

Bree Katz

Love Knows Only Legal Bounds

It was a perfectly euphoric kind of love, the storybook kind of love. The kind of love where you just can't believe this could ever be happening to you, it seems so content, so peaceful, so engaging and enthralling. The kind of love you believed happened every time a handsome man met a beautiful woman, the kind of love you affirmed every time you saw a Disney movie, then disparaged as you got to be an angsty teenager, then started to believe in cautiously as a young adult in it for the first time. Then that blew away like so many tumbleweeds on a dusty roadway out west, and the second time around, it was the kind of love that reminded you of a perfectly spherical soap bubble, effervescent and full of gleaming iridescence, and you knew it was going to pop and leave little flecks of soap all over your kitchen sink with the invasion of the next scummy, caked-on dish from last night's dinner.

That dish was about to burst Sylvie's bubble.

"Happy first anniversary, mah love," Kyle crooned, making Sylvie laugh with his put-on Texas twang. They clinked wine glasses across the table.

"To...aw, hell, I've always been terrible at this," she giggled.

“I think a simple, ‘To us!’ will do nicely,” he responded.

“I think you’re right!”

The glasses clinked again. They took a gulp of their wine, eying each other half-self-consciously, then laughing some more as they took a second gulp.

“You keep that up, you’ll be under the table in no time,” she teased.

“Yeah, tell me about it. You mountain folk. You get your high altitudes and your resistance to—to oxygen, or whatever the hell it is—“

“And the dehydration. Don’t forget, we handle dehydration pretty damn well.”

“Yeah, your dehydration. And your assumption that you can go getting into drinking contests with anyone and everyone.”

“Sure we can. Because we always win.” She took another sip and wagged her tongue at him. “And don’t forget about the subsequent pissing contests, while you’re at it.”

“Right, right. But of course.” The calamari arrived. They dug in.

Kyle glanced up from his almost meditative stare at the fried seafood. “You know, we’ve been together for a year,” he began.

Sylvie swallowed a piece of calamari, then dabbed daintily at her lips—an almost futile gesture, seeing as how, per usual, she had gotten some of the sauce in her hair. “So you keep reminding me.” She tugged at the amber necklace he had given her in deference to her metal allergies and flicked a finger at the wine glass—not the most expensive on the menu, perhaps, but certainly a substantial investment from a guy fresh out of a master's program trying to hit the big time in DC. “What occasioned this reminder, besides the occasion itself?”

"Eh, well...I know you're not much for talking about your family, and I'm not asking you to," he added hastily as she bristled. "It's just that...well, I do talk to my parents and sister on a regular basis, and--how to put this out? I've told them all about this wonderful girl I met, and that I really like her, and so, of course, they want to meet her."

Sylvie refilled her glass and took a sip. "Wow. Sounds terrific. Do I get to meet her, too?"

It got a laugh out of Kyle. "But, seriously..."

"No, no. Actually, it sounds like fun! And fret not. I'm great with parents. Awesome, someone less modest might say. In fact, after some of my prior relationships ended, my boyfriends got the apartment, the furniture, and the CDs, but I got their families!"

He smiled hesitantly. Sylvie cursed herself for violating the no-mentioning-past-boyfriends-at-the-dinner-table rule she assumed existed. "I'd love to meet your parents, in short," she continued smoothly. "And I promise, I'll even check my dirty sheep jokes at the door."

"I appreciate the thought. But you probably don't even have to—they might like it. If you're up for it, we've got tickets two weekends from now to visit them in Ralston, North Dakota. Sheep joke capital of the United States."

She had started with the calamari again, but midway through his statement, she gagged a little, grabbed her wine glass, and managed to force a bit of the wine down before starting an earnest coughing fit. "North Dakota," she gasped.

He grabbed a napkin, making noises of concern as he tried to pat her back across the table. "Something wrong?" he queried once the fit subsided.

She shook her head and grabbed her wineglass. "Nope, absolutely nothing at all." She downed her glass, poured herself some more. Trying to fill the silence that had just set in, she smiled brazenly at him and chortled, "We real sheep ranchers just have a rather low opinion of impostors, that's all. But for your sake, I'll be sure to keep my jokes about plain, boring Plains folk to a minimum during the visit."

He laughed appreciatively and got started on something about his hometown, spending the better part of the rest of dinner eagerly filling her in on the geography, the people, and the historical background of Ralston. He must've gotten pretty caught up in it—apparently, he never once noticed her biting her lip and staring vacantly, concerned about matters far more grave than making inappropriate jokes and derogatory comments at North Dakoters' expense.

* * *

See, ten years ago, Sylvie had indeed been full of hopes and ambitions far beyond the three-hundred person Wyoming town in which she grew up. As her high school valedictorian (none too hard to accomplish in a class of twenty-three people, most of whom needed two to three tries to put their pants on the right limbs), she had gotten accepted to Harvard and Princeton. Those institutions' refusal to offer her scholarships or aid, however, had led her to Arizona State University, where the school was so eager to add a National Merit Scholarship Finalist to their rolls that they gave her a free ride.

She coasted through her first year, applying her few advanced placement credits wisely to avoid general education requirements, and settling tentatively on psychology as a major. What the hell, she thought as she signed the declaration form, I've been privately trying to figure out why my high school friends were so stupid for years.

But the less-grounded aspects of her major soon bothered her, and in her third semester, she decided to flesh her education out with a course called Practical Applications of Law. Really, she figured, how much could you argue with dry legalese, even if you didn't fall asleep upon hearing it?

As she found out, she certainly couldn't argue with the teaching assistant largely responsible for lecturing the class. Only a year older than she was, he had thick, dark hair, sparkling blue eyes, and a smile that could light up a lonely Wyoming highway at the dead of night. She attended his office hours more than was probably necessary, eventually taking

up so much of the other students' time that she and the TA had no choice but to discuss her pointed legal questions over coffee. Sometimes the questions would extend so long that they just had to grab dinner, then they'd find other things to talk about besides class, then those off-topic discussions would have to be continued in his spacious Tempe condo (she having to share a two-bedroom apartment with three other women, of course)...

She didn't drop her psychology major entirely. The sudden rush of feelings prompted a nasty case of intern syndrome, and she spent evenings she wasn't with Jerome frantically searching her textbooks for some diagnosis that would explain all her symptoms. One night, after having kept the light on well past four in the morning, her roommate rose up on one elbow and snippily asked if she were studying for finals already.

"No," Sylvie sighed, "but I think I've got obsessive-compulsive disorder, or maybe I'm a borderline personality. Maybe I'm codependent!"

"Maybe you're in love. Either shut off that light or go read in the living room."

The roommate rolled over and went back to sleep, but it would have done little good even if Sylvie had shut out the light immediately. You could see the cartoon light bulb click on above her head.

Psychological curiosity cured, she went on to throw herself eagerly into the wonderful world of law. Within a semester, she had caught up to Jerome's level, and by the beginning of her junior year, they were taking the same classes. Not all of these classes were particularly interesting, however, so to stay awake, they would pass notes back and forth as though it were elementary school all over again, only with condoms in lieu of cootie shots.

A lecture in their Federal Law class, however, held their attention.

"This," announced their TA, an overexuberant fellow, "is Sonny D."

A pitbull with heart-shaped sunglasses appeared on the projector.

"Sonny D decides to commit a robbery."

"With those sunglasses, he'll be marked in an instant," Sylvie scribbled.

"Never mind the pertinent fact that he's a dog," Jerome wrote back.

The TA continued: "Sonny D and his friends get in a car, cross state lines, and rob a bank just over the border in New Mexico. Is this a federal offense?"

Sylvie scribbled to Jerome, "Yes, because he was driving with a dog license, not a driver's license!"

"At least they both start with D," came Jerome's response.

"Well, yeah, 'cause Sonny D crossed state lines. Duh," remarked a bleached blonde in the back, with a roll of her eyes and a snap of her gum.

"Actually, that's precisely the question we have to ask ourselves: is it actually a federal offense just because it crossed state lines?"

"Is this a trick question?" asked a boy in the front row.

The TA grinned and pulled up another slide.

"It is NOT a federal offense if ANY of these criteria are not met:

1. The bank was not FDIC insured.
2. There was no excessive force, injury, or death caused in the commission of the robbery.
3. There was no appearance of a dangerous weapon present at the time of the robbery."

The class sat silently for a moment. Then Sylvie's pen scratched on the paper she and Jerome shared: "So, Bonnie and Clyde reenactment?"

Jerome, in turn, snickered as thoughtfully as one can snicker.

That weekend, Jerome had a party in his condo. Two girls were laughing their asses off in a corner while Jonathan, their resident sixties holdout, pointed at the girls and said, "See? Do they look like dangerous criminals to you? The man's tryin' to keep us off pot because it makes us too violent! Do you see violence on those faces?"

The girls giggled more and felt around for each others' waists in a pitiful attempt at a hug.

Jerome squinted and poured another drink for Sylvie. She accepted with a halfhearted upturn of her wrist and drank half in one gulp, frowning because she could feel the world turning but knew it wasn't turning the right way. Jerome gave what he probably thought was an ironic laugh.

"This how you planned to spend the weekend?"

"Planned? Isn't this how we always spend the weekends? Isn't that the beauty of it, that we don't have to plan?"

He sipped his drink and frowned.

"I mean..." She squinted at her drink, not sure if there actually was a lemon in there or if she had moved on to the hallucinatory phase. "Babe, I don't care about...plans...all that shit." She took another gulp. "I just wanna spend time with you, that's all."

He stared at some point above and to the left of her head. "Spend time with me."

She nodded.

"You know what I want?"

She shook her head.

"I wanna be...I wanna be independent."

She gestured at the living room, spilling her drink in the process. "This's not independent 'nough?"

"It's my parents' money. It's all my parents. Every time goddamn Mother asks for something--" He fell to his knees, head bowed in mock reverence.

"Boy's had too much to drink," cried Jonathan, "get him some pot to take the edge off!"

Jerome rose in disgust. "I...you and I...we deserve better. You and I--we deserve more. We should--we should be king and queen of the world, you and I!"

"Kings and queens died with Paul Revere or some crap like that. And anyway, we wouldn't be in line."

"For the crapper?" asked Jonathan, who had stumbled past on his way to that particular facility.

"No! For the throne!"

Jonathan puzzled that over as he stumbled to the front hall closet.

"You know," Jerome mused, frowning at his empty glass, "Fuck the royalty. I mean, fuck 'em. All you need to live like the king of your little shitpile nowadays is a little cash flow. So we're going to do it, you and me." He grabbed her hand.

"S'it 'you and me' or 'you and I'?"

He ignored her as he raised her hand in the air, nearly knocking her off balance. "Hey guys! Toast here!"

"French toast?" yelled one of the stoned girls.

"To Sylvie and me!"

Jonathan, who'd just emerged from the closet, raised his still-unzipped penis in appreciation.

"Folks, we're going to rob a bank!"

Even the girls looked up briefly. But they started laughing again as Jonathan stumbled over to them and none-too-subtly seated himself between them.

Jerome surveyed the room in disgust. "I'm going to bed," he announced to no one in particular, as Sylvie had already passed out on the kitchen table.

You'd think it would have passed into the ether like all drunk conversations, but starting the next day, Jerome had pulled out a phone book and was looking up names of local banks, seeing if they had any branches elsewhere--"You know," he told Sylvie with a disarming smile, "because they're probably federally insured if they're across state lines."

Sylvie played along, pulling out maps of Utah, Colorado, North Dakota.

"North Dakota?" Jerome frowned.

"Yes, well, I might have reason to be in the other two at some point. Who the hell goes to North Dakota, though?"

He conceded the point. Sometime in the next week, he'd managed to obtain a phone book for that state. It fit in a standard yellow mailing envelope.

"Still thick compared to Wyoming," Sylvie murmured.

"Big states, no people," Jerome replied, flipping through pages. "Okay, whoops, too far...ummm, cattle prods, car repair, cars, bunting, bomb shelters, benchmaking...ah, here we go. Banks!"

They found three banks with only one branch open in the entire state. Sylvie got to place the calls.

"Um, yes, hello," she creaked, in a voice too high pitched even for the old fart she meant to imitate, "Yes, I'm a little, uh, concerned about my benefits since my husband died—oh, dear, well, thank you, but I'm sure it wasn't your fault—but I thought, perhaps, my grandson's talked me into the wonders of these newfangled systems you call banks—Yes, in my day, you just couldn't trust the confounded things. Yes, I'm thinking maybe I should put my money in yours, but if you don't mind, I've a few questions. Oh, thank you. Yes, well, first off—heh, my grandson told me to ask this, now—are you FDIC insured? Oh, you are? Well...thank you, then. Thank you very much. I'll, uh, think about this."

The same went for the second bank, but the third on the list was an independent operator, five years in the business, and no Federal Deposit protection. Sylvie thanked them in a hushed murmur, put the phone back in its cradle, and stared at Jerome with tire rim-wide eyes.

“Wow. Huh.” He sucked his lower lip. “I didn’t know banks could be in business without that guarantee.”

“Yeah, the whole Bonnie and Clyde thing.”

“Not to mention John Dillinger.”

They stared at each other some more.

“You know,” he laughed awkwardly, “I wasn’t actually expecting us to find a bank that, well...”

“Yeah, no. I mean, you were right. I thought they all had to be, well, insured.” She glanced off. “So I guess I mean you weren’t right.”

He tried to look stern, concerned, anything, but his face fell apart. Soon they were both doubled over his kitchen counter, laughing as recklessly as their stoned partygoers.

So on this whim, they spent the week in the lull between the end of classes and finals prepping heatedly. He bought an old junker off a dazed looking stoner at a Scottsdale gas station, offering to pay in cash for \$100 off the listed price, and the kid accepted with no questions asked. In the middle of the night, they snuck into the parking lot by the campus library and found the car of a boy Sylvie had been on a nightmarish date with. Sylvie played lookout as Jerome removed the boy’s license plates. They stuck the plates on the junker, found some baggy black sweatshirts, pants, and canvas shoes at Goodwill, and with no time left to put off, loaded maps, snacks, and water bottles into the junker. The weekend before finals, they were on their way to North Dakota.

They stopped for gas when needed, but otherwise made the junker their abode. On the way, they listened to music, scowled at the news (“And in local affairs, a cow crossing County Road 97 nearly caused a traffic accident today. Bob Resterton of Kiowa says he almost ran his truck into a ditch after he swerved to avoid neighbor Jim Thompson’s prize Hereford...”), and forced out jokes and light conversation.

All too soon, they arrived in a small town on the state's southern border. ("Couldn't we just technically call this area Mid-Dakota?" Sylvie wondered aloud.) They circled the bank once, Jerome ready to pull in, but Sylvie expressed a sudden urge to use the ladies' room in the gas station down the street. Jerome shook his head.

"Might have cameras in the lot."

"Okay, well, how 'bout a nice, tall bush, then?"

Once Sylvie had spent five minutes squatting behind a bush with no gains, she reluctantly got back in the car. Jerome pulled into the bank's parking lot too quickly. He looked at Sylvie and began, "You know, it's been a fun idea and all, but—"

But, but, but. She had already pulled the bandanna over the lower half of her face, the sweatshirt's hood low over her forehead, and the brick firmly in hand, albeit buried in her front pocket. She was out the door.

Inside, she told herself it wasn't real. She could tell herself that because she fully believed it. She wasn't really going up to the counter and handing the one teller on duty a word-processed note explaining that people were going to get hurt if the teller didn't open all the cash drawers and empty the contents into Sylvie's repurposed pillowcase. It couldn't be real—wouldn't she feel something when the teller, more with resignation than panic, actually went through the drawers and filled Sylvie's sack with cash? Wouldn't Sylvie ordinarily have stopped with the cash and not pointed brusquely to the vaults and safety-deposit boxes? Wouldn't she typically have decided to turn away once she saw the middle-aged woman standing forlornly near those safety-deposit boxes, ready to go visit some of Great-Grandma's most valued and valuable belongings? Surely when awake, she wouldn't have wagged her brick threateningly at the lady, forcing her to open her box, reaching in with a ski-gloved hand to scoop out necklaces, bracelets, rings, watches, a little store of cash.

"That was all my great-grandmother could carry with her out of Latvia," the lady accused Sylvie, tears already coursing down her face. And Sylvie—well, this obviously wasn't really her. The real her would have made some flip

comment about all the rest of the shit this great-grandma must have been carrying around the watch and laughing at the woman's evident misunderstanding of the joke. As it was, she finished emptying the box and ran out, meeting Jerome down the road. They made the state border in half an hour, slowing down only for the inevitable state trooper who crossed their path, then relaxed the rest of the way home.

In the end, when all was sold and squirreled away, they netted \$9,000—not exactly enough to live the independent, carefree lifestyles they'd hoped for, but not paltry on a college student's desires, either. It was enough, at any rate, to help Sylvie secure work and internships in Europe and Canada for the next summers, thus avoiding that small Wyoming town for the rest of college, and the remainder of her share covered moving expenses to Washington, DC, where she'd accepted an entry-level job editing legal newsletters. It was only going to be for a while, just to gain experience, then she was going to get a law degree or Master's at Berkeley, where Jerome was pursuing his legal studies...but a year of distance and infrequent visits takes its toll on a young couple. A final screaming match over the phone when she told him she'd gotten a promotion and raise, maybe he could transfer out east?

But of course not. She just hoped her literal one-time partner in crime would have the good graces to keep his trap shut. She, herself, spent several years scouring news reports, feeling her stomach muscles tense when she read an investigator's report that originated in North Dakota, but apparently, no one had time for mere robberies. There were so many more interesting things, especially in her office—Muslims and politicians proved to generate far more documentation. So with her rebellious streak solidly behind her, she resolved to stay out of North Dakota until their statute of limitations on robberies ended. Or until the twelfth of never, whichever came first.

* * *

On the thirteenth of never, she and Kyle boarded a Boeing 747 bound for Denver, Colorado. The captain refused to turn off the fasten-seat-belt sign.

She groaned and staggered into the terminal. “Man, I didn’t know a plane could drop five thousand feet in the space of two seconds!”

“Amusement park rides aren’t your thing?”

“Yeah, sure, when they’re on a guided track!”

“There’s a guide! It’s called gravity!”

And he steered her to the far ass-end of the gate, out onto the tarmac, and into the tin can with wings that would be their transport to Ralston.

Oh, she regretted wondering if it could possibly get worse on the first leg of the flight. Back then, she didn’t know a plane could go perpendicular to the ground. She really didn’t know the plane could effectively do a 180 from side to side in thirty seconds. She also didn’t know her head could go this far between her legs—if it went much farther, she reasoned, she’d be able to advertise herself to a big-time porn producer.

Kyle patted her back. “Come on, I’ve been on worse before.”

“Wow, I didn’t know you could survive if the engines fell off the plane!” she moaned.

He laughed. “It’ll all be worthwhile. We’ll get in, my dad will pick us up at the airport, and my mom will have a big heap o’ food ready for us when we arrive.”

“Food. Maybe don’t mention it right now.”

“You’ll be fine. It’s smooth sailing from here.”

He went back to his magazine. The plane bucked and rolled a few more times. She quickly tired of her near-literal navel-gazing.

“So, your parents,” she began, her hesitation not entirely due to the free-floating feeling her stomach experienced, “I’ve heard a lot about their hobbies—your dad’s fishing, your mom a great cook—“

“Hobby? Pff, that’s my mom’s job! And can she ever do a number on those fish!”

“Yes, right. But your dad...what does he do? Is he retired? Please,” she laughed too nervously, “don’t tell me this is a *Meet the Parents* situation where your dad will be subtly interrogating me the entire time.”

He chuckled. “Nah, not CIA. Sheriff’s office, though.”

She made a neutral mumble.

“He eventually got moved up to the State Patrol, although he decided it was too much paperwork for him. He went back, ran for sheriff, and ran the county office for fifteen years. Just retired last December, in fact.”

“You must be very, uh, proud of him.”

“Yeah, prouder of him than he was of himself. There was one case that just ate him up—robbery an hour from the South Dakota border, must’ve been, oh, ten, twelve years ago. Never caught the guy.”

“And girl,” she muttered.

He apparently hadn’t heard. “Only time, though. The scuzzbag fled the state, so there was nothing Dad could do—hey, you all right?”

“Fine!” she chuckled from between her legs. He leaned back in his seat to take a nap. She attempted the same but wound up staring fixedly out the window until the plane landed.

Indeed, Kyle's dad Arthur was on the tarmac to greet them when they landed. Kyle introduced them politely, and Sylvie shook his hand firmly.

"Best service I ever had! I never knew you could pull up right to the back of the plane!"

"Sheriff's privilege," he said stiffly, dropping her hand to put the bags in the trunk. She looked at Kyle askance.

"Farm manners. It's too cold most of the year to be bubbly," he whispered as he let her slide into the middle of the pickup truck's bench.

The ride to Kyle's home was bumpy and silent, punctuated only by Arthur asking how the flight was and Kyle responding that it was fine. (Sylvie begged to differ, but she kept her opinion to herself.)

Sylvie shuddered a bit as the truck pulled up to the house—a real, honest-to-God, farmhouse with a red barn in the background and everything. It was a little too close to home on many counts—oh, it had been years since she'd been to the dry landscape of the Rocky Mountain and Great Plains regions. Still, she buttoned it up with a smile and stood by as Kyle embraced his mother and gave her a kiss on each cheek. The woman offered neither a hug nor a kiss anyway.

When Kyle introduced Sylvie, his mother Jeannie looked her over silently, ignoring the hand Sylvie proffered and making only a grunt when Sylvie expressed her gratitude to be staying in her lovely home. This unpleasant formality out of the way, Jeannie led them in the house. Sylvie had only a glimpse of the family photos as she breezed them into the kitchen, then brusquely gestured for them to sit down.

"Water," she stated, filling and placing two glasses in front of the couple.

"Oh, I'm, uh, I'm fine," Sylvie stammered. "I know what water restrictions can be like out here." She grinned sympathetically at the older woman's stony face. "Waste not, want not!" Jeannie squinted a bit. Was it just Sylvie, or did this old lady look vaguely familiar from somewhere?

Kyle cleared his throat. "Sylvie's originally from...Riverton, is it?"

She nodded a bit too eagerly.

“Never been,” Jeannie clipped out. She squinted at the oven. “Dinner’s almost ready. Wash up.”

“Do you need any help setting up?” Sylvie queried.

“Do I look incompetent?”

Muttering something resembling a negative, Sylvie hastily backed out of the room. She reeled down the hall after Kyle, who gestured for her to use the powder room first. She splashed water on her face and hands, then reeled back out, only to remember that she’d had to pee since the airport. She mumbled an apology to Kyle as she reeled in yet again.

“Don’t worry about it.”

He patted her on the shoulder on her way out. “I think it’s going really well!”

She reentered the kitchen, only to suddenly remember that she would be all alone with Jeannie if she were to stay there. She reseated herself with a grimace and wondered if she could disappear under the table until Kyle came back. Just as she started experimentally sliding down in her seat, he emerged from the bathroom.

“Thought I saw some...thing under the table,” she explained lamely as he sat down. But the ding of the oven’s timer cut off the end of her explanation. Kyle’s father materialized just in time to cut into the piping hot chicken.

Dinner was a mostly silent affair, each person passing his or her plate to the head of the table. Kyle’s mother dished out the green beans and potato salad, and for all the silence, Sylvie couldn’t help admiring the meal’s delectability. She complimented the cook gratefully and was met with a grimace. She paused in her mouthfuls. That expression—so familiar—no, not a chance, just her mind playing tricks with her.

Kyle asked his dad what he’d been up to since December.

“Fishing.”

Silence. Kyle nodded. “Caught anything good?”

“Nope, water’s down this year.”

Kyle licked his lips, smiled reassuringly at Sylvie. “So, Mom, you...up to anything good of late?”

The older woman frowned. “Up to anything good? Did your father and I raise you to speak like that? ‘Anything good.’ Don’t just open your mouth for the sake of opening it, boy!” She threw her napkin on the table, rose, and started clearing the plates with a viciousness Sylvie never knew could be attributed to the activity. With an angry flick of her wrist, water flowed from the tap. Minutes passed, steam and spray flecked from the sink. Sylvie glanced to both Kyle and his father, looking for cues to excuse herself, but both men seemed cemented in place. She crossed her legs and shifted in her seat.

The water eased up mildly. “I can’t do it any more, Arthur,” Kyle’s mother stage whispered, her head bowed over the sink, hands clutching the counter.

Arthur compressed his lips. "I'd love to get it over with as soon as possible m'self, Jeannie, but Bob had to go the E.R. for a hemorrhoid. Otherwise it woulda been done as soon as I picked 'em up."

Jeannie shook her head. “I’m no good at playacting, Arthur. You know that.”

Arthur sighed and slowly rose from the table, making Sylvie jump. “I’ll give Bob a call, see if he’s home.”

Sylvie cleared her throat. “Ahh, did Kyle and I visit at the wrong time?”

Jeannie turned and looked Sylvie full in the eye. For the first time all evening, she gave a smile.

“Hardly.”

She turned back to her dishes. Sylvie swallowed. That voice—the last, the only time she’d been in North Dakota—oh, Christ, no way!

She lurched out of her seat. “Excuse me, I believe I should get some air,” she croaked.

“No!” Kyle snarled, then modified his voice quickly. “I mean, my mother made a pie for us. Just for us. You should stay. She’s going to serve it any second here.” He grinned in her direction without making eye contact. Arthur ambled into the doorway and parked himself.

There was no pie. Instead, Arthur ambled back into the kitchen to grab his coat. He nodded at Jeannie, who smiled and said, "Change of plans. We're going out for dessert." As a mysteriously well-coordinated unit, all four rose and went out to the car.

Five minutes later, they pulled up to a house. Arthur mumbled something about wanting to make sure it wasn't a bad time for their hosts and rushed up to the door. A man in suit pants and a dress shirt waddled to the door to meet him. He turned to get something from inside the house as Arthur waited. Sylvie noticed that the man was holding an ice pack to his rear as he walked. Her eye drifted to the mailbox. The Hon. Robert Tarsmore and Mrs. Tarsmore, it said.

Arthur turned from the door, officious paper in hand. Sylvie bolted from the car. She tried to figure out which direction was south and cursed the dressy shoes she'd decided to wear.

Arthur and Kyle shouted behind her. "Stop!" Arthur called. "You're under arrest!"

Kyle cried, "Sylvie! Wait! I can explain!"

Sylvie ran on. She heard the truck start. Within seconds, the truck had pulled past her, turned to block her path. The driver's door swung open.

Sylvie had already turned around by the time Arthur told her to do so and put her hands up. He prodded her into the truck and off they drove.

They pulled up to the sheriff's station. A stunning woman sporting a sheriff's badge waited in the parking lot. Kyle and Arthur jumped out of the car, Kyle dragging Sylvie with him.

The sheriff hugged Arthur. "Hi Daddy!" Kyle swooped in for a hug, too.

Kyle's sister pulled away to face Sylvie, who put on a chipper smile and proffered her hand.

The sheriff slapped a handcuff on it. She Mirandized Sylvie as the family trudged into the station, prisoner in tow.

The younger sheriff let her father unlock the door to the station's lone cell. "I think you already know your cellmate," Jeannie smirked from behind.

The door clanked shut on Sylvie, who had to blink a few times to believe what she was seeing. "Jerome?"

Her old flame shrugged sheepishly. "How could I possibly say no to a hot woman with a pair of handcuffs?"

There was no case, Judge Bob decreed, wincing as he sat down. The statute of limitations had expired fifteen days prior to the court appearance. Damned if he'd been too drugged out to check a calendar when he signed the warrants.

Sylvie's court-appointed lawyer was hugely disappointed he couldn't make his case about entrapment. That Jeannie had coolly followed Sylvie out of the bank that day and took down the license plate number...well, that was just dogged persistence. Urging her kids into interstate romantic entanglements, well...The lawyer shook his head dramatically. It would have been his chance to get hired at the biggest of three law firms in the state.

Sylvie and Jerome split a cab to the Ralston airport, stopping at Kyle's house on the way to get her luggage.

When she entered the house, Kyle waited in the entryway. He held out a bouquet of flowers.

"Oh, you have got to be kidding me."

"No hard feelings?"

She pushed past him to the bedroom in the back.

“Sylvie, I really meant what I said before. I really—yeah, my mom and sister really, uh, encouraged me to get to know you better. But I did—I did come to feel a certain way about you, and I hoped that maybe, now that all that nastiness is behind us, we can...we can...”

“Goddammit!” Sylvie roared. “I know the luggage wound up back here. What the hell happened to my suitcase?”

“Oh.” Kyle twisted his lip. “Well, yeah, about the nastiness. Um, my mother decided that since she wasn’t going to get her way in a court of law, she was going to mete out her own, or something equally melodramatic.”

Sylvie turned to him, teeth gritted.

“She sold your lingerie on eBay,” he let out in a rush. “Oh, and your clothes. And suitcase. But she said the lingerie got the highest price.”

A half-hour cab ride and three-hour plane ride in a winged tin can work wonders on a relationship. These lengths of time can kill a burgeoning relationship, push a steady relationship to exciting new levels, or rekindle an old flame. Sylvie and Jerome remarked as they staggered off the plane in Denver that it felt as though the last ten years hadn’t happened, and what do you know, Sylvie still technically had a few days left of vacation. Jerome had been “a wee bit” disbarred after telling his law firm he had been arrested in North Dakota, so every day from now on could be his vacation.

They decided to go see some mountains up close and personal. He’d never been, and she could use the breath of home—as long as it was just a breath.

Two days later, as Sylvie scrubbed at pots and pans in their rented Fraser Valley condominium, he snuck up behind her and wrapped his arms around her. “You know,” he murmured, “one of my last cases involved a bunch of grannies suing a major corporation for investing their money in some newfangled technology that went bust. See, I say the corporation played it wrong. They should’ve convinced the old farts the money was for better pacemakers or, I don’t know, something close to old ladies’ hearts.”

Sylvie watched a soap bubble float out of the sink and hover near the windows. "I'll go set up a bank account," she said. "How do you feel about Grand Cayman?"