



*Excerpt: Love Finds You in Snowball, Arkansas ©2008 Summerside Press*

“Hey there,” he greeted her, his warm smile stroking her cheeks and staining them pink.

“Hi.”

“Don’t you look fresh and pretty,” he commented.

“Thank you.”

Lucy realized it was sort of ridiculous how much she valued those few words spoken by him. “Dinner’s fired up outside, but it’s a little colder out there than I’d anticipated, so I came in for some coffee. Can I get you some?”

“Is there tea?”

“Down at the end of the table.”

She could feel his gaze on her as she lobbed a tea bag into a cup of hot water.

“The other folks here on retreat belong to a family reunion,” he told her. “They went after trout up at White River. I think there will be quite a feast for all of us tonight.”

“Oh.” She tossed the used tea bag into a small bowl and doctored her cup with milk and sweetener. “How nice.”

“You had some bad luck out there today,” he commented.

“Well, it’s like that some days, isn’t it?”

“It sure is. I remember sitting in a rowboat with my buddy down in Grapevine Lake, near Dallas. He caught catfish and bass on one side of that boat, and I sat there all day without a single bite on the other side.”

The warmth of his empathy soothed her nearly as much as the tea, and Lucy took a deep, slow breath before drinking a little more.

“Want to take a walk outside?” Justin asked her. Her heart began to pound relentlessly against the wall of her chest before rumbling up into her throat.

“Sure.”

Several large barbecue grills were set up on the stone patio, and redwood picnic tables draped in blue gingham cloths dotted the lawn.

Lucy and Justin meandered over toward one of the workstations where Betty Sue, the owner of the camp, was filling empty corn husks with bass filets and then sprinkling them with salt, pepper, and lemon juice. Lucy looked away.

“I’ve never seen that done before,” Justin told Betty Sue, oblivious to Lucy’s avoidance of the table. “Can I help?”

“Of course,” she replied. “Go and wash your hands real good, and slip on some of the plastic gloves in the box by the sink.”

“You’ll be here when I get back?” he asked Lucy, and she nodded eagerly.

Justin hurried off to do as he'd been instructed, and Lucy looked up to catch Betty Sue's eye on her.

"There's going to be baked yams and macaroni salad, some steamed string beans, and a lovely butternut squash," the woman said, and she smiled at Lucy with a knowing glint in her eyes. "You'll find plenty to eat on the table over there without ever passing by the grills."

"It shows?"

"Only to the trained professional."

Lucy chuckled and then touched Betty Sue's arm. "Thank you."

"No problem, sugar."

Lucy held her ground as Betty Sue continued with the preparations. After a moment, she felt the presence of someone beside her and glanced over to find a small girl standing there.

"I'm Annie," the child said, her large green eyes glistening.

"Hi, Annie. I'm Lucy. You must be with the family reunion group."

"Yeah. That's us."

The two of them stood there, side by side, both of them folding their arms and staring straight ahead. Lucy realized suddenly that they must look like life-size and miniature versions of the same statue. The little girl finally broke the silence. "We caught bunches of fishes today."

"I'm sorry to tell you, so did we."

"It was gross."

"It sure was."

"And now we gotta eat 'em," Annie said incredulously, and she turned and faced Lucy with a contorted face that made her want to laugh. "Can you believe that?"

“I can believe it. We’re eating ours, too.”

“I’m not gonna do it.”

“I hear ya.”

“I’m six, and I’m not gonna.”

“I’m twenty-nine, and I don’t think I will either.”

Lucy and the little girl both tossed their curls over one shoulder and shook their heads.

“I hope there’s cake,” Annie commented as an afterthought.

“Now there’s a food I can get behind,” Lucy replied.

The little girl giggled. “Yeah. Cake is good.”

“Cake is very good.”