

## Chapter One

*29 Palms: The Fire swamp for our young hero and wife. (It was quite lovely, a few curtains...)*

When I first saw Palm Springs from the air I was so excited. Elated would be a better word. Not only was I about to reunite with my new husband (just over a year into our marriage) after three months of boot camp but I was on the other side of the country. No moms or dads to call every day and get overly involved in our business. The sky was lit brightly with the sun and no cloud cover dared to obscure the brightness yellowness against the purest blue. And true to the “California” experience, the woman who sat beside me was famous. Well kind of. She worked on costume design, was married and divorced from the man who wrote “Generation Kill”, and had personally talked to and met Jessica Alba and Will Ferrill.

As the plane ran the course and brought us in, my excitement was only tempered by my nervousness. The last time I had seen my husband, Brian, was just before he left for MCT in 29 Palms California. But those seven days together had been short lived and awkward. (There is a strangeness that comes over a man while in Boot Camp. Life is simple, and life is full of purpose. Everything you do teaches you something, prepares your body or mind for the next level of training.

I wasn't completely sure how the reunion would feel, but I couldn't wait.

“That's Bob Hope's house,” said the sort of famous woman beside me. Palm Springs had been the “it” place in the early '50's and I was flooded with images of Lucille Ball and Ricky Ricardo lounging pool side in their very chic Hollywood clothing and long cigarettes.

Once out off the plane I walked through the airport, and was completely infused by the Californianess of it. This small airport in Palm Springs has no roof, per say. Well okay, there is a central building that does have walls and a roof and is enclosed. But it's a circle with several different sliding glass doors that open into very elaborate sail tops and canopies that are just open to the warm of the air. The desert air is immediately wafting around you, warming you from the cold airplane and filling your lungs with lovely air that fills like sunshine. I knew I was no longer in Kansas. (Or in my case, North Carolina.)

As the doors slid open, I saw him at the end of the ramp, hands tucked in his pockets, body trim, and practically no hair. His high and tight, the standard Marine Corps haircut is a close shave to the head with a fade. My husband is an ash blond, therefore the high and tight makes him look like his hair is just sort of there. I smiled, and he smiled. We kissed, soft and simple at first, gauging the other. Then he pressed in for a deeper kiss. Ah. There he was.

“Ready to be off?” He easily took my carry-on from me and walked to baggage claim, from there we ventured out to the car he bought the day before. Last minute purchase for my arrival.

As we drove from Palm Springs I was overwhelmed and ecstatic. This was our new place, our new home for the next 6 months to a year. It was tan and rolling hills and warm and full of sun. The sky was 180 degrees and endless, which meant our possibilities were endless.

“Wait till you see the field. You are going to love it.” He smiled at me, and as we rounded the highway and descended into the flat part of the desert, I saw thousands of giant windmills sprawled across the land and over the small hills of tan dirt and rock. Thousands of white, giant arms were slowly spinning and collecting the energy of the wind for the town of Palm Springs. They were magnificent and Brian was right, I did love it. From the fields of wonder we entered the “Snake”, a winding road that slithered through the low mountains of Yucca Valley. [Note: I keep calling the hills and mountains of the

area, low, and that is only by North Carolina standards they are. But these mountains were and still are to this day, beautiful looming and unique to the landscape of California. And I can better understand why the settlers of the west and the natives of this area fell in love with this land.] On the other side, of the “Snake”, in which no cell phone can call out for help, was the small and niche town of Yucca.

“This is where the Wal-Mart is.” Brian told me, “and by the way, there isn’t a grocery store in the town of 29 Palms except for the Commissary.”

**[Definition:** Commissary-military supplied grocery store on base that provides grocery items tax free to our service men, women and their families and one of the best places in the world, next to Mickey Mouse, barely.]

“There has to a grocery store in town, not everyone is in the Marines,” I quipped. Brian just shrugged, as we drove past small coffee shops and tons of antique dealers, then slowly the town faded and we were just on highway, a straight and long stretch of road. Highway 62. On either side of the car was desert, pure bonafide desert. And these really ugly trees called Joshua trees were scattered about. This wasn’t the kind of desert you see on the movies in the midst of Arizona of flat, cracked land like God’s own jigsaw puzzle, nor is it the rolling dunes of the Sahara. There is a kind of desert that falls in between. Dry, pebbly and full of rocks. It has cactus and low growing grasses, small rough lizards and funny looking birds that don’t really fly. This is also the desert where you don’t stop in the middle of the night because you disappear. Its really lovely though.