

Excerpt from *Aundy*:

“You are one of the most stubborn, hard-headed women I’ve ever met, Aundy Erickson,” Garrett said, running a hand through his hair, sending the dark locks into a state of complete disarray. His movements made Aundy want to run her fingers through it as well. “Your ability to be self-sufficient would never come into question. If you need help, ask for it. We’re more than happy to give it. You’ve been through so much since you’ve arrived here and handled it all in stride. Growing up in the city, without any rural background, you’re going to need some help. Never hesitate to ask.”

“I know, but I’ve imposed on all of you too much as it is.” Aundy felt tears prick the backs of her eyes. She would not cry. Giving in to her emotions, as jumbled as they were, wouldn’t help prove she could care for herself and Erik’s farm. Her farm.

“You’ve never imposed on us. Ever.” Aundy was so obstinate. He couldn’t recall ever meeting such a stubborn, headstrong woman. She made him want to... Thinking about what he really wanted to do, he refocused his attention on why she went to the Underground. “Regardless of all that, what information were you hoping to find?”

“I wanted to buy something and no one would talk to me about it. Dressed as a man, I didn’t have a bit of trouble making the deal.”

“What did you buy?” Garrett tried to think of anything Aundy would have purchased in the Underground that could possibly be beneficial to the farm.

“I don’t think you’re going to like my answer.” Aundy didn’t want to tell Garrett about her sheep. He’d been quite vocal when she and J.B. were discussing the pros and cons of raising sheep the other day, about how much he disliked the “stinky little boogers,” as he referred to them.

“What did you do?” Garrett asked, pinning her with his silver gaze.

“I made arrangements with a man to buy something he wanted, quite desperately, to sell.”

Garrett’s patience was nearly exhausted. “Which was?”

She hesitated, taking a deep breath before answering. “Sheep.”

He let out a whoosh of air and sat back in his chair. Blinking his eyes twice, he was sure Aundy couldn’t have said what he thought she did.

“Did you say sheep?”

“Yes,” Aundy whispered, staring down at the cloth covering the table.

“Smelly, nasty, bleating little sheep?”

“Well, I don’t know about the smelly, nasty, or bleating part, but yes, I did agree to purchase sheep.”

“Woman! What are you thinking? Did you sign papers, make payment? Is the deal final?”

“Not yet. Mr. O’Connell was under the impression I was helping a new widow. I asked him to call Mrs. Erickson Monday morning to make arrangements for the sale.”

“O’Connell? The whiskey drinking Irishman? Why he’ll...” Garrett yelled, his eyes flashing fire.

Aundy reached across the table and clapped a hand across his mouth. “Shh. You’ll have Dent and the boys in here if you don’t quiet down. Not only should you not be here, especially with me dressed like this, but I’m not quite ready to impart the knowledge to them that we’ll soon be raising sheep.”

“Fred will quit.” Garrett stated a fact Aundy already knew. He’d made it perfectly clear that he had no interest in tending sheep, so it was a gamble she had to make.

“I’ve taken that possibility into consideration.”

“Did you also take into consideration that a lot of the neighbors around here hate sheep? Not just dislike them, but hate them. I know many people in the area raise sheep, but our neighbors are all wheat growers and cattlemen. If you think about it, there isn’t one little lamb to be found from here all the way to Pendleton. You could be asking for a lot of trouble.” He could see the stubborn set to Aundy’s chin and knew she had no intention of listening to reason or changing her mind.

“I’ll handle any problems should they arise.”

“Look, Aundy, I think you...”

Placing her hand over Garrett’s mouth again, Aundy fought the tremor that shot from her fingers up her arm and spiraled down to her toes. The feel of his lips beneath her fingers made her wish he’d take her in his arms and kiss her again in the very worst way. She didn’t want to think about why she wanted, needed, him to hold her. She just knew that she did.