

Prologue

Foreword:

The movies we see and books we read have us all believing that love is always gradious. True love is a knight in shining armor saddled on a white stallion lance held high fighting for her love daily. It's standing in the rain with a boombox held high playing a song of redemption outside her window begging for forgiveness, and getting it. It's writing a letter sharing your deepest feelings to melt her seemingly icy heart so that she will take you back and fill the now dull pain that was left in your chest weeks after she left, and she comes back. Don't always believe what you see and what you read. No this isn't me being bitter about having lost love, it's me coming to the conclusion that life and love are infinitely more complex than what the story books tell us. Real love in the real world often comes with tragedy, deception, amid complex decisions that lead to real pain, real consequences, and doesn't always end how you expect. Ironically friends, sometimes the cowboy doesn't ride away.

Prologue:

Its two weeks before the presidential election in Washington, D.C, the town is empty and quiet. Everyone is off to nooks and crannies across the country turning over rocks to find the votes needed to pull off a win and keep their jobs. Tristan Adams isn't, although he wishes he was. He wishes he was somewhere where the memory of her wouldn't haunt his every step, if there even is such a place. Instead he's lit up a montecristo cigar that a friend-of-a-friend gave him the night he ended things with Saralane a week ago. In this town he's learned it's exceedingly difficult to find people to call truly friends, but this guy was nice, gave him a good cigar, listened to him bemoan his loss.

The sun is setting just behind him, throwing shades of orange across the marble rock of the Washington Monument, reminding him of a limestone cornerpost used to hold barbed wire tight on fences back in Kansas. His hazel eyes with flecks of green, brown, and blue are staring out over the district from the roof of his luxury apartment complex in Navy Yard. There is a small string of lights hanging above him and flames dancing through the rocks of the gas lit fire pit that he's sitting near.

His feet are propped up on the rim of the circular pit. The heat is creeping into his classic brown ostrich skin custom made cowboy boots. Single welt and the tops are ever so slightly showing below his navy suit pants. They are blue tops, slightly brighter than the navy of his suit pants. There is a small bead of red piping running up the side with an elaborate paisley design in white stitching - red, white, and blue fitting for his job as General Counsel for his home-state Senator in D.C.

He's wearing his black felt lid, aka cowboy hat, with a cattleman's crown and silver toothpick jutting out of the hat band in the back. It's after Labor Day so he's changed from a lighter straw hat made for the summer heat to his heavier felts to keep the chill away, in line with his cowboy etiquette. His jacket is draped over the seat behind him, custom made too, little tiny American flags line the inside and peaking out from the folds is the monogrammed line "There's No Place Like Home" above the inside breast pocket nearest to his heart when it's on. A white hollywood dress shirt sets in contrast to his diagonally striped Versace tie, also red, white, and blue, but mostly blue. He's nervously rolling the lit cigar between his thumb and forefinger. The glow of the burning tobacco is reflecting off his gold signet ring that's adorned with the scales of justice that hold his Grandpa Addams' wedding diamond and a family diamond from his mother

as well. You can barely see his navajo silver and turquoise bracelet peeking out from underneath the cuff of his shirt stamped with his initials.

He can see the Nats stadium to his left, the open water of the Anacostia river meeting the Potomac river to his right, and a pool in front of him that looks as if it's running right off the edge of the building into the river below. He chose this place to live because it's so close to water and off the beaten path so to speak. Growing up on a cattle ranch has him used to wide open spaces, this is about as close to "open" as you can get in the District of Columbia. He can see for miles down the river from his rooftop perch.

It's going to be clear enough to see some stars, he thinks. Although it doesn't hold a candle to what the stars would look like laying on his back in the bluestem grass of the Flint Hills of Kansas where his favorite family pasture is. He can picture it in his mind, the uncountable specks of light littering a dark blue almost black canvas that is the Kansas sky. The haze of the milky way galaxy streaking down the center, always being able to find the north star. "I miss home," he mutters under his breath as he pulls on the smoke of his cigar, takes a taste, and blows it out, "I miss her," he replies to himself, thinking of his childhood home just a brief reprieve before the other thought crept in, *home was wherever she is*. It's shaping up to be a peaceful evening, he's actually alone on the roof for once, but that makes no matter, he finds no peace in his heart tonight.

It's been eight days since they broke up, only three days since he caught a glimpse of her at a Halloween party. Dancing with some friends he turned and saw her, when their eyes met she winced in pain. He tried to say, "you look pretty tonight" but she just set her eyes to the floor and walked on by. For the last forty eight hours all he's been able to see is her smile fade into pain when she laid eyes upon him. Two years and hundreds of memories together and all he sees is

that grimace, *how can she lose love so quickly?* Every excruciating minute on this rooftop his mind is racing fueled by emotions pulling at his deepest fears. *This is really over, the last two years meant nothing, you've failed, she's on to greener pastures, you. weren't. good. enough.*

He takes another long drag of that montecristo, tastes of sweet tobacco with hints of leather and spice. "I should have just walked away," still talking to himself as he turns to snag the bottle of Cattleman's Club. *Walking away would have saved me, it's the cowboy way, restless, running, not letting anyone tie me down.* He grabs a couple cubes from the ice chest, drops them into a glass with a rattle, pours himself a double, and takes another drag of his cigar. He settles back into his chair waiting for the first star to show in the sky. Well really it's not a star but rather Saturn, *you really can't see the stars for shit in this city.* He could have walked away when he had the chance, just like cowboys do. Then he would have held the upper hand. He would've had all the cards, the ace in the hole. Just like last time. But no, he didn't ride off into the sunset, he turned his horse back to the hitchpost only to find the door shut.

His iphone buzzes with his friend John calling him. John's a gem, as difficult as it is to find a real friend in this city, John is as close to Tristan's best friend as you can get, aside from the cigar and whiskey that's now coursing through his veins. John is about 10 years Tristan's senior with a life story as rich as they come. From owning a dude ranch in Colorado to being Chief of Staff to a Nebraska Congressman. Tristan always gravitated to John in times of struggle. John would listen, I mean really listen, encourage an even temperament, and even if Tristan did the opposite, John never gave up.

Tristan picks up, "Counselor," he says, his traditional greeting.

John replies, "how ya holding up."

"Not good." Tristan's voice cracking as tears begin to well and fall dripping into his whiskey.

And he wasn't doing good. The last two weeks, before and after the breakup had been excruciating. He could feel it coming and instead of walling himself off he poured even more of himself into the relationship. It didn't matter in the end.

Everywhere he looked and everywhere he went there she was, imprinted in his mind, unshakable. He saw her face in everything, her light blonde hair with wisps of long curls, her pink lips curled in a seductive smile begging to be kissed, and her eyes, HER EYES, slightly green with a large starburst of amber and light brown. He felt her touch when he slept, at least in the few hours that he could sleep each night, heavily sedated with melatonin. The way she would run her fingers through his hair starting from his temples to the back of his head before she'd kiss him. How she would press her body against his, his chest hair tickling her nipples, grabbing the small of her back and pulling her even closer. When he rolls over to the side where she always slept in his king sized bed he'd catch the smell of her perfume, Carolina Herrera, the sweet smell of flowers and vanilla. But that's not the only smell he remembers. It's also the smell of self tanner that he always used to hate, there's still a small stain on his white sheets because of it. It's also the deep warm breath of her pheromones that drift into his nose as they kiss, difficult to put words to but it's the smell of a chemical connection and attraction deeper than love itself.

The hole left in his heart manifested physical pain in his chest. At first it was a sharp stab, like his knife slipping and cutting his finger. But now it's more the steady pressure of a painful pinch that's unrelenting. He lost nearly ten pounds already because his appetite was non-existent but his need to run, miles and miles, high. His mind always raced with those thoughts of what he could have done, what he should have done, what he could do now. But even more, how could she do this, what is she doing, is it this hard for her, if it was this hard why isn't

she back in my arms tackling this pain together, what's the meaning of all this, how do I move on? To say “Not Good” barely scratched the surface of the depth of his helplessness.

“I’m sorry man, I know this is tough.” John replied.

“I just don’t know what to do, how to fix this, if it's even fixable.”

“It’s going to take time.”

“What if I don’t have the time? What if I really lose this one?”

“Then you lose her, there are plenty of women in D.C.”

“I know that, I know I can move on, hell I’ve already had a girl slide into my DM’s asking for my number. But that's not the point. They don’t mean a damn thing. She was home.”

“Then you are going to have to wait it out.”

“What If I missed that chance already, what if this is God’s way of punishing me for what I did to Morgan.”

“What do you mean man, tell me about that.”

Just then Marine One came into view taking a turn past his apartment complex headed to the Marine One Hanger across the river, then another, and then a third. *The President must be in town.* And Tristan starts to tell John how this tragedy unfolds.

Hinge

Chapter 1: Hinge, (six years earlier)

“Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep,” the blaring sound of an alarm wakes Tristan up on a Friday morning in Kansas City. Although it's pitch black in his basement bedroom he knows the sun is easily burning its way through the morning, already over the treetops of his yard to the east. He leans over to his white pine bedside table that's adorned with rusty round handles, taps the cowboy boot shaped lamp awake and silences his alarm. There's not much else on that table except a gold Seiko watch, a half drank glass of water with a smudge of lipstick on the rim, and a used condom. He feels someone stirring to his left and it almost startles him, *she's still here*, surprised that she didn't leave but glad that she spent the night.

She's laying facing the other way with her entire back exposed. Long dark hair running along light tan sheets stopping midway down her back. She smells sweet, almost like honeysuckle but with a shadow of sex and sweat from the night before. She's a bit darker than his sheets with a few moles sprinkled down her back. The light from his lamp is gently reflecting off her suntaned body, showing the tone of a girl who is definitely into fitness. Her shoulders are lean and feminine and a soft line of muscle follows either side of her spine. The bedsheet is resting lightly on her hips exposing her entire back. But the sheets are light enough that the round and full shape of her butt doesn't have to be imagined. *God she's so hott*. Tristan thinks.

Tristan has always had an eye for women and a talent for opening. His buddies would always tease him about closing, but his strong features, charisma, and unabashed cowboy confidence got them laid several times because he actually had the balls to go up to a group of girls and talk. Typically into blondes but seemed to have better luck with brunettes. The one in his bed he got with his favorite pickup line at the country concert the night before.

The concert was a part of the yearly Hot Country Nights series and Easton Corbin had played. Tristan went there with a group of his buddies. They always stood under the archway in the open air venue of power and light, maybe thirty yards from the stage and only steps away from the outdoor bar where Tristan's roommate worked. Their favorite spot because it was easy to snag a whiskey, even easier to see the band, but not in the jungle of people screaming shoulder to shoulder closer to the stage. His friend Dave had eyes on a hot little number in a red dress. Several of her friends were peppered around her. This girl had bleach blonde hair and bright red lipstick on, cream colored boots. Tristan and Dave had similar tastes.

Knowing that Dave wouldn't make the first move Tristan had said, "Follow me," to him, the game was afoot.

He then walked right up to the girl in red, flashed her a smile and she smiled back. He grabbed her hand lightly and noticed freshly manicured red nails as well. The girl knew how to use colors to her advantage. The evolutionary biology of man can't help but resist the temptations of red. Rather than what traffic laws have attempted to override, red on a woman means go, not stop. It symbolizes love, passion, and desire, in this instance more lust than love. While the red with the blonde had captivated Tristan he instead did what he'd done several times before and said, "I have a question for you." For a brief moment he could tell that she was hoping he'd ask for her name, but it was too late, Tristan had already committed to his plan. He just turned sideways, her hand still in his, and chuckled, "have you met Dave."

The girl laughed, did a slight curtsy and replied, "good to meet you Dave," but before she could look back at Tristan, he had already disappeared.

Tristan knew Dave always cursed him under his breath when he did this but there was almost always the call the next morning thanking him when he sealed the deal.

Tristan still hadn't gone far, just back up to the bar with a finger in the air, his roommate already with his whiskey, water, and lime in hand. Amanda was a damn good barkeep, she could almost always tell when another round was due and would bring them up fresh and free. Little did Tristan know that one of Red's friends had followed him to the bar. The girl now in his bed. She bore witness to the 'have you met Dave' shenanigans and was wildly intrigued why the handsome cowboy hat wearing man didn't actually make a move on Red.

"That was sly," the mystery friend had said as Tristan turned from the bar, "you know she was more into you."

"Well, I'm not that into blondes," Tristan had lied, noticing this girl had beautiful long brown hair, "plus he gives me good deals on my cowboy boots."

"Wait, that's the Dave who owns the western store?" she showed a bit of surprise in her eyes, Dave had a little bit of a reputation in town as the 'Italian Stallion'.

"Indeed, you can go chase him too if you like." he had replied, playfully and honestly.

"I think I'd rather stay with you."

She's hunting too. "I think I'd be obliged" Tristian had smiled.

"I'm Kylie, it's a pleasure."

"I'm Tristan," and he had stuck out his hand which started with a simple hand shake but he twisted under her palm exposing the top of he hand and then kissed her knuckles, "the pleasure is all mine."

In the background the first few notes of 'All Over the Road' were being strummed by the guitar. Tristan was still holding her hand and spun her around once and asked, "Do you know how to two-step?"

"No," she replied with a look of pleasant surprise after being twirled.

“Want to learn?” Tristan asked after he curled her around his arm with a hand on her hip dipping her slowly to the ground.

“Yes.” she had said laughing while she was still hovering over the concrete floor, hair whipping from a fan near the bar with Tristan smiling down on her.

She has lovely brown eyes and a perfect smile. Tristan had thought.

The rest of the night was a blurr, Tristan spun her around the little gap between the bar and the starwell to the concert crowd. Her white and yellow sundress with floral patterns would flutter with every spin and her bright white cowboy boots quickly learned the rhythm of the one-two-and-step.

Towards the end of the night she had asked, “Can I wear your hat,” a dark gray American with his lucky two dollar bill inside. Which T-ed Tristan up for that favorite pickup line of his.

“You wear the hat, you ride the cowboy,” and she didn’t hesitate. She pulled it right off his head and put it on hers.

Now this morning, Tristan is admiring the beauty of Kylie laying in his bed. He can see her tall white boots in the corner of the room next to his cayman alligator black boots. Her sundress is in a little pile next to the bathroom, her bra and panties nowhere in sight. *Wait, no, she wasn’t wearing any last night.* The thought of that turned him on again. *I could go for a run, or something else for some exercise.* Tristan pursues the or.

He starts by tickling her back in a figure eight pattern from her neck to the dimples that are just above her butt. *Those dimples.* A soft chuckle is let out as his mind goes to one of his favorite movie quotes. In an Australian accent Tristan says, “There are three things I love in this world: medium rare steak, small dimples just above a woman's buttocks and the fear in a man's eye when he knows I'm about to hurt him,” changing the movie quote slightly.

Kylie starts to wake and says, “what did you say Tristan?”

“Nothing babe.” and Tristan kisses the very nape of her neck then the side of her neck, and then kisses her ear.

She lets out a small moan as he breathes a little heavier in her ear and sticks his tongue inside of it. He continues licking her as he reaches around to touch her nipple. He learned quickly last night that she liked a little pinch to make them hard. He repeats the move this morning. Her skin is so much softer than his slightly calloused hands from years of working on the ranch. That roughness has its advantages when softly brushing her skin.

He slowly moves his hand from her breast down to her groin still in a figure eight pattern. His fore and middle finger starts playing with her clit and she lets out an even longer moan.

“What are you doing Tristan,” Kylie whispers.

“I’m getting a run in before work.” Tristan whispers millimeters from her ear making sure his breath tickles her senses.

“This doesn’t feel like a run.”

“I know, it’s so much better.”

She turns her head and he at first lightly kisses her lips. Just before she pushes a touch harder with hers, begging for his mouth to open wider so their tongues can intertwine, Tristan obliges. The kiss becomes longer and heavier while he’s still swirling his fingers over her clitoris. He feels her become more and more wet, her pussy throbbing for him. She finally fully turns and pushes his shoulder back onto the bed. Starting just below his chin Kylie kisses his neck, then his pectoral just over his heart. Continuing down she kisses his navel then just above his fully erect dick, curving slightly to his left, the size of a banana. With that, Tristan lets out a slight “fuck” as she takes him in her mouth.

Kylie slowly works his cock back and forth pausing only to lick each side. She grabs him with both her hands twisting in opposite directions, a string of saliva stretching from her lips to his head as she pulls away.

“Do you have a condom,” Kylie asks

Fuck, I used my last one last night, “no last night was my last one.”

“Screw it, I’m on birth control.”

She crawls on top of him pulling at the tip of his penis and slides it into her still wet vagina. Tristan’s favorite part of sex is when a girl first puts him inside of her. The initial pressure and warmth pulls even more blood to the tip of his dick make it feel even bigger inside of her. Kylie rolls her hips back and forth grinding her clit on his groin. It's clear that she knows how to get herself off but Tristan helps by grabbing on each side of her hip and massaging just above her deep v lines. *Her tits are fantastic*. He looks up at her biting her lip, her boobs are bouncing with every rock of her hips. They are full and perky, her areolas are brown almost the same color of her eyes and about the size of a quarter, tightened with pleasure. She has a mole just over her left areola that accents her athletic body perfectly. Tristan, athletic himself, with a lean muscular chest, moderately dense with hair, pulls himself up to her and takes a nipple in his mouth. With one hand around her back and the other hand searching for the top of her vagina Tristan can tell Kylie is getting close. Triggering a tingling sensation in himself telling him he’s getting close as well. When his thumb finds her clit, Kylie shudders with pleasure, “Fuck this is the best way to wake up,” she says.

“Let yourself cum,” Tristan says, he can tell she's been fighting it to boost the sensation.

“Oh fuck baby,” she moaned. Tristan can feel the throbbing of her vagina as she starts to cum. That's when he takes over and mirrors her hip movements with his own from underneath

her. “Yes,” she says loudly but not quite in a scream. She becomes increasingly wet almost like she’s squirting and starts to shudder a little as her climax intensifies.

“Where do you want me to cum,” Tristan asks, mildly hoping he can cream inside of her.

“I don’t care, wherever you want to,” she replies.

For a split second he thinks about fully releasing himself inside of her but a moment of sanity kicks in just before his climax and he pulls out. She immediately springs down and grabs his dick again, not quick enough, a little semen has already jetted onto his chest. But the rest she keeps in her mouth and slowly rubs her hand up and down his curved shaft to get every remaining drop. There is a twisted feeling of both pleasure and torture as she continues to rub his dick while he’s cuming, its too intense and he twists away from her hand and mouth.

“Are you ok?” Kylie asked, “did I hurt you?”

“No, it was just feeling too good, I couldn’t handle it.”

“Oh you can’t handle me?” Kylie wraps her hands around his head and tries to kiss him.

“Nope! Not until you brush your teeth, I don’t want my kids in my own mouth.” Tristan laughs and still kisses her cheek and forehead. He can’t tell if it makes her feel mad or neglected, but really doesn’t care either way. Post nut clarity.

He then throws his legs over the side of the bed and gets up, “I’ve got to get to work, I’m already late and it’s an hour drive.” Tristan grabs his phone from the bedside table and walks towards his bathroom a few paces away, hard dick still swinging back and forth as he walks. She admires his rich muscles running from his shoulders and creasing down his back. He too has a couple dimples just above a small but perky butt. A cowboy’s butt.

His phone lights up as he slides a barn door open to the bathroom. He turns a brass and antique colored knob to let water start falling from the shower head into a large clawfoot bathtub.

He actually designed and finished this entire bathroom himself and has an affinity for smoking cigars while soaking up bubbles in the clawfoot tub. But this morning, just a quick shower will do. The bathroom walls are white trimmed in red and light gray barnwood and everything in it reminds you of an old farmhouse, only in the middle of the city. Before he gets in he looks at his phone and sees it was a Hinge match with a message that said ‘Hey, you’re handsome.’ Her name was Morgan, another brunette, but unlike the one laying in his bed, this girl had piercing blue eyes and large luscious lips. *Damn, look at those eyes*, he thinks as he quickly writes his response. ‘You’re pretty gorgeous yourself, want to get drinks tonight?’

Tristan sets his phone face down next to the sink, white porcelain sitting on top of a contrasting wooden cabinet to blend the color of his vinyl floors to the barnwood trimming around the bathroom. He pulls the white curtains that hang from a circular bar above the tub back with that sheer scratching noise and steps in. Moments later, Kylie walks in to take a pee. “Did you really finish this all yourself?” remembering a conversation they had the night before.

“Yup, I had some help but I’m pretty handy from growing up on the ranch.”

“That’s so impressive,” Kylie is beginning to really like this man, he really was a cowboy, “Do you want to do something tonight?”

“Sorry, I’m going to my buddy’s barn tonight.” Tristan replied keeping the night open for the potential for this new Hinge match Morgan. His response still isn’t entirely a lie, it is tradition every Friday night to hang out at the Western Store Saloon, what they call his barn. Something he is hoping Morgan would enjoy. “Maybe we can catch up next week.”

He couldn’t see it through the curtains but Kylie’s face was sour, she was hoping this wasn’t just a one night stand but she couldn’t shake the feeling that she couldn’t catch this cowboy. She was right. He was already riding away.

Before Tristan was done washing the soap out of his hair, Kylie had already stepped back into the bedroom where she slipped into her dress from the night before. She called back into the bathroom “I’m gonna catch an Uber back home, I had a great time last night,” hoping that she could salvage back some control by leaving before Tristan did.

“Are you sure, I can give you a ride on my way to work,” he shouted back from the shower.

“It’s ok, I really did have fun, hope to see you around,” trying to be casual about the whole ordeal but still with a sinking feeling that Tristan just wasn’t into her.

Before Tristan could give it another thought she was already walking up the carpeted stairs around the corner from his bedroom that led directly to the outside door of his house. *Wait I didn’t get her number* Tristan finally realized as he stepped out of the shower water dripping down his chest and back onto the bathmat below. His hair matted to his skin. “I can always find her on instagram,” he said to himself.

With a towel wrapped around his waist, just below his abs which were still slightly moist he flipped his phone back over. Still nothing back from Morgan. She never would send a message back to him on Hinge.

AleHouse

Chapter 2 - AleHouse

Almost a year has passed since the Hot Country Nights one night stand. Tristan had thought about sliding into Kylie's DM's a few times but he stayed pretty preoccupied with online dating and work. Plus, she was entirely too easy of a score. He was up for bigger and better challenges. Morgan. While she never responded, Morgan and Tristan had started following each other on instagram not long after they matched on Hinge. There was a dance of liking each other's photos and she'd comment on a post here and there. It was like they kept circling a pond daring each other to jump in but both were a little hesitant to get wet. The initial request for drinks had fallen on deaf ears but at least there was some type of interaction that kept the initial interest alive. However, it remained just that for Morgan, mild interest for a handsome man who claimed to be a cowboy and attorney.

It is late Friday, Tristan is driving back from the State Capitol of Kansas in the company's light grey Chevy Malibu. Black new wayfarer sunglasses are reflecting interstate seventy in front of him, the yellow and white lines flashing across his lenses. The Ray-Ban symbol is engraved into the left eyepiece, these are real, not the cheap knock-offs he got in Barbados when he studied abroad during his 2L year of law school. Six weeks in paradise. After Tristan had graduated from law school a trade association with a wildly good reputation reached out to him to see if he'd be interested in coming on as Associate Counsel and a lobbyist. He didn't have to apply for this job, word had just got around Topeka that he would be a perfect fit, and he was. Not only did he have the bona-fides of ranching alongside his family for most of his life he had a passion for protecting the interests of agriculture and the Kansas cattleman. That's why he actually went to law school. He could have gone back to the Ranch after getting his Animal Science degree at Kansas State, but no, instead he put good use of his public speaking skills and

signed up to take the LSAT. Shortly after he was a full time student at the law school in Topeka, had started a student organization to explore agricultural law, and landed several internships in various ag firms.

The decision to go to law school had put a little strain on him and his father's relationship, understandably. Just imagine the unbending fortitude of a John Dutton like man who poured his blood, sweat, and tears into building a livestock empire just to have one of the heir's turn towards a different path. Tristan on the other hand was faced with moving to a small town with his father and two brothers with the daunting task of trying to be a chief when there were already too many chiefs and not enough Indians on the ranch. In his mind law school was a way he could still help the ranch but in a manner of his choosing and his own path. While he had every intention of hanging his own shingle as a small town solo practitioner, god threw him a curveball with the job offer. Tristan hadn't really thought about lobbying for the interests of agriculture, he would have been content establishing trusts and handling large farm estates. But this opportunity set him down a path where he could effectuate real change for american agriculture.

This week had been long but successful, he had every cause for celebration tonight with his friends and what's her name, another girl from hinge. Lizzy I think her name is. Yes Lizzy. This week there was a major battle between the cattlemen and the railroads in the statehouse. The railroad lobbyist had a reputation as a back breaker and very rarely would be beaten in a legislative fight. He was a daunting man too, very large and tall, slicked back hair, in his late 70s and knew where all the bodies were buried in Kansas. Had a booming voice that cracked a hair from years of smoking cubans. Almost mafia like with gold accents on his suits complete with a sparkling rolex. Tristan was either young enough, or just stupid enough to go picking a fight with

the railroads. They don't call it 'getting railroaded' for nothing. However, this infamous lobbyist did one thing that you should never do, and that's underestimate a cattleman. You see, cattle grazed in all 105 counties in Kansas. Every state Senate and House member had constituents who farmed or ranched. They also didn't ask for much or ask very often. For years a coalition of trade associations and commodity groups had tried to get trucking weights on state and local roads to be in line with the latest technology. Triple axle trailers up to ninety thousand pounds. The railroads would gin up the safety lobby, rally the teamsters union, and get the counties to say such weights would damage the roads. Every year, every dirty trick by the railroad would be pulled to kill the legislation. They put on the best parties, paid into nearly every race, and ensured that leadership wouldn't let it see the light of day.

However, Tristan knew what it would mean to have such a small simple change for anybody who had to truck things from field to farm, pasture to processor, or gravel pit to highway. Over time the savings just on trips alone would more than pay for the expenses of buying a triple axle trailer. More wheels actually meant less weight per tire and per axle and more tires meant more breaks, thus greater stopping power if you have to use those breaks hard. When the facts are on your side it is much easier to make a case, and the soybean association had put a lot of money into studies to prove their case. Tristan had already spent several years sitting back in the halls of the statehouse, his eyes ever watchful, learning others' lobbying styles. He shook hands, did some talking, but did way more listening. His saddle leather briefcase embroidered with the family ranch brand and his initials always sat in the corner of the waiting area outside of house or senate chambers. That or his custom boots would always serve as a icebreaker for legislators or other lobbyist alike.

For the last couple of years he had been building his repertoire as honest, prompt, and accessible for any legislator. You see, Kansas has a citizen legislature so they don't have staff. That means the folks representing different industries can step up not only to help educate the legislators but also take a little off their plate by setting up meetings or delivering messages. In order to make in-roads into the democrat caucus he made it a point to go to their events. First he'd build a friendship on mutual interests, like Chiefs football or a new TV series. After a while they got comfortable with him and would come to him with genuine interest in his former life, ranching. Tristan was able to romanticize the farm in their minds which made it a lot easier when it came to asking for their vote. He served as the bridge between the inner cities of Kansas and the rural red farm country. Every year he'd also host a big event called "dem-steaks" where he would take several leaders of the democratic caucus to an infamous steakhouse on the outskirts of Topeka where they would gorge themselves on steak. He only had one rule for them, which they respected, steaks couldn't be grilled over medium-rare. A few who always got steaks well-done thanked him for that rule, they didn't know what a good steak was.

This alliance with democrats wasn't happenstance but rather planned. The railroad coalition with their unions always relied on democrats to help kill things. But Tristan was coming in on the flanks. There was always enough rural republicans that would advance the interests of the cattlemen's association that Tristan worked for, but with democrats and more urban republican's this truck weight bill never seemed to get far in committee. They also never had Tristan leading on it either.

This week had been the committee markup on the Senate side, a time where the transportation committee would consider a bill and decide to pass it as is, amend it, or kill it. There was nine members in the committee and Tristan's whip count was 4 definite yeses and two

likely yeses making it a plus six for passage of his bill. Those last two had to come through. But that would just be the first step, there was then the full body of the Senate and the through the House committee and chamber. This was going to be a long tough fight.

Standing right outside the committee room before it started he was a hair nervous. *I'm confident but this isn't a sure thing.* That's when he heard the booming voice of the railroad lobbyist.

"Addams," he said, "I want to cut a deal."

A deal, interesting, that means he's scared of losing, doesn't hurt to hear him out. "I'm not opposed, what are you thinking Mark."

"Your coalition is mostly Ag, but your bill covers any and all products shipped by truck. Why don't we cut out all the bullshit and make this bill increase truck weights for Ag only."

"If I cut this deal will you call off the dogs and go neutral on the bill."

"We will go neutral and stop whipping against it. Ag is still our biggest customer."

Taking this will solidify a win and let the bill sail through the process and honestly right to the governor's desk. "Do you have language for me to look at?"

Mark pulled a folded sheet of paper out and passed it over. It followed the same basic format of the bill only restricting the permit for the weight class to any and all agricultural products. It was actually significantly broader that Addams anticipated covering even frozen meats and finished food products from a farm. *This is good, this is really good.*

"Let me make a call." Tristan stepped away and called back to the livestock association headquarters. "Brad, the railroads offered a deal. It's really good and gets us pretty much everything we want and all but eliminates any opposition."

"What's the catch?" Brad asked.

“Only downside is we break up the coalition for non-ag supporters. Upside is we got our foot in the door and can come back in a few years and do the rest.”

“Make the deal?”

“I think it's smart, low risk, and would be a big win.”

“Then do it.”

Tristan walked back towards the committee hearing his boots clicking on the off-white tile floors as he walked up. Tristan doesn't even own a pair of dress shoes. “Mark, lets do this.”

Mark stuck out his large hand and Tristan grabbed it firm. “I'll get the amendment to the Chairman.” Mark replied.

The rest operated smoothing, Tristan shot a text to the legislators that he know would support it so they did get caught off guard. The vote actually passed unanimously out of committee and later it would sail through the rest of the bodies and right to the Governor. This was big, a small-town cowboy turned lawyer got the railroad to bend. The celebration was in order.

On the drive home, he shot Lizzy a message, “I'm almost home from Topeka, I'll let you know when I get cleaned up and head towards you.” This wasn't a real date, no dinner or wooing beforehand. Just a drink at the bar before his buddies show up and they all can celebrate. They will all be headed to the Alehouse. A popular spot in Westport on the Missouri side of Kansas City. It's situated on the corner of Broadway and Archibald with its floor to ceiling windows along the front and a big wooden sign dotted with hollywood style round lights spelling out the bar name.

“Sounds great, I can't wait.” She replied.

Tristan's house was situated about 2 miles straight north of his friend Dave's and the infamous Western Store Saloon. As he pulled up to his small ranch style brown house situated in a corner lot on steep hill that the street then wrapped around. His white four door F150 was in front of the garage the flagpole just to the right with the US and Kansas flag flying high. He pulled his work car up the drive that had an extra spot that jettisoned out from the driveway at the very crest of the hill. He grabbed his saddle leather bag from the set and walked inside. Amanda was there.

"Hey roomie, you coming to AleHouse later or are you working."

"I'm working unfortunately, but aren't you taking your soup du jour with you tonight?"

"Yes Lizzy, hinge girl I matched with this week."

"I can't believe you aren't taking her on a proper date."

"I can't drop a bag for every girl I meet online, I'm not that rich."

"I pay you enough in rent to buy her a steak."

"Honey that goes to the mortgage and if I wanted her to have a steak I'd just grill her one here."

"Yeah so I can walk outside and catch you fucking in the hot tub again."

"Hey, my boots were by the sliding glass door, you should have known better."

"The image of your ass halfway out of the hot tub splashing around like a fuckin beaver will be forever engrained in my mind." She let out a fake throw up noise.

"You know you liked it, you didn't immediately turn around and scream. It took several seconds."

"Shut up, you're gross."

“Alright, Alright, I’m gonna go shower. Whatever you do, don’t come downstairs and get a second show.”

“Go away.”

Amanda and Tristan never had sex but there was always that weird tension between them. They had made out years before one night after the Country Stampede, but they never really took it past that and always remained good friends.

To get to Tristan’s basement apartment you have to walk through the garage and turn the corner. The stairs are carpeted and lead to a large living room. The wall behind the TV painted purple is to the right. A dark brown leather couch with a hide-a-way bed in it is in front of the barnwood entertainment center housing the TV. To the immediate left is the bedroom but if you walk through the living room there's another left turn where his home office desk is and the external door to the bathroom.

Tristan kicks his boots off in the bedroom and starts peeling out of his clothes and hanging them in their spot in the closet on the other side of his bed. He pulls a tailored dark blue button down shirt and his nice pair of wranglers and lays them on his bed to wear. The routine before going out is always the same. Uses a straight edge razor to shave his neck which crisp lines in his beard before a shower. He steps into the shower using his manscaped products to trim up and shave his groin. Afterwards he uses the same brand of deodorant that his dad uses and a light shaping cream for his thick brown hair. The sides are tight and faded but on top its long and falls back and to his right. Good hair runs in the family. This year he’d been using armani diamonds cologne, one of his friends had it and he quite liked it. The girls seemed to too.

After he’s fully dressed he sits at the foot of his bed and pulls on his two-tone wingtip cowboy boots, his favorite pair. He stands and looks in the full body mirror next to his dresser.

The tailored shirt fits his figure perfectly, he's lean and muscular and this shirt complements his shape. He won't be wearing a cowboy hat tonight, the boots can tell his story instead.

He snags his truck keys, wallet, and gum after putting on his gold Sieko watch, a gift from his grandmother, before he goes back upstairs. "I'm out Amanda, dibs on you if Lizzy and I don't work out tonight."

"Again, you're gross." Amanda replied, although her smile hinted at something different.

Outside he jumped into his white F150 four door to go pick up Lizzy from across town and shot her the text that he was on his way. She hit the thumbs up. It was about a 20 minute drive and he had the window's down, the radio up, and the wind was blowing through his hair. Even though it was dark outside the weather was still a perfect seventy five degrees. He loved to sing in the truck and was singing as he pulled into Lizzy's apartment complex on the Missouri side of Kansas City. *The best part of Missouri is named Kansas*, he thought with a chuckle.

As he pulled in he shot a text, "I'm downstairs in the white ford."

"YAY, I'll be right down." she replied.

Tristan positioned the truck so the passenger side was nearest her door, still had both windows down with Turnpike Troubadours playing. He walked over to her side and leaned his back on the front quarter panel of his truck and put one foot on his tire. He pulled out his phone and started scrolling through hinge again. Tristan was singing every word to "Every Girl" while looking for his next potential score. It's not like he wasn't going to give Lizzy a chance but it's so much easier to impress a girl when you aren't fixated on just the one you like. Lizzy was damn sure pretty, at least in her pictures, but why hang up your hat when you're young and have all the potential left in the world. The front door came open as Lizzy stepped out to catch Tristan in the middle of the song.

“And now her voice, it is a melody that sings just like a bird

Oh, she's every song I've ever heard

And her heartbeat is a rhythm that commands her every word

Oh, she's every song I've ever heard”

He looks up and sees her, *her pictures were spot on*, and she said, “you’ve got yourself a decent voice sir.”

Tristan replied with a grin that says try me, “that’s not the only thing I’m good at.” Just before he opened the door he grabbed her by the hand and spun her once on the sidewalk. Interestingly enough she knew how to dance and took to following his lead immediately. He kept singing as they danced.

“Well, she's the sober Sunday kitchen conversation with my dad

Oh, she's every friend I've ever had

Well, we never failed to cut a trail whenever times were bad

Oh, she's every friend I've ever had”

“Cowboy you are way too smooth, is life going to be like this with you forever,” Lizzy asked with the spark of immediate affection in her soft blue eyes.

“You’ve got to rope me, saddle me, and break me before we can talk about forever,” Tristan replied with the same devilish grin, “come on, lets go to the bar.” He opened the door to his truck and helped her up the step, his hand still lightly in hers before softly shutting the door.

She put her arm out the window and said, “this song really is quite good.”

Before he walked around to the other side of the truck, he grabbed her hand again, gave her a faint kiss on her knuckles and replied, “just wait, this is just the start of the evening.”