’s taking it too far.”

“Love it.”

“I love it when you’re happy.”

His words bring a smile to my face. “I love you so much. You mean the world to me, Cowboy Lane.”

“I love you too, horse whisperer.”