

*Half Moon Whim* Bonus Scene

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Sara turned off the highway and onto the unpaved road. She halted, staring at the muddy, slippery lane in front of her. The sky above was a clear blue. A short, fierce storm was now completely gone, except for the large amount of rain it had left behind. She and Jack had moved into their shabby-chic beach cottage nearly a week ago, but this was the first deluge they had faced.

Her grip tightened on the wheel. Driving on rutted, slick roads wasn’t something she was experienced with, and she was slightly regretting her casual confidence when Jack had called earlier at Hibiscus, offering to pick her up. He had only worked the morning, spending the afternoon on household projects.

Selena had practically swooned that Jack was so concerned about Sara’s welfare he was willing to come get her. Sara had tried to play it cool, but couldn’t deny the soft warmth spreading through her chest. Alex had also popped up to the spa to give her tips. She had listened attentively, knowing his concern was well-meant, and hadn’t teased him at all.

Now she shifted the knob into 4L for extra traction, like Jack had suggested. As she depressed the gas pedal, the RAV4 eased forward. The road was bumpy at the best of times, and now the car slid in motions that made her stomach clench. Following the guidance she was given, Sara didn't make any sharp corrections, letting the SUV take the path of least resistance and do what it was designed for.

She didn't get stuck once, or slam into a tree.

A smile tugged at her lips as she emerged from the jungle into the clearing in front of their house where they parked. Except now it was more of a shallow lake. Clutching the wheel, Sara studied her spot by Jack's Ranger next to the house. That morning, he had moved her SUV to dry land, and she'd picked her way from the back of the house to keep dry.

*Screw that. I'll just take my shoes off and wade through.*

Ripples spread from her car's progress as she drove across the shallow body of water. Then she noticed a curious addition which hadn't been there when she'd left for work. Turning off her engine, Sara opened the door and stared at four two-by-fours lying side-by-side next to her car. Another quartet of them were lined up just past those, ending below the porch steps. Delight pulled her mouth into a wide smile.

Jack had built her a bridge so her feet wouldn't get wet.

Three-inch wedge sandals probably hadn't been the best shoe choice, but it was too late now, and she loved this pair. Reconsidering her decision to go barefoot, she stepped out of the car and slowly stood on the makeshift surface. It wobbled slightly as it settled, but held firm.

The front door opened, and Jack rushed out. "Careful, darlin'! Let me help. I couldn't nail those down." He hurried over the planks, waving his outstretched arms for balance. Reaching her, he leaned in for a kiss.

Sara gripped his face with both hands, kissing him back fiercely. When she pulled back, a smile rose that was so big her face hurt. “I can’t believe you did this! When did you get the lumber?”

Jack led the way toward the house, holding tightly to her hand. “I stopped by the home improvement store on the way home from work and picked up the planks from the lumberyard. The platform’s not much, but it’ll keep you dry. I’ll call Calvin and ask him to get a load of gravel out here. I don’t mind spreading it, and that will prevent any future lakes. Did you make it down the access road ok?”

“Yes. Between you and Alex, I knew exactly what to do and didn’t have any problems.” They climbed the stairs and entered the living room. Sara couldn’t stop smiling.

The large open room was still filled with boxes, some open and partially unpacked, others still sealed. Jack’s living room furniture was placed around the room, and the two local watercolors from Sara’s apartment graced the walls.

“Let me change and I’ll join you on the porch,” she said.

Jack nodded and headed for the back door.

The master bedroom was spacious enough to fit Sara’s king-size bed and nightstands, and it boasted a private bathroom. Since Hope had provided Sara’s apartment with the same mattress and bedding as the resort, the choice of whose bedroom furniture to use had been easy. Jack’s bedroom set was in the guest room.

Sara crossed to the dresser, withdrawing a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. She was shutting the drawer when a monstrous, hairy spider skittered over the floor. Right next to her foot. Erupting into a blood-curdling scream, Sara bolted across the room and leaped on the bed. The dark-brown spider froze in the middle of the room, apparently as frightened as she was.

The back door flew open and crashed against the kitchen wall. Jack sprinted into the room, his eyes frantic. “What’s wrong? Are you hurt?”

Sara was still shrieking uncontrollably from her perch on the bed, so she pointed a shaking finger at the offending arachnid.

Drawing his brows together, Jack looked where she pointed, then darted his eyes back to hers. “I see the spider. Sara! *What is wrong?*”

That made her stop yelling. “What’s wrong? Jack, there is a spider the size of Texas in the middle of our floor. That is very wrong!”

Slowly, as if he couldn’t help it, Jack broke into a smile. “All this over a little spider?”

“*Little?* And it’s hairy!” She shuddered, wrapping both arms around herself.

Now he was grinning. If not for the spider, she’d hop off the bed and throttle him.

“What would you like me to do, Sara?”

“Get rid of it! Kill it! Send it to another dimension!”

He held out a placating hand. “Ok, ok. Relax.” Walking across the room, Jack gently scooped both hands over the spider, neatly capturing it as it tried to scabble off.

Sara screamed again.

Jack’s chest shook with laughter, but he was smart enough not to let any escape from his mouth. “I’m getting rid of it, ok?”

“Thank you. And don’t you dare set that thing free next to the house!”

His reply was distant as he headed toward the still-open back door. “Don’t worry. I’ll walk down the cove and find a new home for him.”

Sara hopped off the bed and crossed to the bathroom, eying the floor carefully for invaders. Finding none, she changed. By the time she moved to the covered back porch, Jack was

back from his spider-relocation assignment. He sat on a couch—also from Sara’s apartment—and she dropped next to him, much more relaxed now.

“My knight in shining armor,” she said, kissing his cheek. “Thank you.”

Jack laughed. “If catching spiders and bugs stop the terrified screams, I’ll help anyway I can.”

Sara ruffled his hair. She’d cut it and trimmed his beard the previous day, going shorter on the sides than he’d worn it before. “I like your new look. It’s a subtle change, but very modern.”

Jack wrapped his arm around her. “Not sure it was so subtle. You’re probably going to have a new client tomorrow. The wife of a couple I’ve been diving with couldn’t stop exclaiming over it. When I told her you were right there on the pier, she vowed to make her husband an appointment.” He stroked a finger down her face. “You’re a miracle worker. You can even make me look good.”

“That is the easiest thing in the world, Jack.” Tucking her head next to his neck, she surveyed the cove in front of them. The ocean thundered onto the beach, still feeling the effects of the storm. The soothing rhythm lulled her. “We’ve only been here a week, but I already love it.”

“Me too. I just hope it doesn’t fall apart on us.”

Sara laughed. “Like the giant lake in front?”

“Yeah. Like that.”

She ran her hand down his chest. “Thank you for taking this on. I know I’m not easy sometimes.”

Jack tightened his hold, kissing her forehead. “Easy is the last thing I want. There are so many things I love about you.”

She swallowed past the lump in her throat. “I feel the same way.” Then a small smile tugged at her lips. “Don’t worry. I won’t ask you to list any of those things you love about me.”

He frowned and took a breath.

Sara held a finger against his lips. “Really. I know I can be insecure sometimes. But I believe you love me and that’s all that matters.” She snuggled up again, resting her head against his chest.

A soft breeze rippled across the ocean surface offshore, drawing Sara’s eye to a stationary shadow. A coral reef outcropping. “Do you realize we have our very own shore dive right off our back porch?” Sara asked. “As soon as the ocean calms down a little, let’s go diving out there.”

Jack inhaled a huge breath and held it. Alarmed, Sara raised her head to look at him. “Are you ok?”

Slowly exhaling, Jack gave her a beautiful smile, his eyes full of love. “I couldn’t be more ok. I was sitting here thinking about how much I love you. And why. Good thing you don’t want me to list the reasons, or we’d be out here all night. But you just summed it up beautifully. I love diving, and I want to dive that reef with you more than anything. Sara, you’re making all my dreams come true.”

Her heart swelled. “That’s only fair. You do the same for me. Now we can get started on all those dreams. Together.”