

## Cowboys in the Sand: Spring Break 1998

“Are y’all seeing this?” Gina garbles, her freshly pierced tongue still swollen. “Levi’s and boots on a beach?” She unsuccessfully slurps a cold beer from a straw.

Fifty yards away, three shirtless cowboys stroll, their boots kicking up sand. Sweat-stained straw hats shade their eyes. All three toe the finish line of puberty -- muscles full and defined but not yet held with the confidence of men.

Erica briefly peeks from behind the sun umbrella, her dark braids sticking to her oiled back. “Those are Wranglers,” she huffs. *I hate being interrupted in the middle of a good book.*

With the hunting skills of a lioness and the smile of a Cheshire cat, Leslie wiggles her brows above her mirrored aviators. “Giddy up, girls. Looks like it’s time for me to go save a horse,” she purrs. In practiced movements, she readjusts her B-cups and pounces toward the cowboys. *For real, Les? Just sit down!*

Leslie’s boldness had served them well this week. Not once had they bought drinks. *We agreed that today was our day! No high-pitched giggling, no choreographed hair flips, no fake bubblyness. The last 24 hours of break was supposed to be about us!* It’s why the girls drove all the way out to St. George’s Island -- to be alone.

“Hey cowboy, wanna beer?” says Leslie, tossing a Bud Light to Tattooed Cowboy. Erica can’t help but watch the ink of the Indian feathers ripple on his impressive bicep.

“Guess we’re doing this,” Gina sighs. She nudges Erica with her foot and grabs a couple beers for Long Haired Cowboy and Big Buckle Cowboy. *Sluts.*

Already face down, Erica covers her head in a t-shirt. *Maybe they’ll forget I’m here or think I’m asleep.* It would only take a few sentences of the new Nicholas Sparks book for Erica to tune out her roommates’ seduction routine. No doubt, they would not pay for tonight’s dinner.

Unaccustomed to having visitors this early in the year, the gulls laughed above the scene. Thiers is a perfect partnership, the gulls and the co-eds. The dive-bomb maneuvers of the gulls gave the co-eds the upper hand in stealing the cowboys’ sweat-stained straw hats. The cowboys chased their way a half-mile down the beach, enjoying the ruse of losing to the girls.

“You could tell we were wearing Wrangler’s, huh?” asks Tattooed Cowboy. Erica startles. Towering above, he drips beer can sweat onto Erica’s pages.

“Yeah,” she grumbles. Side effect of growing up country. Waist is higher on Wranglers. Inside flat seam so you don’t get, uh... chaffing.” Erica eyes the cowboy’s crotch. *Damnit, I love Wranglers.* A properly filled-out pair of Wranglers was one of the few things Erica missed from back home.

“Definitely don’t want chaffing,” chuckles Tattooed Cowboy. He settles himself into the sand. *You smell like mint.* “Ok if I sit? Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb can have their fun with your friends. I’m just not in the mood. Dip?” He offers Erica an open Copenhagen, which she declines.

“Cowboys don’t belong on a beach.” *Go away.* Erica rolls onto her back, reapplies coconut tanning lotion, and strategically places a t-shirt over her eyes. *No eye contact, no conversation.*

“We rodeo. Heading back to the swamps a day early.” Tattooed Cowboy stretches across Erica to help himself to another beer from the cooler. *Sure, help yourself.* “I’ve always wanted to live on a ranch. You really from the country? Not making that up? Horses and cows -- the whole thing?” He spits his dip into his empty can.

“West Texas. That so unbelievable?” *Horses and cows, dumbass. Manure and dust and mending fence. Fucking never ending flat land. Best thing about home was the view in the rearview mirror.*

“Why would you want to leave Texas and come *here*? Nothing but sand in Florida.” Tattooed Cowboy sprinkles sand into Erica’s belly button.

“Ugh!” Erica hops up to brush the gritty sand from her belly button before it sticks to the tanning lotion. “Palm trees are a welcome change.” Forgetting that she had untied it, the halter of her bikini top slides down. Erica quickly turns away. Tattooed Cowboy doesn’t hide his appreciation. *Shit.*

“You got a boyfriend?”

“Not at the moment.”

Erica slowly faces Tattooed Cowboy. With a glance down the vacant beach, she drops her bikini top to the sand. *Might as well throw cowboys into the cocktail of men this week.* She hands him the coconut tanning lotion.

“Oil me up?” *Damn Wranglers.*