



Buckhorn Beginnings: SawyerMorgan (The Buckhorn Brothers)

By Lori Foster

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Sawyer

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Morgan

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Review

"Lori Foster delivers the goods."

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"Foster writes smart, sexy, engaging characters."

-New York Times bestselling author Christine Feehan

"Foster's latest is pure entertainment and a joy to read."

-RT Book Reviews on Back in Black

"Intense, edgy and hot. Lori Foster delivers everything you're looking for in a romance."

-New York Times bestselling author Jayne Ann Krentz on Hard to Handle

About the Author

Lori Foster is a New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author with books from a variety of publishers, including Berkley/Jove, Kensington, St. Martin's, Harlequin and Silhouette. Lori has been a recipient of the prestigious RT Book Reviews Career Achievement Award for Series Romantic Fantasy, and for Contemporary Romance. She's had top-selling books for Amazon, Waldenbooks and the BGI Group. For more about Lori, visit her Web site at www.lorifoster.com.

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One minute he'd been reveling in the late-afternoon sun, feeling the sweat dry on his shoulders and neck before he could wipe it away.

In the next instant, she was there.

He'd just glanced over at his son, Casey, only fifteen, but working as hard as any man, tall and strong and determined. His smile was filled with incredible pride.

The last two weekends he'd been caught up with patients, and he'd missed working outside with Casey, enjoying the fresh air, using his hands and body until the physical strain tired him.

Summer scents were heavy in the air, drifting to him as he layered another replacement board on the fence and hammered it in. A warm, humid breeze stirred his hair, bringing with it the promise of a harsh evening storm. He'd inhaled deeply, thinking how perfect his life was.

Then his son shouted, "Holy sh—ah, heck!" catching Sawyer's attention.

Not knowing what to expect, Sawyer turned in the direction Casey pointed his hammer and disbelief filled him as a rusted sedan, moving at breakneck speed, came barreling down the gravel road bordering their property. The turn at the bottom, hugging the Kentucky hills, was sharp; the car would never make it.

Sawyer got a mere glimpse of a pale, wide-eyed female face behind the wheel before, tires squealing, gravel flying, the car came right through the fence he'd just repaired, splintering wood and scattering nails, forcing him to leap for cover. Sheer momentum sent the car airborne for a few feet before it hit the grassy ground with a loud thump and was propelled forward several more feet to slide hood first into a narrow cove of the lake. The front end was submerged, hissing and bubbling, while the trunk and back wheels still rested on solid land, leaving the car at a crazy tilt.

Both Sawyer and Casey stood frozen for several seconds, stunned by what had happened, before un-gluing their feet and rushing to the edge of the small cove. Without hesitation, Casey waded waist-deep into the water and peered in the driver's window. "It's a girl!"

Sawyer pushed him aside and leaned down.

His breath caught and held. *Girl* wasn't exactly an apt description of the unconscious woman inside. In a heartbeat, he took in all her features, scanning her from head to toes. As a doctor, he looked for signs of injury, but as a man, he appreciated how incredibly, utterly feminine she was. He guessed her to be in her mid-twenties. Young, a tiny woman, but definitely full grown.

The window was thankfully open, giving him easy access to her, but water rapidly washed into the car, almost covering her shins. Silently cursing himself and his masculine, knee-jerk reaction to her, he told Casey, "Go to the truck and call Gabe at the house. Tell him to meet us out front."

Casey hurried off while Sawyer considered the situation. The woman was out cold, her head slumped over the steering wheel, her body limp. The backseat of the car was filled with taped cardboard boxes and luggage, some of which had tumbled forward, landing awkwardly against her. A few open crates had dumped, and items—bric-a-brac, books and framed photos—were strewn about. It was obvious she'd been packed up for a long trip—or a permanent one.

Sawyer reached for her delicate wrist and was rewarded to feel a strong pulse. Her skin was velvety smooth, warm to the touch. He carefully placed her hand back in her lap, keeping it away from the icy cold water.

It took some doing, but he got the driver's door wedged open. If the car had surged a little deeper into the lake, he never would have managed it. More water flooded in. The woman moaned and turned her head, pushing away from the steering wheel, then dropping forward again. Her easy, unconscious movements assured Sawyer she had no spinal or neck injuries. After moving the fallen objects away from her, he carefully checked her slender arms, slipping his fingers over her warm flesh, gently flexing each elbow, wrist and shoulder. He drew his hands over her jeans-clad legs beneath the water, but again found no injuries. Her lips parted and she groaned, a rasping, almost breathless sound of pain. Frowning, Sawyer examined the swelling bump on her head. He didn't like it that she was still out, and her skin felt a little too warm, almost feverish.

Casey came to a skidding, sloshing halt beside him, sending waves to lap at Sawyer's waist. His gaze was narrowed with concern on the woman's face. "Gabe offered to bring you your bag, but I told him I'd call him

back if you needed it." He spoke in a whisper, as if afraid of disturbing her. "We're taking her to the house with us, aren't we?"

"Looks like." If she didn't come to on the way to the house, he'd get her over to the hospital. But that was a good hour away, and most people in Buckhorn chose him over the hospital anyway, unless the situation was truly severe. And even then, it was generally his call.

He'd decide what to do after he determined the extent of her injuries. But first things first; he needed to get her out of the car and away from the debilitating effects of the cold water and hot sun.

Luckily, they weren't that far away from the house. He owned fifty acres, thick with trees and scrub bushes and wildflowers. The lake, long and narrow like a river, bordered the back of his property for a long stretch of shore. The ten acres surrounding the house and abutting the lake were kept mowed, and though it couldn't be called an actual road, there was a worn dirt path where they often brought the truck to the cove to fish or swim. Today they'd driven down to make repairs to a worn fence.

A crooked smile tipped up one side of his mouth. Thanks to the lady, the repairs to the fence were now more necessary than ever.

Sawyer carefully slid one arm beneath her legs, the other behind the small of her back. Her head tipped toward him, landing softly on his bare, sweaty shoulder. Her hair was a deep honey-blond with lighter sun streaks framing her face. It smelled of sunshine and woman, and he instinctively breathed in the scent, letting it fill his lungs. Her hair was long enough to drag across the car seat as he lifted her out. "Grab her keys and purse, then get the shirt I left by the fence." He needed to cover her, and not only to counter the chill of the lake water.

He was almost ashamed to admit it, even to himself, but he'd noticed right off that her white T-shirt was all but transparent with the dousing she'd taken. And she wasn't wearing a bra.

He easily shook that observation from his mind.

Even with her clothes soaked, the woman weighed next to nothing, but still it was an effort to climb the small embankment out of the lake without jarring her further. She'd lost one thin sandal in the wreck, and now the other fell off with a small splash. The mud squished beneath Sawyer's boots, making for unsure footing. Casey scrambled out ahead, then caught at Sawyer's elbow, helping to steady him. Once they were all on the grassy embankment, Casey ran off to follow the rest of his instructions, but was back in a flash with the shirt, which he helped Sawyer arrange around her shoulders. Sawyer kept her pressed close to his chest, preserving her privacy and saving his son from major embarrassment.

"You want me to drive?" Walking backward,

Casey managed to keep his gaze on the woman and avoid tripping.

"Yeah, but slowly. No unnecessary bumps, okay?" Casey was still learning the rudiments of changing gears, and he used any excuse to get behind the wheel.

"No problem, I'll just.." His voice trailed off as the woman stirred, lifting one limp hand to her forehead.

Sawyer stopped, holding her securely in his arms. He stared down at her face, waiting for her to regain

complete awareness, strangely anticipating her reaction. "Easy now."

Her lashes were thick and dark brown tipped with gold and they fluttered for a moment before her eyes slowly opened—and locked on his. Deep, deep blue, staring into him, only inches away.

Sawyer became aware of several things at once: her soft, accelerated breath on his throat, the firmness of her slim thighs on his bare arm, her breasts pressing through the damp cotton of her shirt against his ribs. He could feel the steady drumming of her heartbeat, and the way her body now stiffened the tiniest bit. He felt a wave of tingling awareness shudder through his body, from his chest all the way to his thighs. His reaction to her was out of proportion, considering the circumstances and his usual demeanor. He was a physician, for God's sake, and didn't, in the normal course of things, even notice a woman as a woman when medical treatment was required.

Right now, he couldn't help but notice. Holding this particular woman was somehow altogether different. So often, he put aside his tendencies as a man in deference to those of a doctor; being a doctor was such an enormous part of him. But now he found it difficult to separate the two. The doctor was present, concerned for her health and determined to give her the best of his care. But the man was also there, acutely aware of her femininity and unaccountably responding to it in a very basic way. He'd never faced such a pickle before, and he felt equal parts confusion, curiosity and something entirely too close to embarrassment. For a moment while they stared at each other, it was so silent, he imagined he could hear her thoughts.

Then she slugged him.

Though she had no strength at all and her awkward blow barely grazed him, he was so taken by surprise he nearly dropped her. While Casey stood there gawking, making no effort to help, Sawyer struggled to maintain his hold and his balance with a squirming woman in his arms.

Out of sheer self-preservation, he lowered her bare feet to the ground—then had to catch her again as she swayed and almost crumpled. She would have fallen if both he and Casey hadn't grabbed hold of some part of her, but she still made the feeble effort to shrug them both away.

"No!" she said in a rough, whispering croak, as if her panicked voice could do no better.

"Hey, now," Sawyer crooned, trying the tone he'd often heard his brother Jordan use when talking to a sick or frightened animal. "You're okay."

She tried to swing at him again, he ducked back, and she whirled in a clumsy circle, stopping when her small fist made contact with Casey's shoulder. Casey jumped a good foot, unhurt but startled, then rubbed his arm.

Enough was enough.

Sawyer wrapped his arms around her from behind, both supporting and restraining her. "Shh. It's okay," he said, over and over again. She appeared somewhat disoriented, possibly from the blow to her head. "Settle down now before you hurt yourself."

His words only prompted more struggles, but her movements were ineffectual.

"Lady," he whispered very softly, "you're terrorizing my son."

With a gasp, she glanced up at Casey, who looked young and very strong, maybe bursting with curiosity, but in no way terrorized.

Sawyer smiled, then continued in calm, even tones. "Listen to me now, okay? Your car landed in our lake and we fished you out. You were unconscious. It's probable you have a concussion, on top of whatever else ails you."

"Let me go."

Her body shook from head to toe, a mixture of shock and illness, Sawyer decided, feeling that her skin was definitely too hot. "If I let you go you'll fall flat on your face. That or try to hit my boy again."

If anything, she panicked more, shaking her head wildly. "No..."

After glaring at Sawyer, Casey held both arms out to his sides. "Hey, lady, I'm not hurt. I'm fine."

His neck turned red, but his voice was as calm and soothing as his father's. "Really. Dad just wants to help you."

"Who are you?"

She wasn't talking to Casey now. All her attention seemed to be on staying upright. Even with Sawyer's help, she was wobbly. He gently tightened his hold, keeping her close and hindering her futile movements.

"Sawyer Hudson, ma'am. I'm the man who owns this property. Me and my brothers. As I said, you landed in my lake. But I'm also a doctor and I'm going to help you." He waited for a name, for a reciprocal introduction, but none was forthcoming.

"Just...just let me go."

Slowly, still maintaining his careful hold on her, he turned them both until they faced the lake. "You see your car? It's not going anywhere, honey. Not without a tow truck and some major repairs."

She gasped, and her entire body went rigid. "You know my name."

He didn't understand her, but he understood shock. "Not yet, but I will soon. Now." He paused as her face washed clean of color and she pressed one hand to her mouth. Sawyer quickly lowered her to her knees, still supporting her from behind. "You going to be sick?"

"Oh, God."

"Now just take a few deep breaths. That's it." To Casey, he said, "Go get the water," and his son took off at a sprint, his long legs eating up the ground.

Sawyer turned back to the woman and continued in his soft, soothing tone. "You feel sick because of the blow to your head. It's all right." At least, he thought that was the cause. She also felt feverish, and that couldn't be attributed to a concussion. After a moment of watching her gulp down deep breaths, he asked, "Any better?"

She nodded. Her long fair hair hung nearly to the ground, hiding her face like a silky, tangled curtain. He

wrapped it around his hand and pulled it away so he could see her clearly. Her eyes were closed, her mouth pinched. Casey rushed up with the water bottle, and Sawyer held it to her lips. "Take a few sips. There you go. Real slow, now." He watched her struggling for control and wished for some way to lessen the nausea for her. "Let's get you out of this hot sun, okay? I can get you more comfortable in a jiffy."

"I need my car."

Didn't she remember crashing into the water? Sawyer frowned. "Let me take you to my house, get you dried off and give your belly a chance to settle. I'll have one of my brothers pull your car out and see about having it towed to the garage to be cleaned..."

"No!"

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