1. Autumn 2

She's waiting for him when he gets to the restaurant. She looks like an older version of the woman he met at the Capitol Bar & Grill in Sacramento, power suit and accessories. They got married as both their professional licenses were being scored and lived together in indifference for a couple of years. They finally divorced, after she met somebody who suited her better—literally and figuratively—at an open house she was working. Honestly, it was a relief for the both of them.

They sit out on the patio, a nod to his jeans and boots smelling of horse. The dregs of their meal are whisked away. It's time for Kim to come clean.

"So what's up?" he asks.

"I'm getting married," she exclaims as if she's pulling a rabbit out of her hat and waits for the audience to gasp.

"That's great, Kim." He's surprised, but not unhappy. They ended things amicably. As she pointed out, she had her career, and he had his. No kids. No real assets. It was an easy split. "Have you told me about him?"

"No. We've only been dating for a couple of months. But I think at our age, we know what we know. Don't you?" Kim always knows

what she knows, especially when it comes to other people. "We're pretty much set in our ways now, so if those ways line up, why wait?"

"I'm happy for you," he says, clicking her salted margarita glass with the base of his beer bottle.



"You got a girlfriend?" she asks and smirks. "You look good, by the way."

He feels too old to have a *girlfriend,* and anyway, he and Quince aren't there yet. He laughs, drains his beer and motions to the waiter. "So when's the happy occasion?"

The waiter comes by and hands him the bill. Kim makes a half-hearted grab to take it from him, but he waves her off.

"We're going to wait until Christmas. Get married at the vacation home I found for Gerald in Colorado. A white wedding. The kids ski,"

she says, relaxing back into her chair. "Gerald has two children. A son at USC and a daughter at Harvard-Westlake Prep."

Of course, he's got money.

"He has full custody because mom's somewhere in Europe terrorizing some other guy."

"That doesn't sound good."

She flips a hand. "Sometimes you can't help who tags along with the person you marry. How's Zareen, by the way?"

Zareen? His brain flounders. Oh shit. He'd forgotten about Zareen. He leaped back in time when he was a single man with nobody else to think about. Now he's embarrassed as well as angry, as if he's been caught with his pants down. Every time he thinks he has control of his life, he loses it. Or realizes he never had it.

He stands up and puts his wallet back in his pocket. "I'm real happy for you, Kim, but I gotta go."

She's surprised at his abruptness, but stands up quickly, expecting a hug and a kiss on the cheek. He performs the ritual because he doesn't want to deal with anything else.

"Thanks for seeing me," she says, and there's a softness in her voice he hasn't heard in a long time—one he doesn't need.