



# The Story of Us

Teri Wilson

SAWYER FIGURED HE WAS IN for a long night. He wasn't sure if anyone had ever needed to wingman this hard in the entire history of wingman-ing. He met Rick's gaze, nodded and did a little shadow boxing motion.

*Don't give up, champ.*

His attempt at subtle encouragement didn't go unnoticed—not by Jamie, anyway. When Sawyer glanced over at her, he found her glowering at him, mouth agape.

His face went warm. “What?”

While Rick answered questions from a few of the attendees, Jamie murmured to Sawyer, “Oh, I mean, I just think if a guy wants to say something to a woman—like ‘Hey, I like you’ or ‘Hey, I’m actively employed by the company trying to tear down your store’—that *direct* communication

goes a lot further than dancing around the topic or, you know, being vague about it.” She wagged a finger back and forth between Sawyer and Rick. “But you guys do you.”

Sawyer shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other. Beside him, Anita shook with silent laughter. Councilman Eric just seemed confused, and Sawyer was in no mood to fill him in.

“Okay, if one partner would head to the back and grab some salad fixings...” Rick pointed at a long table set up behind the cooking stations.

Jamie—clearly energized by her wave of indignation—grabbed a silver bowl and a pair of tongs and took off as if she’d been shot out of a cannon.

Sawyer followed, hot on her heels. “I’m sorry I didn’t mention my involvement with Ridley when I first saw you at the bookshop.”

There. He’d said it. He’d apologized.

She whipped around to face him, blond ringlets flying. Her skin was so beautiful, it made Sawyer want to weep. “Thank you.”

“But, in my defense...” He just couldn’t keep his mouth shut because, after all, he wasn’t totally in the wrong. “I didn’t know it was *your* bookshop until just then.”

“But you knew it was True Love and you knew how much that place means to me.” She grabbed a chunk of arugula with her tongs.

Was she seriously not going to cut him the tiniest bit of slack? He was just doing his job.

He shook his head and shoveled arugula into his bowl. "Well, yeah, but not for a long time."

"No, it wasn't a long time ago to me. And if you think your being a part of Team Ridley is going to stop me from saving True Love, then you have another thing coming." She clicked her tongs together right in his face for emphasis. The effect was surprisingly ominous.

Sawyer grabbed his bowl and chased after her. He still knew Jamie well enough to know when she was up to something. The high fives when she'd walked in with Lucy, the wielding of kitchen implements...these things weren't insignificant.

"What are you cooking up?" he asked once they'd returned to their side-by-side cooking stations.

She blinked at him with exaggerated innocence. "Miso-glazed salmon. Weren't you paying attention?"

"I was paying attention." In fact, he'd been paying Jamie Vaughn far more attention than he wanted to admit. "And *you* are planning something."

She completely ignored him, focusing instead on the food at her table and Eric, whose presence was really turning out to be a thorn in Sawyer's side for reasons he didn't want to contemplate.

"Sawyer?" Rick said.

"What?" he snapped.

Rick aimed a quizzical look at the bowl in

Sawyer's hands and motioned toward the cluster of his classmates lingering by the table of ingredients. "Do you want to give everybody else some arugula?"

*What the...?*

Sawyer glanced down. "Oh."

His bowl overfloweth. Arugula spilled over the rim and onto the floor. He'd been so distracted that he hadn't left a single leaf behind for the other cooking students.

Titters of laughter broke out, and when Sawyer looked back up, every pair of eyes in the room was on him—with the notable exception of Jamie and Eric, who only seemed to have eyes for each other.

The night was getting longer by the second. He winced. "Sorry."

Was it time for dessert yet?