

I'm a huge country music fan so I knew that was the genre I'd go to when I needed a song for my short story. This song came to mind quickly. Good Directions, by Billy Currington, is definitely a twangy, fun country song that's been a favorite since I first heard it. I love the sweet story it told— a love-at-first-sight romance. I've always been fascinated by the idea of love at first sight and the will of the heart to act on that. So, Gabby and Cooper's story was born! And a quick thank you to all my readers who helped me name the hero and heroine! Hope you enjoy!

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## **Good Directions**

**by Erin Nicholas**

*Sometimes it takes getting lost to find where you really want to be...*

Gabriella Shaw squinted up at the metal pole that *should have* held a street sign. The hawk that perched on top looked back at her. He didn't seem concerned that she had absolutely no idea where she was.

A unique spa experience, her ass.

She was not only as far from spa country as she could get—there were corn rows and cows as far as she could see—but she was about to be minus one best friend if this spa turned out to be bogus. Kari Morgan, her BFF since college, to be exact. They'd known each other through job changes, boyfriend changes and hairstyle changes.

But eight years was enough. She could change best friends. Sure, no problem.

“Hi, you need some help?”

Gabby looked over at the blue pickup that had pulled up next to her. The older man grinned at her.

“Maybe. I'm looking for the Blakefield Country Spa.”

The man blinked twice. “Uh, what?”

Gabby frowned. She was having a hard time believing there was a spa here, but Kari wouldn't have made that up. She was pretty sure.

In the next moment she realized that yes, Kari would have made it up. Her friend was serious about Gabby getting away and relaxing. She would have made up a spa to get Gabby to agree to the trip.

“You've never heard of the Blakefield Spa?” she asked the old man.

“The only Blakefield anything I've heard of is the Blakefield Dairy.”

A dairy? Like milk and stuff? “Where's that?” she asked, not sure she cared.

“Four miles east then two miles south.”

She looked down at the paper Kari had given her. Damn.

“Is that east?” she asked, pointing to her right.

“Yep.” The man tipped his cap back and peered at her more closely. “You sure you want to go to the dairy?”

If he thought she looked like she’d never stepped foot on an actual dairy, he’d be right. Just like she’d never set foot on a farm, period. Or a gravel road. Or in the state of Nebraska.

“I’m not sure I want to,” she admitted. “But I think I’m supposed to.”

“Well, then take a right,” the man said with a chuckle. “Or take a left and go three miles and you’ll end up back on the highway.”

Tempting. Very tempting. But she turned right with a sigh.

Ten minutes later she found the huge sign that read Blakefield Dairy.

Not a spa.

She was definitely telling Kari she could shop, lunch and get pedicures with someone else from now on. As soon as she got her favorite shoes back.

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People fell into two categories in Cooper Reed’s life—the ones who just walked into his house without knocking, and the people who never visited him. The latter group was mostly made of people he didn’t know, so that made sense. The bottom line was that no one knocked on Copper Reed’s front door, so he was startled to hear the sound.

“It’s open!” he hollered from where he was perched on a ladder in his kitchen. Of course someone would show up when he was painting the most pain-in-the-ass spot in the whole house. That little strip of wall between the high kitchen window and the ceiling was also above the sink so he was stretching, reaching and angling his arm in an unnatural position to reach it without falling on his ass and breaking something.

“Um, hello?”

The husky female voice would have been enough to have him spinning around even if he wasn’t on a ladder. Above the ground as he was, the voice was dangerous.

He gripped the ladder and glanced over his shoulder.

Her three-inch white heels were covered in the soft brown dirt of his driveway. He assumed she’d sunk in with the first step. No one wore heels around here. He couldn’t spare time or energy worrying about her shoes though. There were way too many other things about her to notice.

Like the fact she had light coffee-colored skin and that her long legs disappeared under a short skirt which then curved into very nice hips. The pink silky tank top she wore hugged perfect breasts. The

low neckline showed off the graceful length of her throat and he suddenly wanted to know if she dabbed perfume in that little depression at the base.

Her straight, dark hair hung just past her chin, her lips were a shiny perfect match for her top and as she pressed them together he wanted to find out how they felt under his.

The reaction shocked him.

He knew beautiful women. Liked them. Kissed them. But he never reacted so fast to any of them.

She looked amazing, completely out of place in his one-hundred-year-old kitchen... and very familiar.

“Gabby?”

She was staring at him, her eyes wide and her mouth open. “*Cooper?*”

The ladder definitely wobbled then.

“What the hell?” He tried to turn, but the shift made the ladder tilt and he knew he was taking his life into his hands. He shoved the brush into the can of paint and descended the rungs, coming face to face with the woman who’d been haunting his dreams for two years.

“What are you doing here?” they both asked at the same time.

He was amazed. She looked gorgeous and just as he’d imagined her—too covered up, but he’d memorized her naked curves long ago and could conjure those images without effort.

She also looked pissed.

“Is this a joke?” she asked, planting a hand on her hip. “This isn’t funny. I drove ten hours to get here.”

“That’s... great.” He was a dairy farmer. He milked cows for a living. He had a simple life in a small Midwestern town. But he wasn’t stupid.

Gabriella Shaw had been the hottest night of his life. Of. His. Life. And she was now standing in his kitchen. Pissed or not, she was here. And he wasn’t about to just let her go.

He reached out and took her hand. “God, it’s good to see you girl.”

“I think you should know I’m going to murder your favorite cousin,” she said, but she let him take her hand.

Kari was his favorite cousin without question. The other nine were all boys and they’d never done anything so nice as introducing him to Gabby, Kari’s college roommate. Which was how he’d met her two years ago at their joint graduation party. And how he’d ended up with Gabby in his bed for that one amazing night.

“Why? What did she do?” he asked, tugging gently and bringing her closer.

“Sent me here.”

“That’s...” Strange. Amazing. Great. Weird.

“Weird, right?” she asked.

He grinned. “Amazing.” Which was a much better word.

“And weird.”

“I haven’t seen you in two years.” He could tell from the flicker of awareness in her eyes that she recalled the last time they’d seen each other as easily as he did. It was also the first time they’d ever seen each other. And they’d seen everything.

They’d left the graduation party together and headed straight for his hotel room. They hadn’t emerged for nearly twenty-four hours. He’d awakened—alone—just in time to head for the airport home to Nebraska.

They hadn’t seen each other since.

She also hadn’t returned phone calls, e-mails, texts and she’d even declined his friend request on Facebook.

Needless to say, having her appear in his kitchen after all this time was a shock.

But a very pleasant one.

“I know.” She sighed. “It’s been a long time.” She tipped her head to the side. “You’re surprised to see me.”

“Shocked, actually. But happy.” He squeezed her hand. “Please tell me that you’ve been thinking of me.”

Gabby’s eyes widened and she licked her lips. “I, um... thought this was a spa.”

He tried to ignore her lips as he processed her words. But her lips—and his memories—made it very difficult. Which was possibly why what she said didn’t make any sense.

“A what?”

She waved her hand as if to wave the words away. “Forget it. She just—she told me that this was where she came a couple months ago when everything was going so wrong for her. She came back like a new woman, energized, happy, relaxed. She decided I needed the same treatment.”

Cooper felt a number of emotions shoot through his chest. Again, the amazement that Gabriella Shaw was actually standing before him. There was also the heat—the heat he’d felt the first moment he’d seen her, the first time he touched her, kissed her, made love to her. The heat that he’d never felt with anyone else.

And then there was the confusion about what she said. Kari had visited two months ago, stayed with him for a week and partied her ass off. She’d shown up on his doorstep without notice, crashed in his guest room, and had a great time blowing off some steam. Then she’d packed up, kissed him on the cheek and said she was going to pay him back somehow for helping her get her sanity back.

“Well, I can certainly help you with that prescription,” he told Gabby. “Kari slept late, ate a big breakfast, did some work around the place until it was time to go to town, then danced and drank until the bar closed and spent the rest of the night wearing out her old boyfriend, Travis. And yeah, she looked a lot happier and more relaxed when she left than when she’d arrived.”

Gabby’s eyes were huge by the time he was done. “She just slept, drank and had a bunch of sex?” she asked. “That bitch.”

Cooper chuckled. “It worked.”

“I could have done all of that in Chicago.”

He didn’t like the sounds of that at all. He moved in close and said huskily, “Not like you can here.”

“Better beer here?” she asked with a shaky smile.

His grin was slow and sexy. “Something like that.”

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“You sent me here to get *laid*?” Gabby hissed into the phone once she was shut in Cooper’s bathroom.

*Cooper’s* bathroom. She still couldn’t believe it.

Kari laughed. “Well not specifically, but if that happens too, great.”

“Cooper said that’s what you did when you were here.”

“I did,” Kari admitted. “And I needed it. But I just wanted you to get away.”

“By sending me to essentially live with the only one-night stand I’ve ever had?”

“By sending you to stay for a few days with a guy I know and trust to take care of you while you let loose a little bit.”

“You told me this was a spa”

“Spas are for relaxing and rejuvenating. This trip will do that for you.”

“What about the shopping?”

“This weekend is the Potterbury County Fair. There will be shopping and dining unlike anything you’ve ever experienced. Have fun.” And she hung up.

“Bitch,” Gabby muttered to the dial tone.

Gabby took a moment to just breathe deep. And be amazed and overwhelmed by the fact that she was in Cooper Reed’s house.

All she had to do was close her eyes and she could recreate everything from their one night together. Sights, scents, sounds... it was all right there in her memory.

And this certainly wasn’t the first time she’d relived it since it happened.

Oh, boy. She turned to the vanity and ran some cool water, dabbing it against the hot skin of the back of her neck, her throat and forehead. This was going to be interesting.

She could leave, of course.

She'd have to put up with Kari calling her a chicken—assuming she decided to speak to Kari again after this—but she could live through that. Worse than Kari's opinion going south was her fear that *she* would be disappointed in herself for running. She deserved some fun, no doubt about it. She could *really* use some good, hot, dirty loving. She didn't want to shy away from it, miss out, regret it later. But she was wary of it being with Cooper.

No, spending a few days with Cooper, drinking, dancing and getting dirty with him, didn't *sound* scary. But it was.

Cooper Reed was a threat—to her heart, to her *life*. Not her physical, heart-beating, breathing-in-and-out life but the life that she'd established, worked for, fought for, wanted in Chicago.

She was a damned good lawyer. She'd been proving herself. She was doing well.

Okay, this last case—this last *loss*—wasn't great, but she'd bounce back.

At least that's what she'd promised the partners.

Anyway, her life, her career, was in Chicago. She'd known the moment she met Cooper that he wasn't the Chicago kind of guy. She hadn't known or asked—very much on purpose—what he did or where he lived, but she could tell he wasn't big city material.

So, even though he was sweet, smart, funny, charming, and sexy as hell, she'd known from the beginning that he was just a one-night stand. Of course, she never had one-night stands. Hadn't before Cooper and hadn't since. In fact, she'd only had sex twice since Cooper and neither time had been spectacular—or lasting. But with Cooper, it was like she couldn't help it.

It had been her and Kari's graduation party. There had been drinking and dancing. But she'd known before even one glass of wine that if he asked her to go home with him, she would.

And he'd definitely asked.

“Well, I'm here to stay for a few days,” she said, emerging from the bathroom to find Cooper making sandwiches.

“And Kari's drawing up her last will and testament?” he asked, handing her a glass of iced tea.

“She probably should be,” Gabby said. “But I'm too exhausted to think about driving back to Chicago and kicking her ass today. Or tomorrow.” Or for the next week, probably, she thought looking up into his green eyes.

“You know, she told me she was sending me a surprise,” Cooper said. “I was expecting a box with a bow but this definitely works.” He gave her that good ole' boy grin that had gotten her out of her panties two years before. “And if you want to put a bow on, I'd be happy to unwrap you.”

She crossed her arms and cocked an eyebrow—even though she was seriously considering losing her panties again. “You can just put that country charm right back in your pocket, ‘cuz it won’t work.”

She was such a liar.

“Oh, it’s not just country charm. It works in the city too, if you remember.”

Holy crap, did she remember.

She tried to seem unaffected by him. “I was hoping you could introduce me to Travis?”

“Travis?” he asked.

“The guy Kari wore out.” She liked the narrowing of Cooper’s eyes.

“Yeah, I know who Travis is. Why do *you* need to know him?”

“Kari said I need to do everything she did while she was here.”

His eyes narrowed a little further. “Well, that, Gabby girl, isn’t going to happen.”

“No sex?” she asked.

“Oh, I didn’t say that.”

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Gabriella had no idea what to expect from the Potterbury County Fair—or any county fair, for that matter. She’d grown up, gone to school, worked and lived in cities her whole life.

There were a lot of lights, a lot of noises and *a lot* of fried foods.

“Here you go.” Cooper handed her a tall glass of something pale yellow.

“What is *this*?”

“Lemonade. Fresh squeezed.” He saluted her with his cup. “Drink up.”

She took a tentative sip. Then let her eyes slide shut in bliss. It was the most delicious thing she’d ever tasted.

“So are we going to talk about the last time we were together?”

She swallowed wrong and started choking.

Cooper grinned and thumped her on the back. “So you do remember.”

She shook her head. “We’re not going to talk about it.”

“Hmm.”

He took her hand and they moved on to other booths.

“I cannot believe how great food tastes when you fry it,” Gabby said twenty minutes later, half a funnel cake gone.

“Amazing.” Cooper lifted a hand and ran his thumb along her bottom lip.

She saw powdered sugar on the tip of his thumb just before he put it to his mouth and sucked it clean.

Desire, sharp and hot, arrowed through her and she gasped.

“Delicious.” He grinned down at her again. “You should breathe Gabby.” Then he started moving again, her in tow.

She shook her head. This was too much. The last time they’d been together it had been hot, but fast. An instant attraction they’d both just reacted to. This time she was getting to know him, getting to see him in his own environment, totally comfortable in blue jeans that hugged his butt, a soft gray t-shirt that she wanted to cuddle up to and that grin he flashed constantly.

He didn’t only smile at her. He talked to everyone, greeted people personally and they all seemed happy to see him. But there was something different about the grins he gave her. They were sexy but also warm—like he was just thrilled she was here with him. Like she was something—someone—special.

It was addictive.

It wasn’t that she didn’t date or have guys who liked her. She did. A lot.

But that was part of her recent restlessness. Her life was... big. It was crazy, it was exhausting. She was always on the go. She felt like she was always fighting, trying to get more. She wanted to win her cases, wanted to make partner, wanted to impress people—her bosses, her clients, the men she dated.

Slowing down felt so good.

Being with a guy who so obviously liked her, without her even trying, was so amazing.

And she knew, even though she wanted to ignore or deny it, that she was falling in love with him.

No, that wasn’t right, she thought as they moved among the booths of food, crafts and games. She’d fallen in love with him two years ago. She just hadn’t wanted to believe it. Because falling in love in one night was crazy.

But now being with him again she knew it was true.

What she was going to do about it was another question.

He bought her earrings when they got further down to the craft section past the food.

“Oh, I can’t.”

“They remind me of the ones you were wearing the night we met.” He held them up.

He was right.

And she was stunned.

“Oops, I’m not supposed to talk about that night, right?”

He didn’t look a bit apologetic.

She kept eye contact as she replaced her earrings with the new ones.

How did he remember her earrings from two years ago? They'd been simple silver hoops. Nothing flashy, nothing memorable. But she remembered him playing with them as they sat at the bar, him seeming to take in everything about her, studying her face.

Wow. No wonder she'd slept with him.

"Now what?" she asked.

"I'd like to touch you semi-inappropriately."

Her eyebrows shot up.

"Let's dance," he said with a grin.

The dance was outside, in the town square. There was a live cover band, lights strung from trees and poles, and a lot of laughter and conversation.

As Cooper pulled her into his arms, she sighed. He felt so good—strong, warm, protective.

"We fit together so well, Gab," Cooper said, his voice husky. "I hate that I only get this little taste of you and you'll be gone again."

There had sure been a lot of tasting on both their parts the last time they'd been together.

She looked up at him and couldn't help but smile. "Thought we weren't talking about that night."

Heat flared in his eyes and he smiled. "We don't have to talk about it. I think about it all the time. Like you do. Whether we talk about it or not."

She took a deep breath and blamed the fried food as she confessed, "You're right."

"I can't let you leave without kissing you."

Her heart thumped. She knew exactly where kissing would lead. "Good," was all she could say.

Desire was clear on his face, but he swallowed hard and said, "I can't start here, because it's going to get indecent really quick."

The most they did was hold hands all the way home. But within minutes of stepping through the front door, clothes were flung left and right, lips and hands were everywhere and there was a lot of sighing, moaning and "yes, please".

They made it as far as the wall in the hallway on the way to the kitchen.

"I wanted this time to be slow," Cooper said gruffly as he lifted her thigh in one big palm and pressed her into the wall.

"We have next time." She needed him so much she could hardly think. "But right now I can't wait." She gripped his butt and pulled him forward.

He'd already slipped on a condom and didn't hesitate to thrust forward, sliding deep. They groaned together and started moving in a steady rhythm that quickly built and sent them over the edge together.

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As they stood, sweating and breathing hard, plastered against one another, Cooper knew he couldn't let her go. Not because the sex was the best he'd ever had, but because *she* was the best he'd ever had.

But instead of telling her, he tried to show her. All night long. Again and again.

The next morning he left her sleeping, made her breakfast and left it on the stove then went out to get some work done. Working outside had always been like therapy for him. He was at peace, he knew what he wanted, he was focused when he was out in the midst of what he loved and wanted.

But today he felt like something was missing. Well, not missing exactly—it, *she*, was in the house in his bed.

It was crazy to feel like this. They'd met one night two years ago and had now been together not quite twenty-four hours. But he felt it. She was his. She belonged with him.

And he belonged here.

Would she stay? Could he even ask?

She was just out of the shower when he came back to the house later. They didn't make it downstairs for several hours.

As they sat together by the bon fire at Cooper's best friend's barbecue later that night, he struggled to keep from asking her to stay. She fit in with his friends, she felt so good here with him, so right. But it was a crazy thought. Maybe they could try the long distance thing. They could talk on the phone, they could e-mail and text, they could visit, they could vacation together.

It all sounded great.

But not enough.

He kept his thoughts and feeling to himself at the barbecue, in the car and even as he undressed her that night. Somehow.

They made love that night sweet and slow, like they were trying to savor the time they had. They slept sporadically.

In the morning he knew he had to tell her *something*. Something that would make her stay. Something that didn't sound crazy like "please stay even though it feels we barely know each other, we don't have the same backgrounds, the same lifestyles, but stay."

No, he couldn't say any of that.

He put her suitcase in the trunk and they stood by her open car door.

"Thanks for... everything," she said.

"Well, we drank and danced," he said. "How do you feel?"

She grinned up at him. "Great. Completely rejuvenated. Must have been the beer."

“Right.” He chuckled.

“Okay, well... can I call you?” she asked.

Of course she could call him. “Stay.”

She looked stunned. “What?”

He took a deep breath. “Stay.”

“For how long?”

“Forever.” He shrugged.

“That’s nuts,” she whispered.

“Yep.”

“I do love it here.”

“So, stay.”

“I can come back and visit.”

“Yeah. Or you could stay.” He was really trying not to push. And he wasn’t succeeding at it very well.

She licked her lips. “Will you still give me directions to the interstate if I say I can’t?”

He took a deep breath. Okay. He wouldn’t push her any more. This time. The next time he saw her, though, all bets were off. And there *would* be a next time. “You go four miles to the stop sign. The interstate is to the left. A right will bring you back to me.”

She stood, just staring at him for a long minute. Then she took a deep breath, got in her car and drove off.

He watched until her taillights disappeared. Then he kicked the dirt and headed for the house to look up plane tickets to Chicago.

Ten minutes later he was typing in his credit card number for a ticket out the next day. There was a knock on the door.

No one knocked on his door. He pushed back and stomped to the door.

Gabby stood on the porch.

He grabbed her and kissed her before she could say a thing. If she’d just forgotten her toothbrush he was at least going to remind her of what she was leaving.

“You took a right,” he finally said.

She grinned and nodded. “Right back home.”

THE END

