

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

COOGAN'S BREAK MINIS
BOOK 1

HOPE MALONE



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WHERE THERE'S SMOKE





MANDY

Time has flown by since our unforgettable helicopter adventure and intimate night in the tower. Logan and I have settled into married life, relishing every moment together. Today, we're back at the lookout, sitting high above the rippling forest.

I step outside onto the wooden walkway that surrounds the lookout, my body still zinging from our recent lovemaking. It's peaceful here, a sanctuary away from the chaos of the world.

Logan joins me, his sexy smile brightening my day. Soon enough, he wraps his arms around me from behind, resting his chin atop my head, and letting me know we'll soon be back in bed.

As I nestled deeper into his embrace, a wave

of overwhelming contentment washed over me. I couldn't help but marvel at the incredible journey that had led us here, to this perfect moment. The guarded, lonely man I'd first met in the pond had transformed into the most devoted husband I could have ever hoped for.

Logan's playful spirit and contagious laughter had become the soundtrack of my life, filling my heart with pure, unbridled joy. In moments like these, wrapped in the solid strength of his arms, I felt absolutely cherished, like the very center of his universe.

Our love had only grown stronger since we'd exchanged our vows. The unbreakable bond between us, a connection that had saved us both in so many ways, was now forever sealed by the promises we'd made to each other.

Tears pricked at the corners of my eyes as I whispered, "I love you so much it almost hurts. I never dreamed I could be this happy."

Logan's arms tightened around me, his voice thick with emotion as he responded, "You've brought light back into my life, sweetheart. I'm the luckiest man alive to call you my wife."

We stood there in contented silence, simply drinking each other in as the gentle melody of birdsong and rustling leaves enveloped us. Here in our private paradise, cocooned in the breathtaking beauty of nature and the warmth of

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our unfailing love, I knew we were exactly where we were always meant to be.

"I've always loved this place," he said, his voice hoarse, him having so recently shouted his release, as I had mine. "Now I love it even more. It's like our own little piece of paradise."

There's nothing I can do to stop myself from pressing back against his erection. He truly brings out the wanton in me. "It absolutely is, Logan. I couldn't ask for anything more."

"You couldn't? That's not what your ass is saying."

There's no mistaking the mirth in his voice, with him never far from laughter these days. Such a change from the stoic, miserable man I'd met in the pond all those months back.

After a morning spent drinking coffee and making love, we rinse off under the recently installed outdoor shower. My shocked squeals pierce the surrounding trees, thanks to hot water being too much to ask for in such a remote spot.

Only once we're both squeaky clean and covered in goosebumps do we embark on a hike through the forest. Hand in hand, we traverse the well-worn trails, immersing ourselves in nature's beauty. While the scent of pine fills the air, a

symphony of birdsong accompanies our every step.

When Logan turns sharply off the track, I don't question it. He knows this forest like the back of his hand. With him in charge, I know I'll be safe.

It's this diversion that has us coming across a secluded clearing, carpeted with a vibrant array of wildflowers. The colorful blossoms, steals my breath away as surely as Logan had earlier. "It's like something out of a dream."

Dreamlike is when he pulls me close for a slow dance to music that only we can hear. We twirl in nature's embrace, lost in the moment's joy. Time stands still as we create our own private paradise within the wilderness.

With nature's soundtrack coming to a stop, Logan pulls me even tighter against him, his lips claiming mine in a kiss that makes those shared earlier pale. As lost as I am in the sensual haze, I'm surprised when he loosens his hold on me and shrugs out of his daypack.

It's an action I'm soon copying, dropping mine amongst the wildflowers, the scent released from their crushed blooms wafting up around me.

On watching Logan drag a blanket out of his backpack, I can't help but smile as I do likewise. It would appear I wasn't alone in my desire for

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some fun while we were out hiking. And this clearing is the perfect spot for it.

So perfect that I don't think twice about shedding all my clothes. There isn't a chance of being caught in flagrante delicto here, although I see Logan has bear spray on hand in case Mother Nature has other ideas.

I step forward to join Logan in the middle of the overlapping blankets; the sun heats my body, although his skin is even hotter when we once again kiss. Hot enough to burn any inhibitions I might have left. Hot enough to have me reaching for his cock, my hand tightened around the base and jerked firmly.

He's as ready for me as I am for him, something that shows when he reaches down and buries his fingers in my moist curls. "I want you so badly, baby, it hurts." His words are husky and rushed, with him obviously loath to break our kiss.

Rather than voice my response, I loosen my grip on his cock before tightening it again. It's a motion I repeat along his glorious length, finding him also damp with need.

There's nothing graceful about our descent to the blankets, both of us eager to make love. It's also a maneuver that sees me atop him, the sun beating down on my back as the heat from his cock burns my cleft.

All it takes is for me to raise up on my knees, guide him where I want him, and then lower myself again for his fiery length to fill completely. As I grind myself against his length, more flowers give up their petals.

They're not the only petals getting in on the action, something I find out when I lean back to allow the sun to scorch my breasts and mons. When Logan peels me wide, the sun hits where our bodies join, his cock disappearing into my depths.

As I move up and down as much as I can, I watch his cock filling me, making the sensation so much more than it usually would be. I lean back, lifting higher, desperate to see my body consuming him from tip to base.

Not until he hisses do I think to look at his face. His fight for control of his body is a beautiful thing to watch. I soon join him in this when his thumbs squeeze my pearl, pushing me ever closer to the edge.

"Hah, you sneaky man. Two can play at that game." I lift myself almost free, staying poised on my knees, his length exposed to the breeze now swirling around us. He's not having it. With a sharp jerk of his hips and he seats himself again. And then again, and again. I can't hold out with my keening a match for the wind now whistling through the treetops.

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There's no missing his shout of release and his stiffening under me. I've never had a guy hold out like this, making sure I've had a fun time before he finds his own release. He doesn't always manage it, but when he does, like today, it's magic.

Just as magical is lying in his arms on the blankets, surrounded by wildflowers and caressed by the sun. I know I'll probably end up with a sunburnt ass, but I don't care. I'm right where I want to be.



LOGAN

Spread out on the blankets next to Mandy, I decide life is pretty damned good. She's draped half over me, one leg thrown across my thigh, her skin still warm and slick from our lovemaking. The scent of her clings to me—wildflowers, sweat, and something uniquely *Mandy*. The forest hums around us, alive and breathing, like it knows what we've just done.

If paradise had a sound, it'd be this: her soft breaths against my chest and the lazy heartbeat beneath my ribs.

And yet... there's this one thing that's been bothering me ever since our wedding. While our time up at the lookout tower had been

unforgettable, Mandy deserved more than four nights in a drafty old fire tower. Not a glossy, influencer-style honeymoon, but something that *fit us*. Something remote and private, something a little dangerous, and completely ours.

That's why we're out here this weekend. As sharp-eyed as she is, I knew this was the only way to throw her off the scent.

The secret waiting back at the tower has me smiling to myself. Until I catch her watching me, with amusement glinting in her eyes.

"Just happy with life, sweetheart," I say, dragging my T-shirt over my hips and tugging her closer. Her skin glows against mine, and I can't resist running my hand down the curve of her spine, over that sweet, sun-warmed ass.

We drift for a while, trading lazy kisses and half-finished sentences, until the afternoon heat fades. When we finally gather our things and head back toward the tower, the forest feels like it's humming with leftover energy—ours.

By the time we reach the base, the sun's low enough to turn the treetops molten. She moves ahead of me on the stairs, the sway of her hips hypnotic. I should think about the surprise I've planned, but all I can think about is how damn lucky I am.

At the top, she turns, eyes sparkling. "Logan, I've got a surprise for you."

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Wait—*what?* She's got a surprise for *me*? Isn't that supposed to be my line?

I lift a brow, intrigued despite myself. "Oh really? What have you got up your sleeve, Mrs. Young?"

Inside our little hideaway, she lights the solar candles one by one. Each flicker throws soft gold over her skin. Her movements were unhurried, sensual. The bed's covered in rose petals again, just like on our wedding night. But tonight, there's something else. A small white box tied with a red ribbon, sitting dead-center on the coverlet.

"When did you—?" I stop. Of course. She must've done this while I was in the shower. My clever, impossible wife.

"Chocolates?" I tease, though my pulse is doing that uneven thing it does whenever she's up to something.

She shakes her head, her hair tumbling over one shoulder, eyes luminous and secretive. I reach out, tucking a stray strand behind her ear. The way she looks at me—hopeful, nervous, glowing—has me forgetting whatever surprise I'd had in mind.

I opened the box.

For a moment, I couldn't breathe. Then I see it. The small white stick nestled in tissue paper, faint lines spelling out everything I didn't know

I'd wanted.

"You are?" My voice is rougher than I mean it to be.

She nods, eyes shining.

And just like that, something detonates inside me. Shock, awe, a burst of fierce, possessive joy. I grin like an idiot, then my protective instincts kick in.

"Mandy Young," I manage, "do you mean to tell me you hiked all the way up here when you're expecting?"

She laughs, the sound rich and wicked. "Logan Young, I'm pregnant, not made of glass. And don't you dare start wrapping me in cotton wool, you understand?"

"But we just made love," I protest weakly, dragging her closer, unable to stop touching her. "I went deep. I could've hurt the baby."

She tilts her head, smiling in a way that undoes me. "Honey, you're big—but you're not *that* big."

That earns her a low growl. I scoop her up, pressing her against the nearest wall, my mouth at her throat. "Careful, sweetheart. Keep talking like that, and I'll have to remind you exactly *how* big I am."

Her breath hitches. "Promises, promises."

The box slips from my hand, forgotten. I

claim her mouth, and she melts against me, legs wrapping around my waist. There's nothing gentle about this kiss—it's raw, hungry, a clash of laughter and moans. My hands find her hips, lifting her just enough for her to slide down onto me, inch by glorious inch.

"Still think I'm not that big?" I whisper in her ear.

She answers with a strangled sound that goes straight to my groin. "God, Logan—shut up and move."

And I do. Slow at first, then faster, each thrust timed to the pounding of my heart. The room glows amber around us, candlelight catching the sheen of sweat on her skin. She's all heat and slickness and breathy curses, and I can't get enough.

When she comes, it's with a gasp that sounds like my name. Her body tightens, trembling around me, dragging me under with her.

Afterward, I carry her to the bed, both of us shaking, hearts hammering. I settle her beneath me, kissing her nose, her jaw, the soft curve of her belly. "We're really doing this," I murmur. "We're going to be parents."

Her hand finds mine, guiding it lower until it rests over her stomach. "We already are."

Something in my chest cracks open at that. I

kiss her again, slowly and reverently, letting every touch say what words can't.

Later, as sleep tugs her under, I remember the envelope hidden in my backpack. I slip free and retrieve it, then crawl back beside her.

"With a baby on the way," I say softly, brushing a kiss over her temple, "the sooner we leave, the better. I hear that Costa Rica is beautiful this time of year."

She blinks, confused, still dazed from what we've just shared.

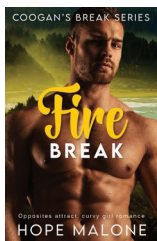
"I wanted us to have a proper honeymoon," I explain, palm spreading over her stomach. "One we can tell our kids about someday."

Her eyes widen as it sinks in. The envelope tumbles to the floor, and she throws herself into my arms, laughter and tears mingling as I hold her tight.

"I love you, Logan Young—husband, father, best friend."

And I whisper it back against her lips, the words rough with truth. "I love you too, Mandy. Forever. And then some."

Where There's Smoke



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If you're still undecided, read on to find out how Mandy and Logan first met.

FIRE BREAK





LOGAN

After dumping my chainsaw in the back of the truck, I waste no time getting over to the fire pond. The sooner I can ditch my filthy uniform and wash away the sweat of the day, the better.

It's not until I'm standing naked on the side of the pond that I realize I forgot my towel. I guess I'm more tired than I thought. Still, it wouldn't be the first time I'd had to walk back to my truck bare-ass naked.

And anyway, my chances of running into anyone are slim, with no-one knowing about the boomerang-shaped pond that I'm aware of. Cheesy as it sounds; I consider it to be my special

place, somewhere to come and unwind without the world constantly trying to interrupt.

Rather than wade slowly and painfully into the cold water, I walk out along a fallen tree and dive in where it's deeper. On hitting the water, every nerve ending in my body sparks; the electricity generated zings through the top of my skull.

Damn, but that feels good.

In an instant, I'm no longer dirty or weary, and the water has restored my inner peace. You'd think after three years I'd have stopped giving Brooke Harrison head space, but I haven't. I can't.

At least when the upcoming fire season arrives, I'll be too busy to dwell on the past. It doesn't matter that I'm now employed as a forester rather than a firefighter. When I'm needed, I'm there.

I strike out for the elbow of the pond in an effortless crawl, deciding to make the most of my last days of self-imposed isolation. This has my thoughts drifting back to what should have been my wedding day.

I'm revisiting the scene from out front of the church when I swim straight into something, although a feminine shriek tells me it's a woman. Where the hell she's come from, I wouldn't have

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a clue. All I know is that my left hand is stuck firm in her long, dark hair.

When I try putting some distance between us, she shrieks again, this time in pain. Only then do I see that it's my watch strap she's caught on. Unfortunately, the more she struggles, the worse the tangle gets.

"Calm down and stop moving, will you? You're caught on my watch."

My words must have been loud enough to cut through her panic, because she stops still. When she finally takes the time to look at me, there's a flash of recognition on her face.

Nope, never seen her before.

It isn't until she gasps that I realize that in trying to stop myself from bumping into her, my free hand is all over one of her breasts. Well, mostly, because we're definitely talking more than a handful here.

"Oh, sorry, sorry!"

The second I take my hand away, we bump together, telling me she's as naked as I am. Unable to stop myself, I peer beneath the water. I wonder if her nipples being pebbled are because of the cold water, or something else.

The water temperature, sure as hell, isn't affecting the erection I'm now working on. It only gets harder when I thump up against her sumptuous curves again.

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Dammit, we're going to have to swim to the side and climb out if I'm to get us untangled. Once there, I won't have a hope in hell of hiding the state of my cock.

And knowing how she'll probably take that, I'm now extra pissed at having my solitude interrupted.

MANDY

Having to clear my throat for the third time in five minutes tells me I'm done for the day. Sure, it's easy enough to edit out all the extraneous noises, but I need to rest my voice. If I damage it, I can kiss goodbye to my career as a voice artist.

On moving back to Coogan's Break to help Mom when my dad got sick, I'd been lucky I could work remotely. This helped financially and gave me a break from sitting at my dad's bedside as his life slipped away.

On shutting myself in the makeshift sound booth I'd set up in their basement, everything else faded into the background. No sick dad, no heartbroken mom, no foreboding of death.

After hanging up my headphones, I turn everything off in the small studio at the back of the cottage I now call home. It's been eighteen

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months since Dad passed, and despite what Mom says, she still enjoys having me near.

But not so near that we have to share a home.

I love my mom, but it was as if I were seventeen-years-old again. My bedroom hadn't changed since I'd gone off to college.

It was while studying economics and business at UCLA that I joined a local theater group. This led to voice-over work, something I was told I was a natural at. I'd been making enough freelancing to drop out, much to my parents' horror.

I've never regretted it, though; especially the freedom of working from home.

Despite a croaky voice, I've achieved more than I'd hoped for today. Usually a contract, like the one I'm working on for a home improvement vlog, would progress like molasses.

A quick check of the time says that if I'm to wash away the cares of the day, I'll need to hurry. I rarely work much past two o'clock, but when it's going well, I've learned to press on. It'll mean a lazy day tomorrow.

After locking the studio, I open the back gate onto the fire-break. This is all that's between my home and the forest, something that's both a blessing and a curse. While I love hearing the wind whistling through the trees, there's always the threat of fire.

I hold the gate open, waiting for Boston

before I remember my Golden Retriever of ten years won't be joining me. He passed a month back; he's now keeping my dad company on the other side of the rainbow bridge.

I'm unable to stop a snuffle. But then I think of the two males who'd been such a big part of my life, enjoying zoomies together, and I break into a sad smile.

"Have fun, you two! Don't do anything I wouldn't."

My greeting is still ringing in my ears when I'm swallowed up by the trees. It's cooler in the shadow of these majestic monsters, but also louder. Birdsong rings out as I zigzag my way through the trunks.

There isn't a trail, and yet I know exactly where I'm going, and I have Boston to thank for this. It had been a year back that he'd slipped his leash when we were out for a walk. It wasn't long after I moved into the cottage, and so I'd freaked out in a big way.

On escaping, he'd gone from slow-old-dog to puppy in seconds, taking off as though his arthritis were a figment of the vet's imagination.

Thoughts of the damage he was doing, or of him being lost in the woods, had me out of breath by the time I caught up with him.

He'd discovered an old fire pond and was frolicking in the shallows. Panicked and then

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annoyed as I'd been, I'd had to laugh as I watched him splashing about.

Of course, I'd also had to deal with his being a little slower on the way home. Despite this, it became a habit of ours at the end of my workday to hike to the pond for a swim. From what I could see, it hadn't made his arthritis any worse, and he loved it so.

On arriving at the pond, I have a quick check around before stripping off. Despite not having seen another soul since first finding it, I always check, especially with Boston no longer around to act as my lookout.

The water is as cold as ever, but this doesn't stop me from floating on my back and gazing up at the old-growth redwoods. The other thing I love is the silence that descends when my ears are below the surface. All day I'm subjected to hearing my voice. A break from that and the constant chatter of the world is the perfect antidote.

I've been floating for five minutes at the most when my shriek of surprise cuts through the quiet. When something yanks the hair on the back of my head, I shriek even louder.

I'm freaking out until his "Calm down!"

breaks through my fear. He'd hardly do that if he were attacking me, would he?

It takes a second for me to get myself under control enough that I can even look at the guy. Then, my biggest challenge isn't calming down; it's breathing. He's so familiar that it's as if I've run into an old friend or a celebrity, and yet I've never set eyes on him before.

It's also that this sense of familiarity is deeper than just how he looks. And trust me; you don't forget a guy as drop-dead gorgeous as this one. At least, I wouldn't.

Transfixed as I am, it takes longer than it should to realize his free hand covers my left breast, and I gasp out. It's only when he removes it I see he wasn't fondling me as I'd thought. Our bodies bump together, and boom, he's hard up against me. And he's naked, too.

Now I'm curious, because if his shoulders are anything to go by, the rest of him will be mighty fine, too. When we bump together again, I'm not as mad as I should be.

Actually, I'm not mad at all.

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Fire Break

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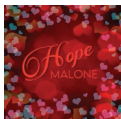


We do hope you enjoyed this spicy short story
set in Coogan's Break.

Many thanks
The Chicks at Bad Birds

 **BAD BIRDS** 

ALL ABOUT HOPE



Hope believes everyone deserves love, especially curvy girls. She also likes to believe there's a welcoming town like Coogan's Break for all of us.



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