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It was close to three in the morning by the time Paige finished work at Leo's bar. Every muscle in her body screamed in exhausted agony. Her eyes felt like someone had sucked out all the moisture and replaced it with sand. Her feet and hands cramped. She knew she'd be making drinks all night long in her dreams.

She let herself in and headed straight for the shower to wash away the smell of booze and sweat. It'd been a rough night, but then Thursday nights were usually cram packed with partiers and tonight had been no exception.

Giving Leo a hand when he was short-staffed or busy wasn't a problem. She'd do just about anything for her older brother. Besides, it wasn't as if her social life was booked solid. She didn't date. Didn't belong to social clubs. Wasn't part of the Whispering Springs Junior League. Wasn't involved in the women's groups at church. Crap. Now that she allowed herself to think about it, she didn't much of a life at all. How pitiful. She really needed to do something about that.

Bending at the waist, she slid her soapy cloth down her legs and for some reason the image of a couple of cowboy hats passing through the crowd flashed before her. A definite tingle hit the area between her thighs. When she'd gotten

a fast glimpse of Cash walking alongside his brother, a punch to her chest had slammed the air from her lungs. Damn Cash Montgomery. She hated that he could still make her breathless with need.

She dragged the wash cloth up her leg. Part of her had been disappointed that he was on the way out. Mostly, however, she'd been glad to see him leave. If last night was any indication of how much he was drinking these days, he didn't need to be in Leo's, or any bar. He'd been a party hound back when she'd known him better. She'd hoped he'd outgrown some of that. Sadly, it seemed he'd only gotten worse.

She stepped from the shower and snagged a towel from the linen storage. Her arms were almost too tired to rub the water off. Thank goodness, she had Friday off. Her to-do list was almost as long as her arm.

After putting on her favorite sleep shirt, she headed for her bed. Of course, Ruby had beaten her there and was curled into a tight ball on one of the pillows. Paige took the other one and crashed.

Friday passed in a blur of errands. She spent the evening at Leo's Bar and Grill, another nail in her I-have-no-life coffin. When she got home at midnight, she scooted her bed-hog kitten over and climbed under the covers.

That was the last thing she knew until the Saturday morning sun burned into her eyelids. Paige moaned and rolled away from the window, trying desperately to get back into her dream involving a cowboy, some rope and a feather bed. After noticing the small movement from her owner, Ruby wrapped her tiny fur body around Paige's head and turned on the purr machine.

Paige shoved Ruby off her head with a laugh. "I'm up. I'm up," she said, swinging her bare feet to the floor. She stretched her arms toward the ceiling and looked around her room and smiled. Her own room in her own house. No sharing the hot water with anyone. No dirty dishes in the sink that didn't belong to her. No bra required if she didn't feel like putting one on. In fact, she could walk around in nothing but her extra-large T-shirt that read Rope Me, Cowboy and a pair of panties. No robe needed. Freedom to do whatever she wanted.

Staying at her Uncle James's house for these past ten months had been great, but she'd never forgotten she was a guest, even when she'd been there alone. But this place? This was her place. Caroline had told her to make herself at home, and Paige intended to do just that.

After sliding her feet into a pair of scuffs, she headed for the kitchen to start a pot of coffee. She'd make a list of things she still needed to do and supplies she needed to buy while she got her morning caffeine fix. As the coffee dripped, she turned the oven on to preheat and started bacon frying in a large skillet.

She stole the first cup of java before the pot finished filling. Her eyebrows shot up with the first sip. Stout, to say the least. She added a little water to the coffee maker's reservoir then cracked open a can of biscuits. When the preheat bell chimed, she slid a cookie sheet loaded with biscuit dough into the hot oven.

She flipped the bacon and then sat at the table with a notepad and pencil. Other than the sizzle from the bacon and the slight tick of the coffee maker, the peace was comfortable. Leaning back in the high-backed kitchen chair, she stretched out her legs and took a long sip of black coffee.

Across the table and directly in front of her, the door to the back bedroom banged open and a half-dressed man ran out, a tennis racket raised high above his head, all while he yelled, "What the hell are you doing in this house?"

Paige jumped from her chair, sending it over backwards. She spat the coffee in her mouth across the table while at the same time tossing the mug of hot liquid at her attacker. The man leapt to the side, avoiding most of the scalding java.

"What are you doing here?" she gasped out, barely able to catch her breath from the sudden adrenaline jolt, not to mention the masculine sight standing in front of her. Her heart grabbed her ribs and rattled. She struggled to focus as her mind refused to accept what she was seeing.

Cash Montgomery wore only a pair of white boxer briefs. Angry long scars crisscrossed his chest, abdomen and arms. But even those couldn't diminish the impact of his naked, chiseled six-pack. Paige swallowed hard against the rising lust.

“I live here,” he answered, lowering his impromptu weapon to his side. Confusion covered his face and his brow furrowed. “Paige? Paige Ryan?”

She nodded. “That’d be me.”

His gaze roved down her body and back up to her face. “Why are you in my house? And why don’t you have on clothes? Not that I’m complaining, mind you.” A wolfish grin spread across his mouth. “Nice T-shirt slogan.”

Paige looked down and felt the flush of embarrassment as it climbed her neck and face. Both nipples protruded through the thin material far enough to be used as hat pegs. Her gaze flew back to him. “I’ll be right back.”

She hurried from the kitchen, tugging down the hem of her T-shirt over her purple panties. She could barely think about the need for a robe when her mind swirled like a blender, mixing her thoughts and emotions like a smoothie.

What was Cash Montgomery doing in her house?

And more importantly, why was she kind of excited to see him?