

Sydney Logan

# Mountain Charm

The Appalachian Heart Collection

The Writer's Coffee Shop   
**P**ublishing **H**ouse

# Also by Sydney Logan

[Lessons Learned](#)

First published by The Writer's Coffee Shop, 2013

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Print ISBN-13: 978-1-61213-165-8

E-book ISBN-13: 978-1-61213-166-5

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the US Congress Library.

Please send your thoughts to [Marketing@thewriterscoffeeshop.com](mailto:Marketing@thewriterscoffeeshop.com) The Writer's Coffee Shop Publishing House [ph.thewriterscoffeeshop.com](http://ph.thewriterscoffeeshop.com)

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# Dedication

To Allison,

Thank you for letting me borrow your name,  
even if you can't read my books until you're a teenager.

Matthew 6:21

## Prologue



Angelina Clark gazed down at the shining candle. Its yellow flame flickered and glistened against the darkness of the living room. She had eagerly anticipated this day—her thirteenth birthday—since she’d been a little girl.

“Today is a special day,” her mother said, her voice solemn.

Growing up, Angelina had heard the legend that had been passed down from her grandmother. It was a fairy tale—much like Cinderella, but without the glass slipper or the wicked stepsisters. Instead, this story involved nothing but a shimmering candle and a simple song, both of which would allow the young girl to blossom into a strong and intelligent young woman. She would be beautiful and—at the age of twenty-one—would find her true love.

It couldn’t be a fairy tale without true love.

Angelina had always been a skeptical child and wondered if there was any truth to the story, but she had never been able to ignore the evidence. With long black hair and piercing blue eyes, her mother was stunning. Celia Clark was joyful, gifted, and wise, and her husband loved her as much today as he had on the day they’d married.

“Are you ready?” Celia asked.

Angelina nodded. Her heart was thundering, and her hands were trembling, but her mother assured her this was to be expected. The ceremony was an important rite of passage in a daughter’s life—a sacred ritual that had been passed down from her ancestors. One day, Angelina would sit on the floor with her own daughter, and her daughter’s candle.

“I’m ready,” Angelina said, her voice brave.

Her mother smiled proudly at her daughter as they joined hands. Between them, the candle danced, casting shadows upon the walls. Angelina closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and began to sing.

*“True love and sweet whispers  
Till death do us part;  
Send someone to love  
My Appalachian heart.”*

Celia gave her daughter’s hand a reassuring squeeze. With her eyes still tightly closed, the young girl swiftly blew out the yellow flame.

## Chapter 1



The crimson sky was aglow along the horizon of the Smoky Mountains. Standing on the front porch with her dog by her side, Angelina had to shield her eyes from the brilliant glare as she stared at the natural beauty of the dawn. To her, it was just another pretty daybreak, but to her mountain mama, a red sunrise was a sure sign of rain.

I'll need to remember my umbrella.

She inhaled deeply, letting the smell of the pines wash over her. So many times, Angelina had been tempted to move closer to town. After all, she was twenty-one years old, and none of her friends still lived at home.

Then again, none of her friends had a view like this from their front porch.

"Isn't it pretty, boy?" Angelina murmured, stroking the dog's coat. Cash, her faithful chocolate Lab, had been her constant companion since her tenth birthday. Fiercely protective and devoted, he always joined Angelina on her morning walks.

It was still early, and the fog had yet to lift. The sun was trying its best, but mountain mist was stubborn, and sometimes it was mid-morning before it finally disappeared. Angelina loved the haze, because it always dissipated, revealing the gorgeous green of spring and summer, or the pretty mosaic of auburn leaves in the fall. In the winter, blinding white snow-covered the mountaintops and clung to the trees.

All of it was beautiful.

All of it was home.

“Angelina, breakfast is ready,” her mother called from the kitchen.

Just like that, Angelina’s peaceful morning was gone. Her mom’s exhausted tone served as a grim reminder that not everything could be beautiful all the time.

Celia Clark’s voice was always laced with a determined energy as she tried to remain strong for her daughter, but Angelina knew better. It had been nearly two years since her mother had buried the love of her life, and as much as Angelina missed her father, she knew her mom missed her husband even more.

“Come on, boy,” Angelina said, tugging the dog’s collar. Squaring her shoulders, she took another lingering look at the mountains before heading inside. The house smelled of bacon, eggs, and buttermilk biscuits. Angelina’s stomach growled as she and Cash made their way into the kitchen.

“Morning, Mom.”

Celia looked up from the frying pan and offered her daughter a smile. “Good morning, Angelina.”

“How are you feeling today?”

“Oh, it’s a good day. Hungry?”

They took their seats at the table, and Celia handed her daughter a glass of juice while trying to disguise her tired smile. Celia Clark might have been the strongest woman Angelina had ever known, but she was a terrible liar.

“Busy day at the shop?”

Angelina nodded and swallowed her eggs. “The Massey brothers are dropping off some of their instruments today. They’ve built some beautiful mandolins and fiddles.”

Celia's Strings was a little music store in the foothills of the Smokies. Samuel and Celia Clark had always loved music and wanted to offer a place for local artists to sell their instruments. Angelina had worked in the shop since she'd been old enough to count change.

Celia gazed out the kitchen window. "We always need more mandolins. They sell so quickly."

Her breakfast remained untouched, but Angelina pretended not to notice. Instead, they talked about the store. Her mother always listened intently, but Celia's desire to run the shop had died along with her husband. She'd been ecstatic when Angelina had offered to manage it herself.

"Happy birthday, Angelina."

Angelina sighed. She supposed it had been too much to hope that her mom had forgotten today's date.

"Twenty-one years old. What a wonderful year you're going to have. I only hope . . ."

Celia's voice trailed off, making her daughter's heart ache. Her mom was doing that more and more—talking about the future and how she might not be around to see it.

Angelina shook her head. "I think this year is going to be just like all the others. You know I don't believe in that old spell."

Angelina had stopped believing in Appalachian magic long ago. If wishing made it so, her dad would still be alive, and her mom's hair wouldn't be falling out in the shower each morning.

Angelina Clark was officially a skeptic.

"You will," her mother murmured.

It was hard to argue with her. Despite Celia's failing health, her visions of the future were as clear as ever.

After finishing breakfast and clearing the dishes, Angelina grabbed her bag, and her mom followed her to the door. It was a half-hour drive into

town, and Angelina wanted to beat the city traffic and do some paperwork before the shop opened at nine.

Celia handed her daughter an umbrella. “Red dawn. Rain’s coming.”

“I know.”

“See? You do believe.” Celia’s blue eyes twinkled, and Angelina smiled because it was so good to see her mom excited about something. Celia reached for her daughter’s blouse and adjusted the collar that didn’t need adjusting at all. “You look so pretty today. I’ve always loved this color on you. It brings out the blue in your eyes.”

All of their female ancestors had bright blue eyes. It was the one physical trait that never seemed to skip a generation.

“You have been given such gifts, Angelina. You should use them. And I wish you could see the spell as a blessing instead of a curse.”

“But it is a curse.”

Her mother laughed lightly, knowing it was a losing battle. They’d had this same argument for years. She’d always believed curse gave the whole thing a negative connotation. She preferred spell or enchantment, while Angelina preferred to forget she’d ever blown out that silly candle.

“My sweet, pessimistic daughter. You’ll see.”

Angelina grinned and kissed her mom’s cheek.

“That’s what you keep telling me,” she said.



Soft bluegrass music flowed from the speakers, flooding the shop with the sounds of acoustic guitars and gentle mandolins. Angelina spent the morning hanging the new instruments on the far wall of the shop. They were well-crafted and beautiful, just as the Massey brothers had promised.

“Celia’s right, you know,” Maddie said.

Angelina shook her head and climbed down from the stepladder, taking a second to admire the craftsmanship of the newest selection of instruments. Customers flew in from as far away as California to buy them—a fact that had always made Samuel Clark immensely proud. Providing musicians with quality instruments was the one family tradition Angelina was determined to uphold.

Her best friend and business partner, however, was always reminding Angelina of the traditions she wished to forget.

They'd been best friends since elementary school, so Maddie Price knew all about Angelina's family heritage. Actually, the entire community knew. For Angelina, it hadn't been easy growing up in Maple Ridge when the whole town believed she dabbled in witchcraft. That was why she'd always been cautious and reserved when it came to using her gifts.

Sure, she'd had some fun with it back in school. Back in eighth grade—after catching Christine Williams kissing Maddie's boyfriend in the school library—Angelina had pretended to curse Christy with pimples. It'd been a complete coincidence, of course, when the girl woke up the next day with her very first zit—right on the tip of her nose. Celia had grounded her daughter for two weeks, but even at the age of twelve, Angelina knew the punishment was worth it.

The witchcraft rumors had quieted down over the years, but some of the older residents still loved to talk about Abigail Rose, the famous Witch Doctor of Maple Ridge. If the tales were true, Angelina's great-great-great grandmother had delivered all the babies in the county and used mountain medicine to heal everything from snakebites to chicken pox.

Maddie had always been fascinated by it all and had spent most of her childhood begging Angelina's parents to adopt her.

"You are blessed, Angelina, no doubt about it," Maddie told her friend. "You are beautiful and smart. You own a successful business, and this is the year you'll finally meet the love of your life. No more horrible dates with complete losers. It's the ultimate fairy tale, and I'm a little disappointed you aren't sufficiently excited about this."

“First of all, beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” Angelina said as she walked back toward the counter. “If I were beautiful—which I’m not— it would be because of my mother’s genes and not some crazy curse. If I am successful, it’s because I work my ass off seven days a week.”

Maddie laughed. “And when your true love walks through the door? Are you going to tell me it’s some cosmic coincidence and has nothing to do with that spell?”

“I never should have told you that story.”

“Oh, I love that story,” Maddie said, her voice wistful and soft. “It’s so romantic, and yet you refuse to believe it. Why wouldn’t you want to believe it?”

Maddie sighed and twirled a lock of her curly red hair around her finger. Angelina couldn’t help but think her best friend, with her ivory skin and bright hazel eyes, was the truly beautiful one. Freckles dotted her nose, despite her useless attempts over the years to conceal them with the most expensive make-up on the planet.

“For argument’s sake,” Angelina said, “let’s say my true love walks through the door any minute now. Why would I want to be with someone if the only reason they love me is because of some ancient mountain spell my ancestors conjured centuries ago?”

From her perch on top of the counter, Maddie looked at her friend with bewildered eyes. “Angelina, I remember your thirteenth birthday party. We had strawberry cupcakes and danced to Britney Spears, and all you could talk about was that sacred candle. You were so innocent and hopeful and—”

“The word you’re looking for is naïve.”

Maddie grinned. “I was so jealous. That candle was going to give you happiness, beauty, and love, and you believed it with all your heart. I know your faith in magic has really been shaken, but this is a good thing. You should believe in this.”

Just then, a tall, middle-aged man walked through the door, gave the girls a nod, and headed straight for the vintage vinyl. Maddie wiggled her eyebrows, and Angelina stifled a giggle.

“If we have to play this game, could we at least hope he was born in my decade?” Angelina muttered under her breath.

Maddie nodded and hopped off the counter.

“This conversation isn’t over, but I’m going to run next door and get us some coffee.”

“I’d like a tea instead, and take an umbrella.”

“Why?” Maddie curiously glanced out the window.

“Just take it.” Angelina grabbed her mom’s umbrella from behind the counter and tossed it in her friend’s direction.

Maddie’s eyes flickered with understanding. “I bet that was a pretty red sunrise.”

“It always is.”

“You know,” she said, leaning her elbows against the glass counter and grinning. “You can’t pick and choose, Angelina. You either believe or you don’t.”

It wasn’t the first time she’d been called a hypocrite. Angelina was immune to it.

With a grin, Angelina nodded toward the window. In a matter of seconds, the heavens had opened.

“Maddie, I can believe in the rain. I can see the rain.”

“I wonder what we’ll see today.” Maddie’s eyes widened. “I can’t leave! What if he shows up while I’m out getting your tea?”

With a groan, Angelina walked around the counter and grabbed her friend by the arm, all but shoving her out into the torrential downpour.



The rain continued throughout the day, keeping the customers away. Angelina was secretly glad. Even though it wasn't good for business, she couldn't deny the strange sense of satisfaction in seeing the miserable look on Maddie's face. Whenever the door would chime with an occasional customer, Maddie would practically jump over the counter to get a better look. She'd nearly given David Murray a heart attack, which wouldn't have been good considering he was still recovering from his last one.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Murray?" Angelina asked.

A disgruntled Maddie shot her a glare and headed toward the stock room.

*Thank goodness it's nearly closing time.*

"Evening, Angelina. I need some banjo strings."

She nodded and gingerly took the man's arm, leading him over to the selection of strings. Time hadn't been good to David. As if the heart attack wasn't enough, he was almost blind due to the cataract in his left eye. Regardless, he still drove around town and played the banjo like a pro.

His voice was low as they walked back toward the register. "Angelina, I don't mean to stick my nose where it doesn't belong, but I was just having supper over at Sally's Diner. There was some reporter snoopin' around, asking questions about your family. Said he was doing a story about Appalachian folklore and someone in Cumberland County pointed him in this direction."

It wasn't the first time a stranger had been interested in her family's history, but the attention always made her uncomfortable.

“I appreciate you telling me,” Angelina said as she placed his receipt in the bag. “Did you get his name?”

“No, just that he worked for some magazine in Nashville.”

She smiled and handed him his strings. “Well, I’ll keep my eyes open. Thanks for letting me know.”

“Sure thing.” David’s expression turned somber. “How is Celia feeling? I haven’t talked to her in a few days.”

“She’s hanging in there. The treatments are hard on her.” “And on you.”

Angelina nodded slowly and swallowed down the emotion that threatened to choke her.

“Don’t you worry about that reporter,” David said, patting her hand. “The people in Maple Ridge might be nosy, but we protect our own.”

She thanked him and grabbed an umbrella. After walking David to his car, Angelina headed back inside and locked the door. When she turned around, she was met with the steely glare of her best friend.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

Maddie’s hands were on her hips. “It’s closing time!”

“And I couldn’t be happier. You’ve been so preoccupied with the spell you haven’t even wished me a happy birthday.”

She narrowed her hazel eyes.

“Happy birthday, you skeptic.”

Angelina laughed and began to empty the register. With the day’s slow sales, doing the evening bookkeeping would be a breeze.

“You have to believe in true love,” Maddie said as she followed her partner back to the office, “otherwise, he’ll never show up.”

Angelina sighed and sat down behind the desk. “First of all, the spell doesn’t stipulate he’ll arrive today.”

“I know, but your parents met on Celia’s twenty-first birthday.”

“Yes, but my grandmother met my grandfather almost a year after she turned twenty-one. It’s not time-specific, Maddie.”

“You mean I might have to wait a whole year?”

Angelina smirked. “My deepest apologizes. And for your information, I do believe in true love. My parents were proof that it exists. I just don’t believe blowing out a candle and singing some silly song on my thirteenth birthday is going to make the man of my dreams appear out of thin air to sweep me off my feet.”

“He’s out there somewhere,” Maddie said, sighing dejectedly, as if it were her heart on the line. “What are you doing tonight?”

“Mom wanted to bake me a cake, so I’m headed home.”

She frowned. “You’ll never meet him at home, Angelina.”

“Who knows, Maddie. Maybe he’s waiting for me on my front porch.”

“Do you promise to call me if he is?”

Her eyes were wide, and she sounded desperately hopeful, so Angelina resisted the urge to laugh at the silliness of it all. Instead, she made a vow to her best friend.

“Absolutely, Maddie. If there’s a man waiting for me on my front porch, you’ll be the first person I’ll call.”



It was dusk by the time Angelina drove out of town and up the winding mountain road that would lead her home. The sky was a pinkish-orange as the

sunset lingered just above the trees. Rain was still falling, but it was nothing more than a light shower as it gently tapped against the windshield.

Angelina couldn't wait to get home. She wanted to curl up on the couch, eat a slice of birthday cake, and forget all about the curse.

By the time she reached the house, the rain had all but diminished. The fog was still dense, but it wasn't so thick that she couldn't see the black SUV parked in her mother's driveway.

Or the man sitting on her front porch.

## Chapter 2



There are moments in a person's life that absolutely shake them to their core. Moments that make them re-evaluate their every thought, their every decision.

This was Angelina's moment.

And she couldn't muster the courage to step out of the car.

Instead, she flexed her trembling fingers around the steering wheel and tried to comprehend the scene right before her disbelieving eyes.

There was a man on her porch.

Even through the fog, she could tell he was a handsome man.

And she couldn't be sure, but he appeared to be around her age.

*A man born in her decade.*

A dazed Angelina glanced ahead, and through the mist, she took a long look at the black vehicle parked in her spot.

With Davidson County plates.

*Nashville.*

In an instant, the moment was shattered. Her short-lived astonishment gave way to something far more familiar—something bitter and suspicious and just downright *pissed*.

Feeling ridiculous, Angelina furiously slammed her car door and stalked toward the porch. This wasn't her true love. Not at all. This was that snooping reporter from Nashville, and he was at her house, on her porch.

And petting *her* dog.

The man's eyes widened as she approached, and by the time she reached the steps, he was already on his feet. Cash, traitor that he was, gave an unenthusiastic bark and rushed to Angelina's side.

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

The man looked a little stunned.

"I'm Dylan Thomas." His eyes were a deep brown and his voice was kind. Thanks to her rage, both features were fairly easy for Angelina to ignore. "You must be Celia's daughter. Wow, I heard you were beautiful, but —"

"Dylan Thomas?" Angelina muttered coldly, interrupting his compliment. "What kind of person names their kid after some drunken Welsh poet?"

"I don't know. Maybe the same kind of person who names their dog after their favorite country music singer."

Angelina's eyes narrowed.

"Oh, Angelina, you're home!" Celia's voice cut through the tension as she carried a tray out onto the porch. "I was just getting Mr. Thomas a slice of your cake."

"Mrs. Clark, please. I've asked you to call me Dylan." He smiled at the woman before sitting back down in the rocking chair with his plate.

Cash seemed torn, looking between the stranger and his owner, before finally releasing a resigned whine and plopping down at Angelina's feet.

The man has charmed both my mother and my dog.

“Dylan has driven all the way from Nashville to meet us,” Celia said.

“*Dylan* is here to write a story about our family. Did he tell you that? Did he tell you he’s been all over town, asking questions about us?”

“He mentioned it, yes.” Celia smiled at the man before turning her attention back to her daughter. “You know, it’s getting a bit chilly. I think I’ll go find a good book and crawl into my warm bed. Give you two the chance to get acquainted.”

“Mom . . .”

Celia’s eyes danced with happiness, and it tugged at Angelina’s heart. There was no mistaking the hope there.

Stupid spell.

“Happy birthday, Angelina.”

Dylan leapt to his feet, thanking Celia again for the cake and holding the screen door open as they said good night. Angelina had to admit the man was good. Those intrinsic good manners were going to charm the pants off many of the women he would encounter throughout his life.

But not her.

“It’s your birthday?”

“Yes, and it was blissfully uneventful until you showed up.”

“Beautiful and infuriating,” Dylan muttered. “Look, Angelina, I was just given this assignment yesterday. I don’t have a clue about Appalachian magic tricks or devil worshipping or whatever it is you do up in these mountains, but I have a story to write. Just let me interview you and your mom, and I’ll be back on the interstate before you can say abracadabra.”

Instead of pointing out just how ignorant he sounded, Angelina decided what he truly needed was a strong dose of fear.

“Actually, I do have something you need to see. A family heirloom. Wait here?”

Excited for any useful information, Dylan’s eyes lit up and he nodded enthusiastically. Once again, those good manners kicked in, and Dylan opened the door for her.

Angelina raced inside the house. She hadn’t touched it in years, but she still remembered where her father kept the key to the case. She grabbed what she needed and quickly made her way back out to the porch, letting the screen door slam behind her.

Dylan jumped out of his chair. “What the hell?”

Angelina lifted the rifle and pointed it straight at him. He didn’t need to know the safety was on—or that the chamber was empty.

“This is a Remington, passed down from my father and his father, also known as an Appalachian magic wand. Just watch. It’s going to make you disappear.”

Angelina thought it was almost comical, hearing him curse and watching him leap off the porch. All the commotion caused her dog to chase after him, which only made Dylan sprint faster until he reached the sanctuary of his vehicle.

“Are you insane?” Dylan yelled.

“I tend to get a little crazy when someone trespasses on my property. Leave my family alone and don’t come back!”

He slammed the door and had to do some fancy maneuvering to get around her car, but within seconds, the only sounds Angelina could hear were Dylan’s squealing tires, Cash’s noisy bark, and her mother’s hearty laughter.



Dylan Thomas couldn't believe his luck.

He should have been white-water rafting down the Mississippi. That had been his assignment until yesterday, when his editor handed him driving directions to Maple Ridge, Tennessee, to do a feature on Appalachian witchcraft.

He was being punished. He was sure of it.

It wasn't as if the mountains weren't pretty. With his trusty camera strapped around his neck, Dylan had taken some beautiful shots today. He'd even snapped a few with his phone and sent them to his mom back in Nashville. The country was gorgeous, but to live there for any extended period of time would require much alcohol and, quite possibly, a lobotomy.

Throughout the day, he'd heard nothing but wonderful things about the Clarks. The mom was a sweetheart, no doubt, but the daughter . . .

Well, the daughter was batshit crazy.

And beautiful. Really beautiful, with gorgeous blue eyes that seemed to flash with fire. With her long black hair and fiery temper, his attraction had hit him like a cannonball. In that split second, he'd wondered what it would feel like to hold her. To kiss her.

But then the pretty was replaced with the crazy, and she'd chased him off the porch with a shotgun.

He wasn't going to stand for it. He had an article to write. A job to do. And he'd be damned if some redneck witch was going to cost him this assignment.

Even if she was, without a doubt, the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.



“You didn’t call me.”

As in most small towns, word spread fast in Maple Ridge, and the news that Angelina Clark had chased the snooping reporter off her porch with her daddy’s rifle had caused more than a few chuckles in town.

Maddie, however, wasn’t laughing.

“You promised, Angelina.”

“I know. I’ve apologized repeatedly. I just didn’t think it was a big deal.”

That was a lie. Angelina knew it would be a big deal to her best friend, which was precisely why she hadn’t called. Interestingly enough, Celia hadn’t said a word about Dylan over breakfast. But she was still laughing—louder than she’d laughed in years. In Angelina’s mind, dealing with the irritating man had been worth the aggravation for that reason alone.

She’d missed her mother’s laughter.

Maddie sighed. “You are exhausting! Was he cute?”

Angelina rolled her eyes and continued dusting the glass case that housed their collection of capos and picks. She mentally noted she’d need to order more before the end of the week.

“Ang, you have to give me something.”

“Fine! I suppose, if forced, I’d call him handsome.”

Maddie arched an eyebrow. “You suppose?”

Angelina nodded.

“Don’t get too excited there.”

“It’s a little hard to get excited when the man is an ignorant ass.”

Maddie’s grin was mischievous. “That’s why he’s coming to you. He needs to be educated.”

“Well, I’m not a teacher. He’s going to have to get educated elsewhere.” Her dusting complete, Angelina grabbed her cup of tea from the register and headed toward the office. “Now, if you’re done with the interrogation, I need to make an order.”

“If only you took your love life as seriously as you take this store!” Maddie yelled, but Angelina ignored her friend and kicked the office door shut behind her.

To Angelina’s great relief, her partner left her alone, giving her the chance to spend a couple of hours getting caught up on paperwork. She finished the weekly order, worked on some monthly billing statements, and before she knew it, two hours had passed and it was time for lunch. On cue, Angelina’s cell phone vibrated on her desk. Certain it was Maddie asking for her lunch order, she glanced down at the screen. It was from her best friend, but the text message had nothing to do with food.

**You are such a liar. He is gorgeous.**

**Dark hair, beautiful brown eyes, and looks so good standing at the register.**

Angelina had never considered carrying a weapon on a daily basis, but right at this moment, she really missed her dad’s rifle.

With an irritated groan, she rose from her desk and flung open the office door. Hurrying to the front of the store, she stopped abruptly when she noticed two men standing at the register.

One was Dylan Thomas, and the other was the county sheriff.

Angelina glanced at Maddie, who was standing behind the counter with an enormous smile on her face.

Maddie had always loved drama.

After a quick glimpse around the store to make sure they were alone, Angelina squared her shoulders and looked Dylan Thomas straight in the eye.

“Get the hell out of my shop.”

Dylan spun toward the sheriff.

“See? She’s rude, and she pulled a gun on me last night. Surely that’s a punishable offense.”

Angelina grinned at the officer. “How are you doing, Jack?” “Oh, can’t complain.”

Jack Prescott was biting his lip to keep from laughing. It was a habit Angelina had found cute during those three months they’d dated back in high school.

“You sure caused a commotion last night, didn’t you?”

“You know me, Jack. I’m protective of the things I love. My mom, my house, my dog—”

Dylan snorted. “It really pisses you off that your dog likes me, doesn’t it?”

“You have no idea.”

Maddie giggled as the two glared at each other. The sheriff maneuvered his way between them.

“Now, Angelina, you know you can’t be shooting at people . . .”

Would this be a good time to admit the gun wasn’t loaded?

“I didn’t shoot. I just . . . pointed it at him.”

Dylan muttered something about crazy hillbillies, which the sheriff ignored.

“Angelina, I talked to Celia this morning, and it seems she’s not opposed to Mr. Thomas writing his story. She made it very clear to me she wants you to cooperate with him.”

Dylan’s smile was smug.

“Don’t we all,” Maddie said, her voice far breathier than usual as her eyes ghosted over Dylan’s muscular frame.

Angelina groaned.

I am surrounded by traitors.

Jack gingerly touched her shoulder. “We both know your mama doesn’t need any extra stress right now. Maybe this will be good for her. It’ll give her something to focus on besides the chemo, you know?”

Dylan’s conceited grin was gone in an instant. “Chemo?”

Jack offered Angelina a sympathetic smile just as three girls walked into the store. The teenagers were giggly as they made their way over to the CD collection.

“No more guns,” the sheriff said quietly.

Too emotional to reply, Angelina nodded and left them standing there while she helped her customers.



“Dylan’s like a lovesick puppy,” Maddie said. “He’s just sitting next to the window, pretending to play with his phone, sneaking glances at you when he thinks you aren’t looking.”

“I’m not looking.”

“I know, and I don’t understand that at all. How can you not look at the man? So what if he was a little bit of a jerk? He’s from the city. He’s completely out of his element, and you have no valid reason for hating him except you’re scared to death his arrival proves the spell is legit.”

“No, I hate him because he showed up at my house after spending the day digging for dirt on me and my family.”

“That’s what reporters do.”

“Whose side are you on?” Angelina asked a little too loudly. Dylan’s head popped up, only to drop once again as he continued to scroll through his phone.

“Yours, always. Just talk to him, Ang.”

Angelina sighed. Maybe her friend was right. After all, the quicker he got his story, the quicker he’d be out of her life for good.

“The spell is not legit,” Angelina mumbled. “And even if it is, he is not my true love, Maddie. He just can’t be.”

Maddie laughed quietly. “Oh ye of little magical faith. I haven’t seen you that fired up in a long time. Sparks were flying.”

“That wasn’t sparks. That was intense rage.”

A customer asked for help with a fiddle, and Maddie promised she’d be right with him.

“It was good to get a glimpse of the old Angelina Clark. I’ve missed her. Now go talk to him and put him out of his misery.”

Maddie went to help the customer while Angelina tried to gather the nerve to go talk to the nosy reporter. Dylan was still sitting at the table next to the window with his eyes glued to his phone. Taking a couple of deep breaths, Angelina slowly walked toward him. He looked up, gave her a guilty smile, and shoved his phone into his pocket.

“Hey.”

“Hi.” Angelina glanced over her shoulder and found Maddie smiling in encouragement. Shaking her head, she turned her attention back to the infuriating man. “I was wondering if you were hungry.”

Dylan looked surprised. “Hungry?”

Angelina nodded. “I thought we could grab something to eat at the coffee shop next door. They have great sandwiches and the best tea in Maple Ridge—if you like tea. If not they have coffee or soft drinks or . . .”

She was rambling, but he was staring up at her with those brown eyes, and for some reason, they were deeper and darker in the daylight.

Dylan smiled and quickly jumped to his feet. “Lunch sounds great,” he said.