

Chapter 14

Their Time

Abbi and Andrew didn't return from Greene's home until 10:30 that night. The last few days had been strenuous. The weather had changed to freezing intermittent snow. It was a beautiful white scene, almost silent, when they climbed out of Abbi's car. The moment they got inside both Abbi and Andrew simultaneously announced that they needed to shower before bed. Later, Abbi was sound asleep with her head on his chest. And at that moment Andrew couldn't have been happier;

although he couldn't fall asleep, his mind began to race through the last two years. Met his future wife, a Colorado native, in a restaurant in Boulder. One weekend, months later, he relocated from Pittsburgh to live with Abbi Carter in Boulder. The first time they met, he would never have tagged Abigail Carter as a state police cadet. That's how little he knew about himself. That evening Abigail Carter took a chance and allowed a young, handsome attorney from the east to sit at her table and talk with her while she ate dinner. This was more than a blind date. Andrew saw an attractive blond dining alone and something drove him to step forward, introduce himself and God knows why, she allowed him to sit at her table and talk. They really had very little in common. But something she saw in him

and something he saw in her connected. She had established her pathway and told him so: "The State Police training academy and a Colorado State Trooper in seven or eight months, then highway patrol duty somewhere." She had just purchased a condo outside of Boulder and she hoped that she could complete her training and be accepted by a District near her new home. There was a total of five Districts that she could apply to with no guarantees of which would accept her. Andrew enjoyed practicing law, but he was not a partner yet and worked long hours out of a remote office.

After dinner with Cadet Carter, he lay in the hotel room alone, thinking he might have met his soul mate. They were so different, yet both seemed more than just comfortable

together. After repeated attempts by Andrew to reconnect, two months later Cadet Carter, still in training, allowed him to spend a weekend with her. Either she was going to commit to being interested in him or he was going to realize this was not going to work out. He would come out to Denver for one reason, "Is this the woman I want to spend my life with, or do I need to have my head examined?"

This blossomed into romance and they both realized they were truly in love. It was Abbi who, after graduating at the top of her Academy class, asked him to come to Boulder and live with her and start a new life together. She topped the offer off by inviting not only Andrew but also his mother to her Academy graduation. Then, at her graduation she turned to his mother and suggested that

if Andrew came to Colorado to be with her why couldn't she, Esther Carter, join them and start a new life as well. Andrew's father died in a DUI accident when Andrew and his sister Leah were both preteen. Esther had lived alone for almost twenty years.

This morning Andrew lay awake, Abbi's head lay across Andrew's chest, feeling euphoric. Andrew had had few girlfriends until he met Abbi. Now, the sensations he was feeling, her slumbering breaths, her heart quietly beating, and the sandalwood scent of her shampoo all overwhelmed him. There was nothing he needed; Abigail Carter had taken him. Then she added her perfect condo with a Japanese garden that was a masterpiece of design and execution. The White Mountain Park abutting the condo was breathtaking.

His law practice in Colorado was even beginning to make a profit. Esther had fit right into Ridgeway Commons and purchased her own condo one block down the street. She spent more time with Andrew and Abbi than she had ever spent with Andrew after he graduated from law school. When Abbi began to wake, Andrew rolled and faced her; he hugged Abbi and wouldn't let go. It was 11:00 AM when they left the bedroom. When Abbi dressed and came toward their kitchen, Andrew was ready to serve her every need: juice, coffee, milk, toast with raspberry preserves and a protein bar, Abbi's daily. She saw the table set and instantly embraced Andrew. "But why today?" she thought.

As Abbi sat, Andrew looked into her eyes and said, "Abbi, I'm more in love today than

ever. We have a lot happening between now and when we return from our honeymoon. God, I can barely say that, where has the time gone? I want us to make certain every day is a great day for us, so today, I propose we do no work, just enjoy."

Abbi grinned and replied, "Great, how about packing a bag and heading up to the cabin. I'll tell Jane that's where we'll be, and we can come back home Monday morning."

"Abbi, you're the best, thanks!"

By noon, they had called Jane, asking first how she was feeling, and explaining they were planning to spend the weekend in the cabin if that was Ok with her. Then, Andrew called Esther and explained they were taking a long weekend and going to the cabin. She told them to enjoy their time away.

With less than an inch of snow on the ground and none falling now, Andrew and Abbi packed up Heidi for the two-hour drive to their Pike's Peak cabin. Abbi had Andrew come down to the garage- not to pack the car- but to see what was there and what was necessary every time you drove in Colorado's winter months. For Abbi that meant having emergency provision in the Jeep if they got stuck in traffic or physically stuck on the highway. That would be unusual because of who Abbi was. She had Heidi rigged with a winch and front and rear tow hooks. She also had a second tow cable, emergency flares, shovel, scrapper, and small axe. Now, they add hiking and cabin clothes, along with food for three days, knowing they might be hungry when they return from hiking. Before they left, they

made sure the Pond equipment and feeder were in good shape. Ebi had just visited so they felt safe in leaving their shiny friends.

The trip to the cabin was a tad over 110 miles, but with snow now coating the highway, traffic slowed down. This was a new experience for Andrew, but he knew that Abbi was not only a good driver, but someone who had gone through Colorado State Police driver training including foul weather simulations. When Abbi was injured and hospitalized, Andrew made certain that Heidi was not alone and drove her Jeep every other day, his way of staying in touch with part of Abbi. He had prayed every day her recovery.

They unpacked the car and Andrew suggested that they skip hiking because of the snow. They both had said they would

hike when they arrived. He offered to put on snowshoes the following morning and do some walking, but for this afternoon, since the snow had picked up he suggested they just sit in the pair of red Adirondack chairs outside and watch the snow. First, he wanted to light the fireplace and start heating the cabin. It was only 42 degrees inside, and the fireplace would be their sole source of heat. The cabin had a large propane tank for fuel for the oven and a water heater, but they would layer clothing and use the fireplace for heat. The cabin now had a solar panel which provided limited electric use. Abbi conceded that starting up the fireplace first was the right thing to do. She was able to make a pot of coffee while Andrew built a fire. No one had been in the cabin since he and Abbi

had been here prior to Abbi graduating from the Academy. It was a perfect retreat, floor to ceiling stone fireplace crafted from local sourced smooth river rocks. a covered front porch, water truck service twice a year, and now both solar and propane provided power for the small range, and a water heater that allowed for three-minute hot water showers. No TV, cable or internet and limited cell service. There was a landline telephone, but it was rarely used.

Andrew went to work starting up the fireplace. Fortunately, when the fireplace was constructed, the mason built a side storage area that held about a dozen pieces of quarter split wood, nice and dry. He found a pile of fat wood sticks and in 15 minutes he had the fireplace roaring. Using four fat wood sticks

and just two long wooden matches, it lit the fat wood and two minutes later Andrew carefully added two quarter split pieces of what looked like pine to the fireplace above the fatwood. His fire might not yet heat the cabin. It would take a few hours, so Andrew made sure he had a good fire. Then he went outside where there was a covered shed and brought in six arms full of cut pieces for the next day. Now, he zipped up his Polo puffer coat, slid his gloves on and sat down on the outdoor Adirondack chair. Andrew was not in the physical shape he thought he was. He hadn't been doing workouts, unlike Abbi. They had a gym, but he needed Abbi to help him get into a routine. He thought maybe getting out of bed with Abbi and spending at least thirty minutes in the gym would be a start; a

stationary bike, a treadmill and the elliptical were waiting for him. Abbi brought out the coffee in an insulated mug, a Zone protein bar and sat with him.

"Thanks, I need to get in shape now, before our wedding. Between us living together and my mom's cooking I think I gained ten pounds!" Abbi was silent, she was breathing in the Carter Peak air. "Andrew, it's a life commitment. I was forced to change when I joined the Academy; workouts were mandatory every day, even for six months. After that, it became my daily start. I would miss it. I do a variety of stuff, and the time goes by quickly. And yes, there will be pain, but you'll feel better about yourself. I promise".

"Ok, I'll probably need some encouragement at first, but I'll start when we get home."

"Now just breathe. We didn't come all this way for you not to enjoy." Ten minutes later after the protein bar and some coffee, Andrew said, "I just need to go check our fire and stoke it a bit. Hang tight." As Abbi sat and enjoyed the first real feel of winter, she watched the snow accumulate. She was comfortable in the cabin, even in winter. They had food, water, heat and each other. She closed her eyes and felt the air and when the snow that landed on her face, the silence, the absence of cars, no planes -just the sound of snow. She was a happy Abigail Carter.

When Andrew returned, Abbi said, "Andrew, I've changed my mind. I'd like us to take a walk with the snowshoes. I'm sure that they'll fit; they are easy to adjust. Our property includes 50 wooden acres, all posted: "No

Trespassing". The moon will be full, and I need a half an hour of exercise before dinner and then I'll be fine, do you mind?"

Andrew responded, "Abbi, you had me at "I've changed my mind." Let's go, I'll get my phone, a flashlight and get the shoes on."

It was not quite 4:00 PM; they had a good forty-five minutes of light before darkness would set in. But Abbi knew her way. The walking in snowshoes was not as bad as Andrew had imagined. His feet didn't sink into the snow and there were less than 5" on the ground, but Abbi was looking for exercise, for both of them. The snow-covered branches were silent until a breeze kicked up. Then they would hear the snow falling, otherwise silent but beautiful. Abbi knew her way and took the lead, but Andrew voiced no

complaints- he was with the woman he loved, and he felt totally safe even as the sun disappeared. In less than a half an hour, Abbi turned to Andrew and said, "Ready to head back?"

Andrew replied, "Abbi, you're my leader, whenever."

Twenty-five minutes later they had made their way back to the cabin. They had seen a few squirrels and rabbits; most of the birds were in covered areas and remained silent. Except for one owl that Andrew clearly thought he heard, Andrew was gaining a new appreciation of what nature would reveal if you allowed yourself to observe, He was learning more each day about Abbi's brain and how she thought they were on the right path.

When they returned, they removed their snowshoes and jackets. Andrew added another log from the chimney cutout. Beside the pine, there was also quartered white birch which was almost too beautiful to burn. The cabin was warming up and Andrew said he would start to cook dinner. When he turned to the table, he saw Abbi taking out two candles, and a wine goblet. Abbi turned, "Andrew, it's Shabbat". Andrew smiled and said give me twenty minutes. Can you help me with firing up the cooktop and oven, I've never cooked with a propane stove."

"I'm glad you asked", Abbi replied. "When we cook here, everything cooks twice as fast and hotter, so we need to adjust."

"This will be a first for me, thanks." And with that, Andrew worked on cooking a salmon

filet and steaming veggies that they had brought along. Abbi found that the salad from two days ago was still in good shape, so they used the same dressing. She took out plates and opened a bottle of wine that she brought along. She placed the candles in the holder that she had taken from their home. When Andrew turned to face Abbi, she signaled that she wanted to light the two candles, chant a short blessing and then chant two additional blessings, sipping from the small goblet with wine and eating a small bite of bread. Abbi had set the table and was now just waiting for Andrew.

The dinner was great. Andrew added more wood and after they cleaned up, they took another short walk. This time they walked out to the Pike's Peak Toll Road. Their cabin was

near the bottom of a twisting toll road. The further up you went the trees ended and just a rock covered the vistas. The area just south of their cabin was covered in assorted evergreens, heavy on pine trees. They carried the snowshoes, but only walked for fifteen minutes to let their food settle; then they turned back to their cabin's driveway and closed the door behind them. Enough for one night.

Andrew woke first, went down to the living room fireplace and added new fat sticks, waiting before putting in two quartered pine logs. Abbi was still sleeping when he looked through the window blinds and saw that the sun was out, and the snow had stopped. Another perfect day with his Abbi.

Then, he heard it. At first it felt like thunder, and then movement, the cabin shook,

and the rumbling got louder, "Abbi, get up! Something is happening! Abbi wake up, come down here!"

"What's happening", cried Abbi. Andrew screamed, "I think we're having some kind of quake. We need to get out of here." Abbi came downstairs and was now dressed." Andrew, go up and get dressed and let's pack up. I'll secure the cabin, get everything together down here and start loading the Jeep." The cabin shook again for five seconds, The walls creaked but nothing fell. Abbi closed the fireplace, turned off the propane line and disconnected the solar main. Then she turned the water supply off from the outdoor tank. All that was left was to pack up the food they brought and get out. Andrew was ready to roll in under five minutes, but another quake

was beginning. They were near the center of it and had to get away.

Heidi had gotten them most of the way down the Pike's Peak Toll Road when the road just disappeared! Andrew screamed, " Stop!" and Abbi locked up the brakes and Heidi stopped. "You, ok?" she asked. A twenty-five-foot-wide trench was right in front of their car. The earthquake had split the road open in both direction for at least one hundred yards.

Andrew gulped some air and said, "Now what?" They got out and looked around, they couldn't go up, there was only one road off the mountain; they were on it. Going straight looked like a 45-degree decline, impossible. They looked around and Abbi said that maybe they could drive cross country.

Abbi told Andrew to try and secure everything in the car. She shifted Heidi into 4-wheel drive mode and made a slow left turn across the opposing lane. They were alone. The dash gauge now displayed the angle of decline and was registering 23 degrees! That's higher than the absolute maximum from what Abbi had read when she was planning to do some off-roading. The limit was a 20-degree decline. She drove slower than she thought possible, but she had not only herself to think about, but also Andrew and their life together. "Be cautious!" she thought, she didn't know if or where the ground might drop away again. Andrew told Abbi to stop; he would walk in front of the Jeep guiding Abbi for a safe pathway until they found more secure ground. There was no one around and just

periodic sounds of distant structures crashing. As soon as they left the far side of the road and its shoulder, they were on loose brown flat rocks. Too much speed or angle and the Jeep would just slide out of control. Andrew understood physics. Abbi kept her window down and Andrew kept his coat buttoned up. It was only 35 degrees with overnight snow and ice on the ground. He used his arms and hands to navigate across the snow-covered field. They probably went about one mile crossing a valley with occasional pine trees in their way. Finally, Andrew came back to the car to warm up. "Abbi, were making progress, I still don't see a road or people, but we are going downhill". Abbi had turned on the GPS on the Jeep, they knew where they were, but this area had no roads except the Pike's

Peak Toll Road. Abbi thought maybe they had bypassed the trench formed by the quake and suggested they turn slowly to the right and make their way in that direction of the Toll Road. She insisted that she take a turn walking the route while Andrew drove Heidi behind her. After about forty-five minutes, she spotted the highway and saw cars that had tried to go up the mountain but were all cut off. Abbi hoped she could walk toward them and re-enter the highway and avoid the trench. She was right, and as she climbed in her Jeep, she gave Andrew a huge kiss. "Thanks partner, you're the best!"

Andrew wasn't sure what he did, but they were about to re-enter the main highway and start their trek home. The quake had been confined to the Peak's area and once

they got on the roadway, they would be on US 24 and then I-25 north back to Boulder. As they got closer to home a news station reported the quake with a magnitude of 5.9 was recorded at the top of Pike's Peak. They got home by 2:00 PM, and after unloading the Jeep and putting away items that they had planned to use over the long weekend, Abbi helped Andrew make lunch. That was more than enough for one day!