

cup.

“Thank you.” It was probably rude to crow about her triumph to a guy who had just been kicked in the nuts from the sound of it. “I couldn’t help but overhear.” She glanced at his friend’s vacant seat. “Bum deal, man.”

“Yeah. It is pretty much ruining my life.” He reached behind him for the jacket he’d shed at some point when she wasn’t prying and stood. “Your day is going much better. Congratulations again.”

She nodded, her smile still intact. “You just need to bite the bullet and pay for a wifey to get what you want.” She chuckled and pulled up the calculator on her computer as he reached for his to-go cup. Damn, this new contract was a sweet paycheck, but in her reality, it meant she could afford dinner at the pub a few nights a week rather than fixing Cup-a-Soup after visiting her father, who’d just been released from the hospital again. Not even good news

solved her true problem. “Heck, I’d marry him for the right price.”

“Excuse me?”

Her head shot up, and she looked right into his vibrant blue eyes, embarrassment sucking all of the moisture from her mouth. And here she’d been trying to avoid this type of moment again.

“I...” She shrugged, and her gaze darted around the little shop. Shoot. He wasn’t supposed to hear her half-serious, half-joking words. When she was on her game, she might have had a clever comeback, but the truth was she was too tired. “I was talking to myself.”

“About marrying me?”

“No.” She pointed to her screen and shrugged. “Something else.” Heat threatened her cheeks, but she absolutely refused to get embarrassed. It wasn’t her fault he had great hearing. He was the one who should’ve felt awkward.

He peered over her shoulder at her calculator and email window, and then raised his eyebrows.

She crossed her arms over her black sweater. Was this fool really standing here judging her? “It was a joke.” Men were so irritating sometimes.

“Are you married?”

“No.”

“Dating anyone?”

“No.” She’d asked Zenzo to come with her to Wyoming. Apparently he had no intention of living anywhere other than Italy.

“Jokes are funny because they are a version of the truth.” He pulled out the chair across from her and sat.

“I’m not laughing.” Did this guy really think she would marry for money? *It would solve all my problems. No, focus, you aren’t a gold digger.* Well, so far she hadn’t resorted to that.

“So then you are serious.”

It wouldn't be the craziest thing she'd ever done – running off to Europe on a whim and then staying for a year still topped that list. “Tell me how this is something you are actually asking about.” She moved her palm up and down, showcasing his face. “You have a problem dating?” The problem wasn't his looks. Maybe it was his personality.

“I'm not looking to date. I need a wife.”

“Yeah, well, we all need something.”

“I'll help you if you help me.”

“I think that deal would be a little one-sided.” Her brow furrowed. This guy looked serious. Too serious. And he wasn't walking away. Had she accidentally proposed to a stranger?

“How much?” He unbuttoned his peacoat and revealed a baby-blue button-up.

She had his full attention. And, holy crap, was this something she could do? Could he afford her? Yeah, she definitely sounded like a prostitute now. “You can't be for real. Listen,

I'm sorry I listened in on your conversation.”

“Then you're well aware of what is going on.”

“I got the gist. It's not my problem.”

“So I'll ask you again, what's your price?”

She should shut the conversation down right there. Or try to again. They were talking about falsifying a marriage. The thought made her skin feel dirty. This wasn't right. But if this guy was for real and had enough money, all her dad's problems would be solved.

She sipped her coffee. The insurance company was refusing to cover an “experimental treatment,” and the estimate was seared in her brain. “A lot.”

“Okay, how much?” His nicely defined cheekbones made her a little angry – he probably could have anything he wanted and thought she was just another easy deal to be made. She was also steamed that she was entertaining his ridiculous offer.