

One



“Come on, Dad. It’s called a frittata.” Sorrow scooped her egg, potato, and bacon creation onto a plate and held it out to her father. “It’s the same food *you* just ordered, just a different shape. See?” She prodded it with a fork. “Bacon, eggs, and hash browns, only all mixed up.”

Bear Bailey gave it a quick, skeptical examination. “*Mangled* up, more like. Nothing beats Sully’s scrambles.” He gave their fry cook a conspiratorial wink. “Ain’t that right, Sully?”

“Yes, sir.” Sully spared him a sharp nod before getting right back to work, his entire focus on a griddle jammed full of pancakes. The man found ways to express his independence, but going against his employer wasn’t one of them. Sorrow supposed you could take the man out of the military, but you couldn’t take the military out of the man.

“More for me then.” She stepped around Sully, but at the last minute, snuck a bit of her frittata onto a plate for him, giving the man a pointed look.

What her father didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him. He’d never change the menu at his Thirsty Bear Tavern, but Sorrow’s life would be dull if she didn’t steal her moments of quiet rebellion.

Sully just shook his head. He’d witnessed some version of this same father-daughter argument for years.

Speaking of arguments . . . “Where’s Mom?” Sorrow asked,

plopping onto a stool next to her dad. She'd overheard him railing on about something the night before, and it hadn't exactly sounded like a two-way conversation. The silence from her mother had been deafening—she might as well not even have been in the room. Not that her father was prone to yelling. Bear Bailey just liked to . . . hold court.

"She's at the front desk," he said, swabbing a piece of bacon in a puddle of syrup. We got two guests coming in this morning. Young couple from Sacramento. Snowshoe types, most like."

"They'll need a helluva lot more than snowshoes if this keeps up." Sully wiped his hands on his apron and leaned against the pass-through between kitchen and tavern.

Sorrow followed the direction of his gaze. What had started as a light dusting of snow that morning had thickened into dense flurries in the past half hour.

"It's really coming down now," her father said, swiveling on his stool to look out the window. "Looking like a slow one for business today."

"Maybe so." She felt light at the prospect. Maybe things would be calm enough for her to roast a nice cut of meat for dinner. Maybe even bake a pie for dessert. Her dad wouldn't be able to complain about *that*.

Helping run her family's lodge and tavern wasn't exactly Sorrow's dream come true, but her older sister and brother had fled the nest, and then her father had his stroke, and she'd been left holding the bag. Though her mother was a definite help, by no means was she strong enough to do all the work on her own. It was Sorrow's opinion that her mom too often let Dad call the shots anyhow.

With her siblings gone, family dinners gradually became a thing of the past, and increasingly it was Sully who served up their meals. For Sorrow, what'd started as an aversion to the man's "Turkey Loaf" blossomed into a passion for cooking.

It started slowly with tricks she picked up on TV cooking shows. Pasta dishes that relied on more than a jar of Ragú. Soups came next—she still marveled how you could add some meat, salt, and veggies to a pot of water and end up with the tastiest dinner ever.

Soon the kitchen became her refuge. She loved the creativity of it. Loved the different flavors. She was stuck in a small town, living with her parents, helping run their inn, but when she was in the kitchen, she could make enchiladas and take off for Mexico. Or whip up a simple bruschetta and whisk herself off to Italy. Though one of these days, she'd settle for whisking herself off to a fancy restaurant in the city, with white tablecloths and big goblets of wine.

She loved cooking so much, she could even imagine doing it professionally—and what a dream that would be. Not that she'd ever get the chance.

Alone in the kitchen, her problems dropped away. Cooking demanded focus—stirring before something burned, chopping the veggies just right—and it always managed to push all other concerns from her mind. And she had a lot of concerns.

Stupid stuff nagged her, and she hated all of it. Housekeeping issues, plumbing issues, money issues . . . *all* the issues that cropped up in the running of a creaky old lodge in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

“You sure I can't make you a side of bacon?” Sully's voice startled her from her thoughts.

“Hmm?” she asked, catching him watching her.

“Bacon. I can make it crispy. You used to like that.”

She gave him a warm smile. “Good memory.”

Sully had arrived in Sierra Falls when she was a kid, rolling into town on a Harley. He was a quiet sort, a restless and rambling soul, but theirs was a very live-and-let-live sort of town, and he'd taken to the place.

He stayed on as cook for the tavern attached to her family's Big Bear Lodge. Folks shortened his name from Tom Sullivan, so as not to confuse him with Tom Harlan, who ran the hardware store across town. And like that, it was as though Sully had been in Sierra Falls forever.

He wasn't exactly prone to sharing—Sorrow knew he'd done time in Vietnam and that he'd been married a few times, but that was about the extent of it. Even so, he was a good man, and she'd come to think of him as an adoptive uncle figure.

She shook her head. Time to get going. It was already 8:30,

and her days didn't so much begin, as they tended to explode out of control. "I'm good, Sully. But thanks."

Sorrow scraped the last of her breakfast to the center of the plate so she could mash it into the tines of her fork and savor every last bite. Next time, she'd try adding tomatoes—maybe sun-dried, so the eggs wouldn't get too runny.

She pushed away from the counter and busied her dishes, catching sight of the conditions outside. "I should get going."

They hadn't had much snow over the holidays, but now that it was January, winter seemed to have begun in earnest. It was accumulating fast out there. While a light dusting was great, too much snow on the road became a hassle, and she worried this was headed toward *hassle* territory.

Being in the foothills, they didn't get as much weather as Lake Tahoe to the northeast, but still, there was snow and ice aplenty, and it plagued her. Keeping the lodge standing was trouble enough—keeping the place warm and weatherproofed through the winter months consumed her. "Duty calls," she said with a sigh. "The floor's all yours, Dad."

Sully dinged the small bell on the window between tavern and kitchen. "Order up."

Bear looked around for the woman who worked as their bartender and waitress. "Where's Helen?"

"I'll bet she's stuck in this mess." Sorrow shook her head sympathetically. "She's got three kids at two different schools, and if it's a snow day . . ."

"Well, someone's gotta do her job." Her father began to stand.

She put a hand on his shoulder. "You sit, Dad. I got this one." Ever since the stroke, Bear hadn't moved around as easily, and Sorrow would just as soon give him the chance to finish his coffee in peace.

She grabbed the plates from the pass-through and served their handful of diners, all of them locals. Visitors to Sierra Falls were few. It was a small gold rush town, too remote to take advantage of the Tahoe resort area, and too far from Route 50 to catch any tourists coming from Sacramento or the San

Francisco Bay Area. It was too out there to be on the road to anywhere, really.

If her family hadn't owned the lodge and restaurant outright, they probably would've gone under years ago. They saw the occasional hikers, hunters, and fishermen, or folks who'd gotten stuck on the snowy mountain pass and been forced to double back and stay the night. But other than that, the Bailey family income relied mostly on serving predictable meat-and-potatoes dishes to the residents.

She served Sheriff Billy Preston last. He looked up from the morning paper as she approached. "Morning, Sorrow."

"Sheriff." She softened her greeting with a smile.

She liked the man—there was something quiet and maybe even a bit haunted in his eyes. She'd heard he was a widower, and she tried to meet those eyes whenever they spoke, tried to give him a genuine smile to compensate for whatever demons the man was harboring.

The sheriff hadn't lived there long, and time would tell if his troubled look ever went away. She hoped it would. She wished the man well. He'd gotten on her good side from the start by being one of the few whose first words to her hadn't been to remark about her name. *Sorrow* was a family name, but sometimes she felt saddled with it, as though in being called a thing, she might be fated to a life of it, like her hard-luck ancestors before her.

Her father always prattled on about those ancestors—grandmother, great-, and great-great-grandmothers Sorrow. They'd known hard lives that, according to Dad, she herself was destined to relive if she didn't marry right, or dress better, or hell, if she didn't clean out the garage and call the plumber.

"I've told you before, it's Billy." Though his words were gruff, his tone was polite, in that way that seemed unique to men in uniform. He took his plate from her hands, lightening her load. "Looks good." He added in a low voice, "But I'd have liked to try that frittata."

His conspiratorial tone surprised her. That he—or anyone—wanted to try her food was a kick. She smiled a real smile then.

She'd love to cook for people someday, and how kind of Billy to sense it.

She gave him a piercing gaze—was he truly sad or was it just a trick of those dark eyes? His smiles were genuine, and though they lit his face she wondered if they truly shone any light on his heart.

Those dark eyes narrowed, and she realized she'd been staring. She gave a little shake to her head. "If you want frittatas, you'll have to take it up with the man." She tilted her head toward her father. He was still seated at the bar, yammering at Sully about something, and he'd likely be in the same spot when she returned at noon for lunch. "Bear Bailey isn't a fan of change."

She didn't know Billy Preston well, and she wasn't interested in him in *that* way—she had a boyfriend after all—but she enjoyed how they always exchanged a few words. He'd been a lieutenant in the Oakland PD before being recruited as sheriff for Sierra Falls, and she loved his occasional mention of big-city life.

An idea hit her. "Hold on," she said, and darted back into the kitchen. She'd baked bread the night before, and the last thing she needed was that many carbs lying around.

She returned, handing him a small foil-wrapped bundle. "It's not a frittata, but my apple cinnamon bread is a close second."

"Sorry," he deadpanned, patting his belly. "We law enforcement officers only eat donuts."

"Well . . ." Biting back a grin, she pulled the bread out of his reach, doing her best to look offended. "See if I ever try to feed *you* again."

"On second thought, it smells too good." He laughed and snatched it from her hands. "Give me that."

She laughed with him, not caring that the others were looking. It was gratifying that she'd been the one to draw out the humor. For the first time that day, the muscles in her shoulders felt like they might relax.

A hideous sound caused her to seize right back up again.

Outside, there was the long whine of creaking timber, followed by a loud crash.

She and the sheriff locked eyes. For the flicker of a moment, a feeling of comfort cut to her heart, and Sorrow was grateful she wasn't in it alone.

Which was crazy, of course. She didn't even know the man.

But those thoughts came and went in the blink of an eye, and she was dashing out the door, Billy and the rest of their patrons hot on her heels.

Two



Billy Preston's first thought was that somebody had crashed a car into a tree. His second was of his wife.

Every other thought was.

Only this time, he felt almost guilty when the memories of her slammed back into his mind. He'd been sharing a few friendly jokes with a pretty woman—as though he'd forgotten his past and were a regular guy.

But he wasn't a regular guy. Three years ago, his wife had been struck and killed by a bus while biking to work. And he hadn't been there for her.

There was never any predicting what would return him to that day. No knowing when the odd questions would creep in to haunt him. Things like, what had *she* eaten for breakfast that day? Had *she* looked at the newspaper before she'd left that morning? And a desperate curiosity would seize him, plague him.

This time, it was the sound of crashing from outside that called her back.

Normally, he held a shield in place through the daylight hours. It let him deflect those bad thoughts, hoarding them for the wee hours. But he'd met Sorrow's eyes, and the raw connection there startled him. It shattered his guard, sending his mind spinning for an instant.

Spinning back to those days when he drove his wife to work every day. Every day except for *that* day. He'd been up late the night before with paperwork—police did reams more of it than they showed on TV—and Keri had insisted he snag the extra twenty minutes of sleep.

A beat cop delivered the news hours later, just as he was racing out to grab a bite for lunch. It'd taken that long to identify Keri, to track him down as her next of kin.

While he'd been showering, and swilling back the rest of his tepid coffee, contemplating whether or not he could get away with skipping his morning shave, his wife had been on the side of the road, dying. While he'd been bitching to the guys about paperwork, she was already gone.

He'd endured six months of personal leave, a few years of phoning it in, and countless hours at the gym lifting till the muscles in his arms trembled, before an old buddy hooked him up. The small town of Sierra Falls had lost the sheriff they'd known for decades, and did Billy want to step in to fill his shoes? Like that, he was tapped for the ballot, running uncontested, and before he knew it, he was packing up his belongings and heading to the mountains.

He'd been anxious to get away from the city, from the reminders that lurked everywhere, and now, living in the shadow of the Sierra Nevadas, a part of Billy was able to find some peace.

The other parts, he simply shut down.

Sharing that moment with Sorrow had unsettled him. He'd had the eerie feeling that, locking eyes as they had, she could see into his soul, reading his guilt, his pain.

Billy shoved such silly notions to the back of his mind. He bolted up from his booth. Ran out the door.

Sheriff once more.

He and Sorrow stood shoulder-to-shoulder, and it took only a second to realize what'd happened. A tree branch had crashed through the roof of the Big Bear Lodge.

Billy shook his head slowly. A goodly chunk of the roof had caved in, and it was now one devastated mass of snow, timber, and roofing. If he craned his neck just right, he could see through the hole clear to the attic window on the other side.

“Oh, shh”—Sorrow swallowed the tail end of the curse—“sugar.”

“Go ahead and say it. Looks like you could use a good round of swearing.” It seemed the woman managed most every aspect of her family’s business. He guessed this would fall square on her shoulders, too.

Her arms were crossed tightly across her chest, like she might fly apart if she let go. “It’s the *Sorrow* thing.”

“The what?” If she was speaking about herself in the third person, maybe she was more upset than he’d realized.

“It’s my luck. The *Sorrow* luck. All the women in my family who’ve been named *Sorrow* have had atrocious luck. With men. With money. With pretty much everything. Why they keep using that damned name is beyond me.”

Edith Bailey burst from the lodge, a crocheted shawl clutched at her chest. “What on earth—?”

“The roof.” Sorrow spared the briefest glance for her mother then looked back at the devastation. “How much is *this* going to cost?”

They all stepped closer. Billy rested a hand on the pine towering overhead. Peering up into the branches, he said, “Looks like you’ve got some dead branches.”

“I knew we needed to trim the deadwood.” Sorrow pinned her mom with a look. “I told him we needed to trim the deadwood.”

Billy didn’t need to ask to guess that by *him* she’d meant her father, but he knew to mind his own business. Instead, he backed up, shaking clumps of snow from a row of low branches. “This is some wet snow. And on top of last week’s storm? Too heavy, even for this gorgeous old giant.”

Sorrow’s mother remained silent, chewing on her thumbnail.

He hardly knew the Bailey family, but at that moment, her tense presence seemed like the last thing Sorrow needed. Putting his hand at Edith’s back, he gently guided her back toward the door. “You’re going catch a chill, ma’am. I can help your daughter while you go find yourself a proper coat.”

Edith stopped in her tracks. “Oh good Lord, the hope chests.” In a panic, she called to Sorrow, “Your grandmother’s

trunks. The attic will get soaked. You've got to go take care of all the trunks."

"We'll take care of it." Billy continued to herd her back inside, then returned to Sorrow's side. "What trunks?"

"There's ten tons of junk in the attic. As if I don't have enough on my plate." She turned, trudging toward the lodge entrance.

The woman looked suddenly so drawn, so alone, Billy couldn't help himself from falling into step with her. "Can I help?"

As she opened her mouth to reply, the wind gusted, enveloping them in a cloud of white. He instinctively reached for her, taking her arm to stop her. It was silly—the cars in the lot were parked, there were no more snow-laden branches overhead, it was perfectly safe—but he couldn't stop himself.

They stood like that for a frozen moment. Sunlight caught the snow and it sparkled as it swirled around them. It kissed the fabric of his shirt, damp and clinging to his shoulders.

When the cloud settled, he found Sorrow's gaze on him. Watery light cut through the branches and reflected off the snow, and he saw that her eyes were more green than blue.

Guilt speared him, and he pulled his hand back abruptly. He felt like he was cheating on his wife. Logically, he knew that was ridiculous, but something in his chest told him otherwise.

There was a brief, awkward silence, and then they both spoke at once.

"What do—"

"How is—"

They each huffed out a humorless laugh. He tried to smile, but suspected he didn't quite manage it.

Crossing her arms over her chest, she gave a self-deprecating shrug. "Just my luck, huh?"

He cleared his throat, anxious to be back to business. "It might not be so bad."

They studied the damage. Snow was still falling, steady and quiet, drifting into the attic in a way that seemed almost diligent.

"Or not," he said, correcting himself.

“Yeah.” Pain flickered across her face, before she schooled it to a careful, bland half smile. “It’s kinda bad.”

He put aside his own pain for a moment, confronted with hers. “Seriously, Sorrow. Are you okay?”

She sighed. “Complaining won’t stop the snow.”

She was no nonsense. He appreciated that. Just then, he didn’t think he could deal with an overwrought female. “What can I do to help?”

“Unless you’re a roofer, there’s nothing you *can* do.” She bit her lip, deep in thought. Something about it made her seem so alone. “Damien—he’s my . . . friend—he’s got contacts.”

Damien. Billy recognized the name and guessed it was the good-looking guy he’d seen around with her. He’d spotted the two of them doing things like eating lunch, or driving in his car, headed out of town.

Clearly, more than friends.

Billy wanted to help. He almost offered to help her sort through the attic. But he reminded himself it wasn’t his place. Sorrow already had a man to help her, while Billy had work to do.

They said their good-byes, and he headed back to the tavern. He needed to pay his bill and get back to it. And then he’d push this strange episode from his mind.

Three



Sorrow had sent the sheriff on his way. Something about the look on his face made her feel pitiable, and she hated that feeling. She might need help, but she wasn't helpless.

She especially didn't want *him* thinking of her in that light. Billy Preston was once a big shot police lieutenant in a major city, and she hated feeling like she might be a small-town yokel in comparison.

And anyway, she had a man in her life already, and he *loved* to help. Maybe it was because Damien was stuck in a suit, sitting behind a desk at his family's business, but he seemed to relish coming to her aid as much as any knight of old had loved crusading on a white horse.

Whatever the reason, he was always happy to roll up his sleeves and do things like chop wood, or fix a clogged drain, or perform any of a variety of manly man tasks she might need. Sometimes he was a little *too* happy about it, smothering her with his manly manness when she didn't necessarily need it.

Though there was one task she liked him to perform, and she blushed to think of it. A wistful sigh escaped her. She sure could use a heaping dose of *that* sort of help right about now. But she pushed the thought aside—this latest crisis was a doozy. She barely had time to shower these days, much less

canoodle with Damien, no matter how yummy he looked in his suit.

She sat on an old stool. Staring blindly at the attic wreckage, she phoned him.

“Hey, Bailey,” he said, answering his cell the way he always did when she called. He had a smile in his voice, and it was a relief to hear him, even though she never did love his penchant for calling her by her last name. But it was a habit he’d started in middle school, and those things died hard.

“Hey yourself.” She heard background noise, like the sound of wind and gears shifting. She frowned. “Are you driving?”

He paused, hesitated. “Maybe.”

“Oh, Damien, you know I hate when you talk and drive.” Even as she said it, she hated even more the naggy sound of her own voice. But he could be so reckless sometimes, acting the bad boy, and she had enough troubles without him wrecking his car. “God forbid,” she muttered, putting such thoughts to rest.

“Relax. I’m using that ear thing you got me.”

She held her tongue for a moment, and decided she’d pretend to believe him. “Okay.”

“What’s up? We’re still on for tonight, right?”

She heard the sounds of spitting gravel and the whine of a rapidly downshifting engine. He drove like an eight-year-old playing with Hot Wheels, but she’d vowed not to henpeck. Instead, she told him, “It’s the roof.”

“The what, babe?” He cut the engine, and she heard the dinging of the opened car door. “Tell me.”

Hearing the focus in Damien’s voice, she completely forgave and forgot his crazy driving. He’d work his magic and save the day. She knew a momentary pang—was she taking him for granted?—but she nudged away the feeling. Sorrow was strong and could handle what came her way, but finding a roofer willing to work in this weather was another thing entirely. And Damien, with one phone call, always managed to pull a rabbit out of his hat.

“The roof,” she repeated, getting up and wandering to the center of the attic where she could stand fully upright. Snow was blowing in, and she shielded a hand over her eyes, squinting

against it. “A branch from that old pine smashed through, into the attic.”

“Yeah, it was dumping pretty hard this morning,” Damien said, and she heard his car door slam. “I told your dad he needed to cut back that tree.”

“I know, I know. But what Bear wants—”

“Bear gets,” he finished, with an irreverent laugh.

Everyone in Sierra Falls loved her father, but they also knew how set in his ways the man had become. As far as Bear Bailey was concerned, there was only one way to run the Big Bear Lodge and Thirsty Bear Tavern, and it was *his* way.

“Don’t you worry,” Damien said. “We’ll have you patched in time for happy hour. What’s the damage?”

She spun in a circle, assessing. Thankfully the snow was slowing, but the sun was coming out and the temp was rising, and snowmelt had already begun to drip in a steady *plop-plop* on the attic floor.

Sometimes she didn’t want her boyfriend to keep swooping in to save the day—but this was definitely not one of those times.

“It’s pretty bad.” Snow piled in little drifts around the room, while the lodge’s ambient heat had puddles forming in random cracks and valleys along the warped timber-plank flooring. “I called Jack Jessup, but he said he’s booked solid and can’t come out till next week.”

“I’ll call him,” he said, and she knew that was enough to settle it. Damien Simmons was the son of Dabney Simmons, CEO of Simmons Timber, a company that provided the bread, butter, and livelihood for much of their town. The Simmons clan owned much of the land in Sierra Falls—if someone in the family wanted a roof patched, it got patched.

“Thanks, Damien.”

“My pleasure, Bailey. I’ll be sure to get my reward later.”

He laughed suggestively just as he clicked off, and the sound reverberated in her belly, her body’s response instant. It wasn’t love she felt for him—at least she didn’t think it was—but that didn’t matter. If she ever wondered why she was with the guy, all she had to do was see him in person, and . . . *yowza*.

Damien had a knack with women—he’d had it as a teenager,

and he had it in spades now. And though it felt wonderful to be the center of his attention, there was something about it she didn't trust. Maybe it was leftover from high school, when he hadn't spared her the time of day.

But he was hot, she was lonely, and besides, everyone in the town expected it. He'd been out of her league for years, but now that she was one of the few from their class who either hadn't left town or wasn't married, everyone expected her to fall head over heels for "the Simmons boy."

Everybody knew him, of course. He was the pride and joy of the Simmons family. Oddly, that was one of the things that appealed to her. Not that he had money, though she sure could've used a whole lot more of that in her world. But Damien understood family expectations and responsibilities, and she liked that. Sorrow had family obligations coming out of her ears.

She just wished he weren't so heavy-handed with her sometimes. He took care of business for his family, but she didn't necessarily like the feeling that she was an obligation for him to deal with, too.

She raked a hand through her hair. "Damien, Damien," she murmured, not quite sure what to do with him. But now it was time to get back to business.

Knowing Damien, the roofer would be there within the hour. In the meantime, she might as well do as her mom asked and rifle through the generations of old junk not valuable enough to have a place in the rest of the house.

"What a disaster." She kicked at one of the old trunks. It was the "hope chest" of one of the women on her dad's side. If it'd belonged to one of the Sorrows in his family tree, it was no wonder the thing was still filled with dusty and forgotten hopes.

She nudged it from the wall to see how even after death, these women had bad luck. The sides were already rippling and peeling, the wood turning cherry-red with damp. Getting ruined on her watch.

"My apologies, Grandma Sorrow. Or old Auntie Sorrow. Or whoever you were." Sinking to her knees, she jiggled the old hinge, trying to unfasten it despite years of rust.

"Too bad they didn't name *Laura* after you," she grumbled.

Why her parents hadn't saddled her big sister with the name Sorrow was beyond her. If they had, maybe *Laura* would be the one kneeling there in a freezing puddle. "If I'd had a different name, then maybe *I'd* be the one off gallivanting around California. I'd be the one with the fancy job and car."

But no, her siblings hadn't been able to run out of Sierra Falls fast enough, abandoning her with things like leaking roofs and rotting trunks. "Maybe I'll find some treasure and then *I* can have *my* turn."

She finally pried open the lid, and was hit by a wave of mildew and mothballs. "Oh, jeez." She rubbed at the twinge in her nose, looked up at the bright hole in the roof to catch a sneeze. She was going to be sneezing all day, she knew it.

"All right," she muttered, digging through the contents in search of whatever needed saving first. "Gotta start somewhere."

Family photos, important papers—she went through each trunk, systematically setting aside anything that couldn't be washed or replaced. Most of it was junk, though. Her father had inherited the lodge from his father, who got it from his father, and so on, and much of this stuff was the forgotten, meaningless bits of life that accumulated when you weren't paying attention. Old ledgers, musty afghans, mildewed picture frames, a warped guitar . . . she hoped to convince her parents to toss it all in the Dumpster, but knowing Bear and Edith, she feared it was a pipe dream.

"Seriously?" she exclaimed as she opened an old Kinney shoebox, revealing stacks of ancient receipts. She shoved the whole thing into a paper bag, planning to sneak it and the rest of the worthless papers to the recycling center in Silver City. "Do they seriously need this stuff?"

What she saw at the bottom gave her pause, though. The prettiest lace shawl, with ivory crewelwork, yellowed to a color that told her it'd been at the bottom of the trunk for a long time. She pulled it out, afraid the cheap wood might bleed color onto it.

Something tumbled from the shawl, and she scooped it up. A stack of letters. She held them up to catch the light. "Hello there."

They were as yellowed as the linen, but otherwise miraculously spared of damage, still bound by a strand of rickrack gone crispy with age. The handwriting was old-fashioned spidery loops, and she got a shiver, knowing in her bones that she held a piece of history. A very intimate piece of history.

Carefully, she slid off the ribbon and unfolded the first page. The writing was dense, but two lines at the end popped out:

*Sincerely, and ever your Loving,
Sorrow*

“Well, what do you know?” She’d known all her life that hers was a family name, but seeing it written by the owner’s own hand felt thrillingly personal. “Which Sorrow were you?”

She plopped onto her bottom. An icy puddle seeped into the seat of her jeans, but she didn’t care. She’d read the date at the top of the letter—1851. This could be from none other than her three-times great-grandmother, the first and saddest Sorrow of them all, Sorrow Crabtree.