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If she kissed him right now, would he be shocked? Back away? Return the kiss?

A bead of sweat rolled down his throat. She ached to lick it, taste his saltiness, draw his flavor onto her tongue. Her tongue flattened against the roof of her mouth. Her mouth opened. But he didn't give her the chance to kiss or taste him.

Forearms thick with muscle and sinew wrapped around her legs, swept her up and carried her over to the soft blanket holding their lunch. He knelt, letting her legs slide onto the ground.

“I am so embarrassed.” She dropped her head against his shoulder, not wanting to look into his eyes.

“Why? I’m the one who should have his ass kicked. I should have remembered what a first horseback ride can do to legs.” Putting two fingers under her chin, he lifted her head until their gazes met. He shook his head, looking disgusted. “I’m sorry, Caroline. Feel free to call me a few choice names. Dunderhead. Idiot. Whatever.”

She stared into his steel-blue eyes, her breathing coming in deep draws. For a minute, neither of them moved, and then she placed her hand on his face.

“Here are my choice names for you. Wonderful. Thoughtful. Caring. Do those work?” She smiled, ready to move on. He didn’t need to know any more about what she really thought about him. She dropped her hand from his face and made a point of looking around the picnic area. “This setting for lunch is perfect. I’m glad we rode over. I can’t believe how much of Uncle Angus’s ranch I’ve gotten to see today. It’s beautiful. I can see why you wanted it.”

He caught her hand and brought it to his mouth, leaving a kiss in the palm. For what seemed like eternity, they stared into each other’s eyes, neither making the move to come closer nor to move away. His warm breath blew on her face. With each inhale, she breathed in his scent, a mixture of woody cologne, leather and something that was just Travis. She’d made up her mind to kiss him just as her stomach took that exact moment to rumble loudly. He smiled, leaned over and gave her a quick kiss.

“Sounds like you could use lunch.”

She dropped her face into her hands and shook her head, laughing away her sexual frustration. Travis moved away far enough to get a hand on the basket handle and dragged it over.

“Let’s see what goodies we have in here.”

Strapped on the inside of the lid were two plates, knives and forks and two red-and-white plaid napkins.

“I’ll get the food out,” Caroline said. “See what we’ve got to drink.”

Travis stood and retrieved the cooler. Looking inside he said, “Looks like ice tea, water and some Cokes.” He grinned. “And I do believe there is a container of potato salad. You are going to love Henree’s potato salad.”

Caroline was pulling a container of hot biscuits out of the basket to set alongside the fried-chicken strips. “This all smells heavenly.” She drew in a deep breath. “And I’m starved.”

They loaded their own plates, grabbed bottles of water and settled in to eat. For the first few bites, Caroline couldn’t help but moan. Travis had been right. Henree was a wonderful cook.

“So, Travis,” Caroline said, wiping her mouth with her napkin. “Tell me about growing up here. Your family seems so close.”

He nodded and then washed the large bite of chicken and biscuit down with half the bottle of water. “We are. You know everybody except my brother, Cash, right? The one who’s on the PBR tour?”

“Never got a chance to meet him. Is Cash his real name?”

“No. A nickname, and Mom hates it.” He grinned. “Everybody thinks he got that name from all the rodeo winnings, but that’s not it at all. When we were growing up, there wasn’t a dare Cash wouldn’t take, as long as there was money involved.” He laughed. “He got pretty fast evading bulls, rolling unmanned tractors, you name it.”

Travis continued on with his stories as Caroline set her empty plate off the blanket on the grass and lay on her side, her head propped in her hand. She watched his luscious lips move as he talked. Watched his Adam’s apple slide up and down with each pull on his water. Enjoyed ogling the muscles in his arms as they bunched and flexed and showcased their beauty with each movement. As she watched him talk and gesture and laugh, her insides tumbled like clothes in a dryer...jumbled and hot. He was pure raw male, and the female inside her roared her approval.

Above, birds sang and flew from tree to tree. The sun painted muted stripes on the blanket and across Travis’s lap. With each breath, she drew in both the earthy scent of the grass beneath them mixed with Travis’s masculine aroma.

The combination hit her like a powerful aphrodisiac. She licked her lips and tried to slow her runaway heart.

This wasn't real life, she cautioned. This was a temporary arrangement known only to her and him. He was being a class act, a real friend today. *Don't do anything that could put a roadblock on that friendship.*

Satisfied she'd talked herself down off the I-am-going-to-jump-him ledge, she drew in a deep breath and sighed in total contentment.

Travis set his plate inside the basket and then lowered himself onto his side, lying face-to-face with Caroline. The end of his lips lifted into a smile as he brushed a few wayward strands of hair off her face. The roughness of his fingers ignited the nerve endings in her skin, reviving all those emotions she'd just squashed. She pressed against his hand and allowed her eyes to drift shut. She wanted to experience his touch without any visual distractions. Wanted to lock this feeling into her memories.

His scent grew stronger seconds before his full lips touched hers. She angled her head, wanting to get as much lip-to-lip flesh touching as possible. He wrapped his hand around her head and held her as he plunged his tongue through her open lips. She gave him full access to her mouth, welcoming his tongue's touch in every nook and cranny. Powerful electrical surges flashed through her body. The area between her thighs grew hot and damp.

He pulled away and she opened her eyes. His steel-blue eyes were dark with desire. His breaths came in jagged pants. Reaching out, she put her hand behind his head and pulled him back to her for another kiss. This time she took control, probing and tasting, licking his tongue, his teeth...allowed her tongue to convey her message. She wanted him.

Apparently message received, Travis scooted across the blanket and lowered Caroline onto her back. He moved his hand to her waist and squeezed. The heat from his palm burned through her shirt as he slid it from her waist to the curve of her breast. He fondled her flesh as a shudder wracked her body. Caroline slid her tongue in and out of his mouth, trying to say without words what she wanted...needed.

She draped her leg over his hard-as-a-tree-trunk thigh and tried to press her aching center to his body...anywhere. But he took control, moving between her legs, pressing the hard erection behind his zipper against her center. She moved to press back, moaned deep in her throat.

He found the tail of her shirt, slipped his hand under and touched her skin, igniting flash fires with each stroke of his fingers. Surely she would burst into flames.

Then he was gone. Rolled away and onto his back.

Stunned and embarrassed at her own guttural reactions to his attentions, she stared up into the sky.

“Caroline...”

“Don’t,” she snapped. “Don’t you dare apologize.”

“Okay. I won’t. But that wasn’t what I was going to say.”

She rolled onto her side and propped up her head. “What then?”

He turned his head to look at her and then turned away. “I was going to say I was too old for sex on hard ground.” He looked at her and grinned. “I was going to suggest a soft bed instead.”