



COUNTRY HEARTS

CINDI MADSEN

WYATT POSITIONED JEMMA IN FRONT of the big box with various switches and pointed over her shoulder. The scent of her vanilla perfume overwhelmed his senses, and he was acutely aware of how close she was. Every time he was around her, he got lost in her blue eyes, in her smile, her infectious laugh.

“Come on, lever,” she said when she flicked it and the red-tinged lights didn’t turn on. “Don’t you want to work for me?”

Amusement tugged the corner of his lips into a grin—on top of everything else, the woman was completely adorable. “Are you talking to the control box?”

She glanced over her shoulder at him. “I talk to everything, just in case it’s listening. Can I confess something?”

Everything inside him froze, but he managed to nod.

“I didn’t realize it until I came here, but I talk to my bunny a lot. Like, a lot a lot. It helps, regardless of the fact that I’m relatively sure he only loves me for carrots—much like your horse.”

Warmth suffused his veins. “Confession: I find that in-

credibly endearing. And I talk to my cows and horses all the time.”

“I know. That first night we met, you were talking to Casper, scolding him in such a funny, affectionate way. It was super cute, actually.”

He could feel the flush in his skin. Before right now, he’d say he didn’t get embarrassed. And he wasn’t so much embarrassed as...spotlighted, he supposed. She saw him. The real him.

Since going too far down that path might lead to trouble, he worked to stick to the lighter side. “I think we only have to worry if our animals start talking back.”

“Oh, Señor Fluffypants talks back. There’s just a language barrier.”

“Because he speaks Spanish?”

“No, he’s a bunny, silly. He speaks rabbit.”

He huffed out a laugh as he shook his head, and her grin sent more of that intoxicating warmth pumping through him.

She slowly spun to face him, and now she was caged in his arms. As if someone else was in charge of his arm, he lifted it and put his hand on the side of her neck. There was so much he wanted to say, so much he shouldn’t, and he wasn’t sure which side of him would win the tug of war.

His thumb drifted over her jawline, making a case for letting go, just for a couple of seconds. His gaze locked on her lips, which parted on a shaky breath.

“Jemma? I’m pretty sure—” Camilla stumbled to a stop, her eyes wide, her mouth forming an O. “Oh. Sorry, I—”

“I was just showing Jemma how to work the lights.” Wyatt reached over, twisted the end of the wire around the screw, and used his pocket knife to twist it tighter.

The red lights flickered on. “Looks like everything’s good

to go now, so I should probably find Bailey Rae and get going.”

What he needed to do was get his head straight, which would never happen around Jemma. He'd already tried space, but that hadn't helped.

Still, he didn't want to run from her, because he was getting confused on the lines between neighborly and friendship and...more. So he gave her shoulder a quick squeeze. “I'll talk to you later.”

“Later,” she said in a soft voice that made him want later to be right now.