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# THE WESTON FRONT

Go West - Book One

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GRAY GARDNER



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's  
advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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**T**he eyes.

I felt those eyes on me before I could even turn around and see whom they belonged to. I almost wished I hadn't. But I had no choice. The hairs on the back of my neck stood at full attention until I casually turned my head and shot the most nonchalant glance I could muster over my shoulder. Then my entire body felt a shockwave.

Blue, no...aquamarine globes peered across the small crowd. At me.

Feeling myself shiver I quickly turned and swallowed hard. Heat blazed around me. Shit, was I blushing? I hadn't done that since I'd first met my fiancé.

No...ex-fiancé. The Ass Face, as my best friend Caroline referred to him. I didn't exactly hate him. I'd loved him for so long. And at least he had the decency to break it off before the wedding.

"Quit thinking about that Ass Face," Caroline muttered, having to lean her head down to my level so that I could hear her whispering over the large man speaking in front of us. Tall,

curvy, exotic...these words had all been used to describe my oldest, dearest friend.

“I’ve thought about him every day of my life since freshman year,” I sighed sadly, leaning up on my toes to respond. Short, ginger, flat as a board...these are all words I had been pleased my fiancé had ignored when we’d started dating.

Now my life had no direction. Work, love; I was floundering. I’d been let go when the newspaper began downsizing, starting with the Fine Arts Section. My life’s work had been art gallery openings and puff pieces, and that was suddenly gone. So I’d focused on becoming Mrs. Daniel Barron. Then I got let go from that, too.

“And those are just a few of the big time rules we like our guests to follow ‘round here, just for everyone’s safety. Now, on to the fun stuff,” the large, round man with the short gray beard and tight plaid shirt tucked into his tight jeans said in front of us, the guests.

About forty of us had been picked up in several stretch Hummer limos at the airport, quietly chatting and getting to know one another on the hour and a half drive to the Dude Ranch...or Guest Ranch, as this big fat Santa guy was calling it. Now we were getting a safety lecture and a quick rundown for our ten-day stay.

“...Trail rides, rodeo, barn dancing, water activities...”

I scratched behind my ear and looked up at the ceiling of the covered porch of the 10,000 square foot, two-story administration cabin with a towering wall of windows and breathtaking views. I searched up there for a couple of seconds, and then I let my eyes fall down the stacked logs of the cabin’s exterior to the cowboys and cowgirls standing behind all of us quietly. The Staff.

He caught me looking at him. Or maybe I caught him looking at me. Regardless, our eyes locked. His tan straw hat was pulled low on his head but I could still see those eyes. They raked briefly down my body, surely unimpressed by my skinny jeans,

Lone Star Beer t-shirt and flip-flops. When his eyes pulled back up to mine I had no other choice but to jerk my head back around, my dark brown red-in-the-sunlight hair whipping over my shoulder and into my mouth. So not cool.

“Pearl snap shirts, tight jeans and boots,” Caroline groaned in my ear, her dark brown hair flowing in waves around her shoulders with a floating elegance. “I like everyone here already.”

This dude ranch had been her idea. Well, correction: the vacation far away from reality had been her idea. A break from returning gifts with thank you notes, from telling the story of my break-up over and over again, from crying every damn night as I sat alone in my new king sized bed. My marriage bed. I’d picked the place, a ranch in foothills of the Rockies in Wyoming where I was sure to interface with total strangers who neither knew nor cared a thing about me. I was ready for blessed relief...and silence.

“Blake!” Caroline laughed, placing a hand on my shoulder. I snapped my head up to her and realized that everyone was now talking and moving around us. She held her hand out to an insanely attractive man in tight jeans, a blue pearl snap shirt and a brand new straw cowboy hat. “This is our host, Rowdy.”

“Ma’am,” he greeted with a deadly smile, shaking my hand, his eyes darting back to Caroline every other second. This was not atypical. She was a knockout and I was...short and easily overlooked.

“As your host I’m just here to make sure your experience here at the Bar H Guest Ranch is nothing but pleasurable,” he began, gesturing to the black top road where people were now forming groups and following their hosts around the lush green property.

Caroline giggled and walked next to him, listening attentively as I rolled my eyes and walked behind them, staring at the red nail polish she had painted on my toes on the plane. She’d called it a slutty red, though I wasn’t sure I was worthy of it. I was just too exhausted to try and have sex. That’s how miserable I was.

“A rodeo? And you’re in it?”

I breathed out at Caroline’s enthusiastic voice. No, it was her come-and-get-it voice. Who could blame her? Rowdy, if that was indeed his name on his birth certificate, was positively edible. I liked his ass in those jeans. What brand were they? I leaned forward a little and squinted my eyes in the setting sun. Levis.

“A campfire every night sounds wonderful!”

Says the girl who can’t ever work her sixty-cent Bic lighter. Rowdy smiled down at her though, getting that look in his eye that told me I’d probably be sleeping outside or in the barn in the next few days. Caroline never worked at a snail’s pace.

An average height blonde woman in, you guessed it, jeans, a pearl snap shirt, and straw cowboy hat suddenly jogged up through a patch of pine trees next to Rowdy, taking his arm and whispering up into his ear. He nodded and quietly replied back, then turned and looked at me.

“Well, we thought we’d be short with forty guests in our section this session but as it turns out, Blake, you have your own host, too. This is Kelly.”

“So nice to meet you,” I gratefully smiled as Caroline already had Rowdy by the arm and was tugging him up the road. “I uh, don’t think I could have handled them for too long.”

“Oh,” Kelly said, eyeing the pair and then forcing a smile at me. “Uh, relationships with guests are frowned upon...”

“I predict they’ll be banging headboards by day’s end,” I interrupted, grinning.

Kelly smiled, too, looking a little relieved.

“Rowdy is a good cowboy but...he’s good for business around here too, you know?”

“Yeah, I get it,” I sighed, as we walked up the slight incline towards a couple of the honey colored log cabins hidden by trees. I shot a glance her way. “So how good is he?”

A smile played on the edge of her mouth as she stared ahead.

“I’ve had better, but not bigger.”

Damn. We each gave a muffled giggle as the towering pine trees opened up into a large field and a community of cabins appeared. Guest lodging. About twenty cabins hugged the tree line and the landscape couldn't have been greener. Beautiful and peaceful.

Our bags were already in our two-bedroom cabin so Caroline and I gathered in the large living/dining room with a small kitchen as Kelly and Rowdy showed us all of the amenities offered at the state of the art Bar H Guest Ranch. Touch screen panels controlled everything: lights, air, (small) television and all communications both internal and outgoing. A map on the touch screen showed us our section, then the other sections: one for families which was up by the administration cabin and also where the large swimming pool was located, and one for couples which was understandably more secluded and offered less activities.

"And if you need anything at any time this system is connected to our smart phones," Kelly added, pulling hers out of her back pocket and holding it up. "Just pull up my name on the screen under the 'Hosts' section...or Rowdy's name, and we'll call you back on this and get you whatever you need."

"I don't know," Caroline sighed, tapping her fingers on the countertop. "I can have some pretty strange requests."

Kelly swallowed and looked down as Rowdy just stared, so I saved everyone in the room. "That's actually true," I nodded, looking over at Caroline. No one said anything else so I continued with an eye roll. "So, like, is there anything on the agenda for the rest of the day?"

"Dinner up at the Dining Cabin if you want," Kelly began, looking relieved to be talking about anything other than sex and Rowdy. "But if you're too tired you can get anything served at the meal delivered here."

"And then the campfire at sundown," Rowdy added, looking

heroic and chiseled as the sun beamed through the windows behind his silhouette.

I swallowed as Kelly cleared her throat and looked away and Caroline bounced up and down on the balls of her feet like she was anticipating how good this stay was going to be. I was suddenly thrilled with my parents' Christmas present (still in the box) which had happened to be Bose noise reducing headphones.

Dinner was all right. Caroline knew me well enough to recognize that I was uncomfortable around a bunch of strangers and really gave her best effort to steer the conversation towards her and away from any agonizing personal questions aimed at me. We were seated at long, sturdy wooden tables in straight long lines and sitting on matching benches, so even though she sat across from me she couldn't play goalie and block *every* inquiry.

"What's a pretty little thing like you doing here without a boyfriend?" a middle-aged woman asked, trying to eat her pulled pork BBQ sandwich as daintily as possible with her inch long French manicure. Her Burberry shirt practically screamed in protest as she dripped BBQ sauce everywhere.

I shoved my sandwich in my mouth and wiped the excess sauce in a messy smear across my face. "Oh, you know," I mumbled, mouth full. "Just trying to escape the demands of city life."

She absently dabbed her mouth with her cloth napkin a few times, then added, "Well, I'll tell you what. Why don't you sit with us at the campfire and you and my son Isaac can get to know one another."

"Oh, you're staying on the Family side of the ranch?" Caroline quickly interjected, eating a small fork full of coleslaw. "We're on the Adventurers' side...ooh, so sorry. No mingling."

I smiled at her as we stood up and quickly walked towards one of the walls, made entirely of glass, and burst out of the doors into the night air. I laughed as Caroline held my shoulder and giggled.



“I swear, I thought the next thing she was going to say was that she was just looking for a nice Jewish girl for her son, the doctor!” she laughed, wiping her eyes as the cool night air swept around us on the flagstone terrace. Caroline’s dad was Jewish so she had loads of experience with set-ups simply because of her background. She didn’t practice any kind of religion, however. The only thing she seemed to worship was at the altar of men.

I leaned against the ledge and looked out into the pine trees down a rolling hill. “She doesn’t look like the type that gives up easily,” I giggled, shaking my head.

“Come on.” Caroline nodded, walking down the stone steps towards the large fire pit where we could already see flames blazing in the night. “I heard there would be s’mores.”

I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my chest, really quick, but still noticeable. Dan and I used to build fires in the pit by my ranch house and make s’mores. My feet faltered and I took a step backwards, shaking my head once.

“God, Caroline, I have a neck ache from those airplane pillows,” I sighed, making a show of grabbing my neck and rotating my shoulder. “I’m going to go back to the cabin and take some pain killers and just take it easy.”

She paused; looking back at me with, you guessed it, pity, then forced a smile. “Okay. Can I bring you a s’more?” She half-grinned.

“And ruin a romantic evening of burning marshmallows with Rowdy? I’ll be fine,” I replied, holding my hands up.

“If you’re sure,” she began, knowing that I kind of liked being alone these days, but afraid to give in to my demands.

“Go!” I ordered, smiling and turning for the stairs on the opposite end of the terrace. I waved as she disappeared, then dropped my smile and sighed heavily as I descended upon the road lined every fifty feet with an iron gas lamp. I just couldn’t be around so many people, singing and listening to stories and doing

whatever they do around a big ranch campfire. Dinner had been hard enough.

*Maybe I could call Kelly on that touch screen and get her to bring me a Hershey bar, though.*

“Hey.”

I looked up from my gray tennis shoes that I’d changed into and back over my shoulder. My whole body froze, causing me to stumble forward a little. It was him, smoldering cowboy guy with the beautiful eyes. I tried to say ‘hey’ back, or anything, really, but I couldn’t seem to locate my voice. My whole body was tingling.

He seemed a little agitated, as he looked me up and down, for a second time that day, then to either side of the road.

“Where’s Kelly?” he asked in a deep voice, hands on his hips. Ooh, he looked bossy that way.

I swallowed and tried my best to sound like he didn’t affect me in the least.

“At the campfire, I guess,” I replied in a small voice that surely wasn’t my own.

He frowned even more, if that was possible, then asked, “And why aren’t *you* at the campfire?”

No one had said it was mandatory but I was beginning to realize that maybe the staff didn’t want guests roaming around the wilds of Wyoming alone in the night. The ranch really was in the middle of nowhere. I guiltily clutched my hands in front of me and looked down at my tennis shoes. One was untied.

“I was tired from the trip,” I softly said, brushing my hair behind my ear and venturing a look up at him. He was shaking his head and the corner of his mouth was turned up into a grin. Was I in trouble? Did I really care if this host was angry with me or not? I really didn’t think I’d been breaking any rules.

“Come on,” he said, taking two steps with his long legs and reaching me. He stood about six inches away, his pearl snap plaid chest right in front of my face and...what was that? Sweat? Did his musky sweat really smell that heavenly? I leaned towards him

a centimeter as he held his arm out to the dark road ahead. "I'll walk you back to your cabin."

My mind processed that slowly since his scent was so intoxicating, but I managed to spin and walk slowly down the road without embarrassing myself too much. He walked beside me, very close.

"You really shouldn't walk around here alone. There are bears, moose, wildcats...a lot of things that could snatch you up and carry you off into the night."

The look I gave him must have not been quite as horrified as he'd wanted it to be, because he took my shoulder in his large hand and gave it a shake. "I'm serious," he said, stopping and looking down at me, reducing me to a child getting a scolding.

"Sorry," I mumbled, tearing my eyes away from his amazing eyes and dangerous stubble along his jaw. I turned and kept walking. There was nothing else I could do. He was soon next to me again as a cool breeze blew across our path, causing me to shiver.

"You should wear a jacket or sweater at night," he stated, frowning down at me again.

I'd read the brochure. I nodded, folding my arms across my chest. "I packed one; I just...forgot it tonight, I guess."

"Well don't forget it tomorrow," he ordered. His voice was deep with a little huskiness to it. I liked it, probably too much, but it was easy to get caught up in the sound and miss the actual words. "D'you hear?"

I rubbed my arms under my t-shirt and nodded.

"You don't say much, do you?" he inquired as we rounded some trees and passed another gas lamp.

That was the absolute truth. I'd never been much of a talker to begin with, and ever since Dan had broken it off with me I really just preferred to sit back and let Caroline do all the conversing. She made me laugh.

"That answers that," he mumbled, shaking his head and adjusting his old, frayed straw cowboy hat.

I frowned up at him, sure that he'd intended to be insulting, which only made the corner of his mouth turn up into a small grin again. I exhaled and looked back at the road. The glow of the cabins finally came into view. At least this awkward interlude was over.

Picking up my pace, I actually thought I'd beaten him to our cabin when I felt his hand grab my shoulder again. When I just paused, nose to the wooden door, he gently spun me around and peered down at me. He looked less frowny and more confused. I could only assume he was accustomed to girls chasing after him, not the other way around.

"No more solo outings, okay?" he stated, waiting for a reply.

"Okay," I nodded, feeling a little trapped as his body and glare pinned me to the door. I reminded myself to breathe and exhaled through my mouth, a real way to catch a man, I know, but he was still staring at me.

He suddenly took a step backwards, off of the porch, and then gave that sly, corner-of-his-mouth-up grin. Then he was gone. No goodbye or any variation. He just turned and disappeared into the night.

"How come *you* can walk alone at night?" I muttered, pressing the touch pad by the door with my thumb. I heard the lock disengage and had just walked inside the western style decorated cabin when the touch screen on the wall by our kitchen blinked and chimed.

Waving my fingers over it I jumped back as Kelly's frantic face suddenly appeared.

"Blake? Oh good, there you are. Jeez, Sweetie, I'm sorry I didn't escort you back to your cabin! I thought you were coming to the campfire! I..."

"Kelly," I interrupted, trying not to laugh at her. She looked pretty funny with her serious face so close to the camera, though. "It's fine, really. I was just a little tired. I'll keep you abreast of my plans from now on, okay?"

I could actual see her relax and peered back over my shoulder. Had that guy called her so quickly to say that I'd been unattended? The thought unnerved me more than getting carried off into the night by a moose.

"I hope...I mean, you're not in trouble, right?" I cautiously asked. If that guy, whatever his name was, had gotten her in trouble with the boss he would get an earful from me, that was for sure. "Did someone..."

"No! No!" She quickly grinned, though it looked forced. "Is there anything I can get you tonight before you go to bed?"

She sounded like a servant. I uncomfortably shook my head and signed off with her after she promised to never leave me alone again. That didn't sound as great as she thought it did, unfortunately.