



Brokedown Cowboy (Copper Ridge Book 2)

By Maisey Yates

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If practice makes perfect, Connor Garrett should be world champion of being alone. Since losing his wife he's concentrated exclusively on his family's ranch. Until Felicity Foster needs a place to stay and Connor invites her to move in temporarily. That's what friends do. What friends don't do? Start fantasizing about each other in their underwear. Or out of it...

Since high school, Liss has kept her raging crush in check. But helping Connor rebuild his life only reinforces how much she longs to be a part of it. One explosive encounter, and she'll discover that getting what you always wanted can feel better than you ever dreamed...

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Editorial Review

Review

"Yates writes a story with emotional depth, intense heartache, and love that is hard fought for and eventually won in the second Copper Ridge installment. Liss and Connor are a memorable couple, with sexual chemistry that will make you blush and humor to make you laugh all through the painful adversity they endure. This is a book readers will be telling their friends about." --*RT Book Reviews* (4 stars)

About the Author

Maisey Yates sold her first book at age twenty-three. Since then it's been a whirlwind of sexy alpha males and happily-ever-afters, and she wouldn't have it any other way. She divides her writing time between dark, passionate category romances set just about everywhere on earth and light, sexy contemporary romances set practically in her backyard. She lives in rural Oregon with her three children and her husband, whose chiseled jaw and arresting features continue to make her swoon. She feels the epic trek she takes several times a day from her office to her coffee maker is a true example of her pioneer spirit.

Lillian Thayer is an audiobook narrator whose readings include *Abiding Darkness* by John Aubrey Anderson and books in Maisey Yates' Copper Ridge series.

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Connor Garrett was a grown-ass man. He knew there was nothing to fear in sleep. He knew the darkness of his room didn't hide anything more sinister than a pair of carelessly discarded cowboy boots, waiting for him to stub his toe on them in the dead of night during a sleepy trip to the bathroom.

He knew these things, just like he knew the sun would rise over the mountains just before six this time of year, whether he wanted it to or not. He knew these things as surely as he knew that an early-morning breeze tinged with salt meant a storm would blow in from the coast later. That unintentional run-ins with barbed-wire fences burned like a son of a bitch. That wooden barns burned and people you loved left.

Yeah, he knew all that.

But it didn't stop him from waking up most nights in a cold sweat, his heart pounding harder than a spooked horse's hooves on arena dirt.

Because the simple truth was that Connor Garrett knew all these things, but his subconscious had yet to catch up.

He sat bolt upright in bed, sweat beading on his bare chest and his forehead. If this weren't standard procedure for his body, he might've been concerned he was having a heart attack. Unfortunately, though, he knew at this point that the racing heart, accompanied by chest pain, was just stress. Anxiety.

Damn lingering grief that refused to lessen even as the years passed.

He wasn't surprised when he woke up alone in bed, not anymore. It had been three years, after all. He wasn't surprised, but he *noticed*. Every time. Was acutely aware of how cold the sheets were on her side of the bed. It wasn't even the same bed he'd slept in with Jessie. He'd bought a new one about a year ago because continuing to sleep in the bed they'd shared had seemed too depressing. But it hadn't accomplished what he had hoped it might.

Because no matter how hard he tried, whether he lay down in the middle of the bed at the start of the night, or even on the side nearest to the window, he always ended up on *his* side.

The side by the door. In case of intruders or any other danger. The side that allowed him to protect the person sleeping next to him. The side he had taken every night during his eight years of marriage. It was as if his late wife's ghost was rolling him over in his sleep.

And then waking him up.

Unfortunately, Jessie didn't even have the decency to haunt him. She was just gone. And in her place was emptiness. Emptiness in his bed. In his house. In his chest.

And when his chest wasn't empty, it was filled with pain and a kind of dread that took over his whole body and made it impossible to breathe. Like now.

He swung his legs over the side of the mattress, the wood floor cold beneath his bare feet. He stood and walked over to the window, looked out into the darkness. The black shadows of pine trees filled his vision, and beyond that, the darker silhouette of the mountains, backlit by a slightly grayer sky. And down to the left he could barely make out the front porch. And the golden glow of the porch light that he'd somehow managed to leave on before he'd gone to sleep.

His chest tightened. That was probably why he'd woken up.

Abruptly, the dream he'd been having flooded back through his mind. It hadn't been a full dream so much as images.

Opening the door late at night to see Eli standing there, his brother's face grim, bleaker than Connor had ever seen it. And a ring of gold light from the porch had shone around him. Made him look like an angel of some kind. An angel of death, it had turned out.

As stupid as it was, he was half convinced that leaving that same light on downstairs brought the dreams back stronger.

It didn't make sense. But if there was one thing he'd learned over the years, it was that grief didn't make a lick of sense.

He jerked the bedroom door open and walked downstairs, heading toward the entryway. He stood there in front of the door, looking at the porch light shining through the windows. For a second he had the thought that if he opened it, he would find Eli standing there. Would find himself transported back in time three years. Listening to the kind of news that no one should have to hear.

There was a reason his darkest nightmares consisted of nothing more than his younger brother standing on his front porch.

Because in that moment his life had transformed into a nightmare. There was nothing scarier than that. He was confident he could take the bogeyman if need be. But he couldn't fight death.

And in the end he hadn't been able to save Jessie.

And he was not opening the damn door.

He flipped the light off and found himself walking into the kitchen and opening the fridge, rather than going back upstairs. He looked at the beer, which was currently the only thing on the shelves besides a bottle of ketchup and a bag that had an onion in it that had probably been there since the beginning of summer.

He let out a heavy sigh and shut the fridge. He should not drink beer at three in the morning.

Three in the morning was clearly Jack Daniel's o'clock.

He walked over to the cabinet where he kept the harder stuff and pulled out his bottle of Jack. It was almost gone. And no one was here. No one was here, because his fucking house was empty. Because he was alone.

Considering those things, he decided to hell with the glass. He picked up the bottle and tipped it back, barely even feeling the burn anymore as the alcohol slid down his throat.

Maybe now he would be able to get some sleep. Maybe for a few hours he could forget.

He'd given up on getting rest years ago. These days he just settled for oblivion.

And this was the fastest way he knew to get it.

"You should just install a drain in the house so you can hose it down and let all the dirt wash out. Just like you do out in the barn."

"What the hell are you doing here, Liss?"

Felicity Foster refused to be cowed by the overwhelmingly unfriendly greeting her best friend had just issued. It was just Connor, after all. She was used to his less than sparkly demeanor. She was also used to finding him passed out on the couch in the morning.

It would be nice if that occurred less frequently, but if anything, he seemed to be getting worse.

Not that she could blame *him*. She blamed his barn burning down. As far as the loss of Jessie was concerned, things might have continued to get better had he not lost that, too. It was just a building, bricks and wood, but it was his livelihood. It was just another piece of Connor's dream burned down to the ground. He'd had enough of that. Too much of it.

She was officially pissed at life on his behalf. How much was one man supposed to endure?

"And to answer your rather charming question, Connor," she said, stepping nearer to the couch, "I brought you groceries."

He sat up, his face contorting, making him look a bit like he'd swallowed a porcupine. "Groceries? Why did

you do that?"

"I know it's been a while since you've gone out and socialized with actual people, rather than simply sharing your space with cows, so I feel compelled to remind you that the normal human response to this would be *thank you!*"

He swung his legs over the side of the couch and rubbed his hand over his face. She wanted to do something. To put her hand on his back and offer comfort. She was used to those kinds of impulses around Connor. She'd been fighting them for the better part of her adult life. But her conclusion was always that touching him would be a bad idea. So she stood there, her hands held awkwardly at her sides, leaving him uncomfortable. Leaving the appropriate amount of space between them.

That was part of being a good friend. At least, it was part of maintaining a healthy friendship as far as she and Connor were concerned.

"Thank you," he said, his voice gruff. "But why the hell did you bring me groceries? And why did you bring them by before work?"

"I brought you groceries because man cannot live on booze alone. I'm bringing them this morning because I was too tired to lug them over last night, when I actually bought them. So I thought, in the spirit of goodwill and breakfast cereals, I would bring them by now."

"I do like breakfast cereals. I'm ambivalent about goodwill." He stood up, wobbling slightly. "Feeling a little bit ambivalent about gravity, too."

"I'm surprised you feel like eating. How much did you drink?"

He looked away from her and shrugged in a classically Connor manner. Playing things off was an art form with this man. "I don't know. I woke up in the middle of the night. I couldn't get back to sleep so I had a little bit to drink and ended up staying down here. Anyway, I don't really notice the hangovers anymore."

"I don't think building up a resistance to hangovers is a crowning achievement."

"For my lifestyle, it certainly is."

She rolled her eyes. "Come on, cowboy. I'll pour you some cereal."

She shouldn't offer to do things like that for him. She knew it. But she did it anyway. Just like she brought his groceries when she knew his fridge contained nothing but beer. Just like she still came to his house every day to make sure he was taken care of.

"Whoa, wait a second, Liss. We do not know each other well enough for that shit."

"I've known you since I was fifteen."

"The preparation of cereal is a highly contentious thing. You don't know how much milk I might want. Hell, I don't know how much milk I might want until I assess the density and quality of the cereal."

"Are you still drunk?"

"Probably a little bit."

"Kitchen. Now."

Connor offered her a smart-ass smile, one side of his mouth curving upward. She couldn't help but watch him as he walked from the living room into the kitchen. His dark hair was longer than he used to keep it, a beard now covering his once clean-shaven jaw. She didn't mind the look. Actually, *didn't mind* was an understatement; she thought he looked dead sexy. Though, in her opinion, there was no look Connor had ever sported that she'd found less than sexy. Even that terrible haircut, gelled and spiked up, that he'd had for about a year in high school, his one and only attempt at trendiness. No, on that score, the beard and hair were fine. The real issue was that his mountain-man look wasn't a fashion statement, but an outward sign of the fact that he just didn't take care of himself anymore.

They walked into the kitchen, and with the sun shining through the window like it was now, she could clearly see the coat of neglect that everything wore. The stove had a grease film over the top of it, a shocking amount of splatters on the white surface considering that she knew Connor never cooked anything here beyond frozen pizza. The pine cabinets looked dingy, the front window dotted with a white film of hard-water stains.

The house didn't wear its neglect with quite the same devilish flare its owner did.

Connor reached up and opened one of the cabinets, taking out one of the brightly colored boxes of cereal she had just placed there. It struck her, in that moment, how funny it was she had known exactly where to put the cereal, and that he had known she would.

He grabbed a bowl and placed it on the counter, turning to face her, and she realized then that Connor wasn't wearing his neglect quite as well as he would like everyone to believe. Sure, he was still sexy as hell, the tight lines by his eyes, the deep grooves in his forehead not doing anything to diminish that. But they were new. A map of the stress and grief of the past few years, deepened by his recent losses.

She ached for him. But beyond buying the man's food, there was very little she could do.

She had been about to unload on him about all the crap that was happening with her rental. But it wasn't a good time. Though she doubted with Connor there was ever a good time. Not because he wouldn't care, but because she didn't want to pile on.

Connor poured milk on his cereal, milk she had brought, and set it back on the counter. He picked up his bowl and started eating, crunching loudly on his first bite. "Are you going to have some, Liss?"

"I never say no to cereal. I have important accounting stuff to attend to. I find an early-morning carb rush is the best way to handle that."

"Coffee?" he asked, talking around the food in his mouth.

"I had a carafe before I came over. I don't play around with caffeine consumption."

"Well, I need some." He set the bowl back down on the counter and made his way over to the coffeemaker.

"So you had coffee. Beer, and coffee."

"I'm not an animal."

Liss snickered while she got her own bowl and set about preparing her cereal. There was a strange domesticity to the scene. Mundane conversation, easy morning sounds. Water running in the sink, clattering dishes. The soft filter of early sunlight through the thick wall of evergreens that surrounded Connor's front yard.

There was something poignant about sharing this with him. This moment that seemed to have slipped right out of time. Like something she'd stolen, something she shouldn't have.

Seriously, you would think she was the one who had been drinking. She was maudlin.

Connor started the coffee then returned to the island where he'd prepared his cereal. They stood across from each other, eating in silence, except for the crunching. And the sounds of the coffeemaker.

More morning sounds she was not entitled to.

Because this was the kind of thing a guy shared with his lover or wife. Not with his oddly codependent best friend.

"Have you heard back from the insurance company about the settlement?" The barn had burned down in July thanks to a few kids carelessly playing with fireworks, and while Liss knew that insurance companies could drag their feet to a pretty insane degree, this was going somewhere beyond that.

It was mid-September, and as far as she knew, Connor's bank account remained void of settlements.

"Nope."

"Well, that's a little bit ridiculous, don't you think?"

He shrugged one shoulder then took another bite of cereal. "Probably. Just haven't had the energy to go chasing it down."

"Don't you think you should find the energy? All that equipment..."

"I'm very aware of what I lost in the fire. I don't need you to summarize. Anyway, I've been making use of Bud's old tractor. Plus, Jack had some extra tools."

"That's very nice. But don't you want your own things?"

"Yes, Liss," he said, his tone getting hard. "I would very much like to have my own shit. Actually, what I would really like is for my barn not to have burned down."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Fernando Levering:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important act, like

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