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**Tequila
Makes Her
Clothes Fall Off**

by Cara North

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By

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my grandmother, Mary E. Miller. I would like to thank my husband Chris, for understanding that writing is a career not a hobby. In addition to my husband, I would like to thank the following people for their encouraging words regarding this book; Diane Merlin, Laura Kitchell, and Nancy Naigle. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the cover artist Shirley and Pennie my editor.

Chapter 1

Hoochie mommas! Her girlfriends had left her at the slot machine and now she could not find a single one of them. They were probably having a three way in an elevator right now.

Bethany Dodson took one look around the bar and considered walking right back out. She tugged at the sweater-set and made her way to the bar. Bethany actually felt a little relieved she was alone. There was one thing she planned to do for herself this weekend and none of her so-called friends were going to be involved. If they had any clue, she would not be let out of their sight, much less dumped at the slot machines.

The only seat available was next to some long-legged cowboy, equipped with a cowboy hat and all. This really was not what she had in mind. But the only way to grab a guy and get married would be to get him drunk first. Bethany was not proud of this, but it seemed like the only way she would get what she needed. Her father had entirely too much influence back home. This could be her last shot at freedom.

“Do you mind if I sit here?” Bethany indicated the seat as she placed a hand on it. She would have to tiptoe to reach the damn thing. Why do they make bar stools so tall in the first place?

“Suit yourself.” He nodded and tipped his hat.

Bethany smoothed her hands along the back of her skirt to keep it in place, turned facing away from the bar stool, and began the process of easing up onto the seat. She tried to mount it like a lady, only to tip, sending her sideways into the cowboy.

“I’m so sorry.” Bethany realized she looked very unladylike as her arms flailed and grabbed onto his biceps for dear life. The last thing she needed was to fall on her ass. Making a fool of herself certainly would not get her anywhere.

“You wanna sit at the table?” He motioned with his head as his hands settled on her shoulders.

“I’m here alone.” Bethany thought about her statement and rephrased it. “I’m not here alone. I’m just at the bar alone.”

“Come on, now you’re not at the bar alone either.” The mysterious cowboy led her to the table.

“Manners. Wow! I thought those went out of style in the eighties.” Bethany fidgeted with her small Coach wristlet under the table. This was not the kind of guy she planned to con, but since he had made himself comfortable in the seat across from her, she really had no choice.

“And I thought ladies only existed in the South. You don’t have a southern accent.” He winked. “What brings you to Vegas?”

“Bachelorette party, well weekend is more like it. My uh, friend Katie, yeah, Katie is getting married next week and all of us came out here to send her off. My friends seem to think we’re on spring break again.” Bethany hoped she did not sound as nervous as she felt.

“So they’re all off gallivanting and you’re here by your lonesome?” He motioned for a waitress and sighed. “Well I’m celebrating the end of a bad relationship, an old friend turned out to be someone I couldn’t trust at all.”

Before she could say anything, the waitress approached. She propped her hip on the table and talked to him. “Hey cutie, what’ll it be?”

Bethany did not know what made her bristle at the waitress flirting. Maybe it was because she was sitting right there, and for all the busty blonde knew, she was his girlfriend. Maybe it was because she thought his whiskey brown eyes were the most seductive eyes she had ever seen. Or maybe it was because all her life she had been labeled goodie-two-shoes and was fed up with it.

“Tequila.” Bethany smacked the table, getting the waitress’ attention, and nodded. “We’re celebrating here.”

The waitress eyed her and then nodded.

“What’s your name anyways?” Bethany asked.

“Jack.” He smiled. “And you are?”

“Bethany, Bethany Dodson from Louisville, Kentucky.” Bethany accepted the shot the waitress sat on the table. “Bring a bottle of Patron.”

She lifted her shot to Jack and smiled. "To new friends, and past lovers."

"Here, here." He toasted and swallowed his shot.

The waitress returned with the bottle and Bethany poured another.

"So you plan on getting wasted?" Jack asked as he watched her fill his shot glass as well.

"You got a problem with that, Cowboy?" Bethany decided the moment they sat down, the brochures were right all along. *What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.* And she intended to make something happen tonight. Jack was not what she had pictured. He was everything she knew she could never have. Tall, dark and handsome. She did not usually go for medium, plump, and sheltered. However, this was a desperate time and called for desperate measures.

"No ma'am. Just wanted to know your intent." He lifted his glass and they swallowed another shot.

"My intent is to have a good time. I have to tell you, I haven't had a good time outside a shopping mall in forever." Bethany poured another round. "You know, you have the sexiest eyes. I mean, I don't normally go for the rough, rugged, tall type. But you have very nice eyes."

Bethany took another hit of liquid courage.

"Well thanks. I think." He swallowed the next shot. "And so you know, I don't normally go for the brunette, short..."

"Don't you dare say fat." Bethany turned up her lip in a snarl.

"Straight laced." Jack tipped his hat. "I would never call a lady fat especially one who isn't. I would call her all buttoned down and closed up though."

Bethany gasped as he winked. He thought she was a prude! "I'll have you know this is a cashmere sweater-set, and this skirt is from the new Ann Taylor collection. These shoes alone cost two hundred dollars."

"So you're a gold digger?" He sat the shot glass down and looked around as if he were looking for an exit.

"Did you not hear who I am? I'm Bethany Dodson. My daddy was in Time magazine as one of the richest men in the U.S." She took another shot. Since she could drink her friends under the table in college, it was not much of a buzz but she

could feel it. Bethany knew she should stop but if she did, she would not have the nerve to seduce a cowboy. "I don't need your money. I just want to have a nice time."

"I see." Jack settled down and smiled.

"So here's to new beginnings, and forgetting bad assumptions."

"One more and I'll lead you around the dance floor, what do you say?" he asked.

"You're on, Cowboy." Bethany chucked back the shot and did not bother with the lime anymore. She motioned for the waitress and handed her a Visa. Jack was still pulling his wallet out when the waitress walked off. "You gotta be quick on the draw there, Cowboy."

"I see that, but don't worry. You'll appreciate my tendency to linger later on tonight." Jack reached a hand across the table and grasped hers.

"I'll count on it." Bethany had a feeling he was not kidding and her big talk might get her into trouble. The tall cowboy led her out to the dance floor. She had not danced in ages. His butt looked divine in the well-fitted Levi's he wore. A refreshing sight compared to the khaki's and business suits she had grown accustomed to seeing men in. She followed his ass right out to the center of the floor and caught an eyeful when he turned to face her, leaving her then staring at his crotch.

Jack cleared his throat.

Bethany snapped her head up and looked at him. She could feel the heat creep up her neck and into her cheeks. He was smiling again. Two well placed dimples, one on each cheek, popped out each time he flashed his winning smile. Bethany inhaled the spicy scent of a light aftershave as he pulled her close. One hand slid to the small of her back and the other held on to her right hand. Her thighs straddled one of his and she realized he was tall but not uncomfortably tall. His hand, rough and calloused, spoke of hard labor. It was another contrast to the hands of her father, and her ex-fiancé's, men who probably got a manicure as often as she did. "How tall are you?"

"Six-foot even." Jack looked down at her and took an estimated guess. "You're what five six, five seven?"

“Five-foot five inches, the heels give me an inch or two I don’t normally have.” Bethany realized they were not moving around anywhere. They were just swaying back and forth. Probably the only reason she was still standing as the tequila began to have its desired effect. Her body warmed and her smile came easier. She did not feel like she was drunk, but she definitely felt different. “What’s this song about?”

“Well, it’s about a guy who’s doing something right. He doesn’t know what it is, but his woman likes it.” Jack placed her right hand on his chest. Both of his hands then moved to her back, one pressed between her shoulder blades, the other in the small of her back. Her hands moved to his back, she hugged him closer, her cheek pressed against his chest and her hips moved against his as they swayed, making only the tiniest steps. She apparently had an affect on him. His erection pressed against his jeans and her abdomen.

After what seemed like hours, he finally spoke. “You smell good.”

“So do you.” Bethany whispered. Somewhere between the tequila, the aftershave, and the heat of his body lined up against hers, she completely lost her mind. This was not the guy she was supposed to be seducing, hell he was out of her league, but apparently, he did not know that, so she would definitely take advantage.

“The way you’re rolling your hips is making me crazy.” He admitted.

“I think I went crazy three minutes ago.” Bethany made a slight laugh. There was something about him, he was a stranger for crying out loud, but she found a sense of peace glowing inside the longer they danced. “So, do you have a room here?”

“Yes.” Jack inhaled the sweet scent of her hair again. “Do you want to go?”

“I think so, yes.” Bethany looked up into those whiskey brown eyes and licked her lips.

Jack must have taken her tongue wetting her dry lips as a clear invitation because he bent down to kiss her. She kissed him as if she had not been kissed in ages, as if she could live the rest of her life off this kiss. Her tongue slipped past his lips and explored his mouth. He captured it, sucked on it until she moaned while

rolling her hips against him, causing her abdomen to press harder into his erection. No one had ever sucked on her tongue before. No one had ever kissed her like this.

He pulled back and gasped for air. "Let's go woman before I can't stop, and take you right here."

"Maybe in the elevator then?" Bethany licked her lips tasting his kisses and enjoyed his sense of shock. Of course, she looked all buttoned down and straight laced. She had been trained to act proper all her life. But she was not going to be proper tonight. Jack did not know her from Eve. She would never see him again after tonight and if she could get him a little drunk maybe she could even get him to marry her, but having sex would do for now. If his kisses told her anything, they told her he was the right man to initiate her into a new life!

Jack almost pulled her arm out of its socket he walked so fast to get out of there. She trotted behind him, smiling at the fact that she, little Miss Goodie Two Shoes, had this hottie in such a frenzy he could not wait to get her naked. Of course, she could not wait either. She had been waiting thirty years to get naked. However, Jack did not need to know that.

Once they left the bar, he headed towards the lobby. Bethany prayed none of her friends decided to come back looking for her. She told them she would turn in after she finished with the slot machines. If they saw her now they would be attacking Jack and taking her to the hospital for an evaluation. In all their years, she had never been the wild one. Not like she could be. Her daddy's reputation was always at stake.

Every boy who came near her was warned he would live in poverty the rest of his life if he even dared touch her. Then her daddy chose the man he wanted her to marry. She gave Douglas a chance, but he was just like her father. He only wanted a trophy wife, and Bethany had been a trophy child too long to even think about spending the rest of her life in another man's shadow.

Jack did not even blink when she told him her name and then affirmed who her daddy was. Maybe he did not really know. On the other hand, maybe he did not care. Either way, those were two bonuses for her cause. This weekend she was going to lose her virginity and get married, to anyone other than Douglas!

Once they stood in front of the large gold elevator doors, Bethany had a moment to look at them. She held back a giggle.

Here he was; tall, muscular and enough eye-candy, women who did not realize she could see their reflections were ogling him, too. And there she was beside him, probably weighing in around the same number, just compacted in a smaller frame, and definitely not muscle. She wondered what color his hair was since he still had his hat on. His hand held hers as he watched with impatience the number above the elevator door as it made a decent to their floor. His thumb brushed across her knuckles and her nipples pebbled against the sweater-set. She could see the difference in her reflection.

Focusing on him, she enjoyed his long neck and Adam's apple, bobbing as he swallowed, and then he looked at her, not directly, but in the reflection.

"You are eating me up with those eyes." Jack smiled. Bethany blushed and he tugged her closer to his side. Leaning over he whispered, "Will you eat me up with those sexy lips of yours?"

Now it was her turn to swallow. A wave of heat rolled through her and moisture surged onto her panties.

"Yes." She squeaked out.

"Good." He said as the elevator dinged.

The doors opened and they stepped on. Jack hit the close door button before anyone else could get on with them. He punched the 22nd floor and then turned to Bethany.

With a strong sense of urgency, Jack placed his hands on her ass, lifting her as he pushed her back to the elevator wall. His mouth covered hers and his tongue dueled. She gripped his shoulders and moaned as his erection nuzzled against her aching sex through their clothes.

"This isn't going to work." He pulled back, looked at her eyes then kissed her again.

"What's not going to work?" She hated how small and desperate her voice sounded but it was a little late for him to get noble. He leaned in kissed her again, flexed each finger in turn on her ass and then sighed.

“I only have one condom. We’ll have to get more.”

“Oh.” Bethany smiled. She opened her mouth to speak but the elevator stopped and the doors opened. They were both startled and a little embarrassed as he gently released her back to her feet.

“Well you got the right floor buddy.” A man entered with a woman smiling happily on his arm. “Go on. They’re only here another hour, or you’ll have to go find a place out in town.”

Jack tried to straighten himself out. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Go on, see for yourself.” The guy winked.

Jack stepped out of the elevator with her right behind him. As he reached back to hold her hand, she grabbed his arm and moved closer. She could feel her heart thumping in her chest; even hear it in her ears, as they faced the Floating Chapel.

“Welcome, two forms of ID and a room number are all you need folks. Come right on in.” A tall man, with a decent comb over, dressed in a tuxedo, bowed and directed them toward the room straight ahead. A flowing silk banner hung over the entrance announcing the Floating Chapel.

“This can’t be real.” Jack shook his head and looked at her. She was biting her lower lip, hoping he did not see the gleam in her eye. This was perfect. Absolutely perfect!

“Then what’s the harm in it?” Bethany took two steps forward then stalled, as Jack did not move. She did not know him from Adam, but she knew in general, men did not like to be challenged. “Chicken?”

“Alright, little woman. You want to get married, let’s go do it.” *It worked.* Jack headed through the doors with a sense of purpose.

Bethany almost stumbled as he took long strides through the entrance tugging her along behind him. A heavysset woman eyed them, smiled and then called out, “Last one.”

Chapter 2

“I do.” Bethany said with an air of certainty.

Jack listened as the man pronounced them man and wife. For a sham, he felt pretty touched by it all. He did not want to feel moved by the ceremony it just sorta happened. One minute he was sitting at the bar trying to figure out how to convince a woman to marry him, the next he was standing here with this outrageous brunette, saying I do. He knew exactly who her daddy was. That was an unexpected bonus. It guaranteed she would not want or need his money. All he had to do now was convince her to come to Montana for three months. He did not want to lie to her. But he would if he had to.

“You may kiss the bride.” The minister said.

Jack looked into her soft green eyes. She really was a pretty little thing, except she was not exactly little. Bethany was about the most voluptuous woman he knew. His tastes tended toward the tall, blonde, leggy type. However, as soon as he held her on the dance floor, something clicked and he had to have her. He leaned over and kissed her with a tenderness he did not know he possessed.

And it lingered. She had the softest lips he had ever kissed, and he had kissed a lot of lips.

The minister cleared his throat and they abruptly parted.

“If you’ll step into the next room Jo-Lee will give you the papers.” He pulled his collar and cracked his neck. “I’m beat folks. One hundred of these a night is a lot of ceremony.”

Jack blinked twice at the man then followed Bethany’s lead into the next room. The same heavysset woman was behind the makeshift counter and she handed over their ID’s. Jack signed a paper billing the whole thing to his room.

“Champagne and strawberries should be there when you get there. Congratulations.” Jo-Lee said with a smile.

“Did you hear that? Champagne and strawberries, too bad it’s not a box of condoms.” Bethany teased.

“Here.” Jo-lee sat a large box of condoms on the counter. “Must be your first time.”

Jack looked at Bethany who stared in shock.

“Thanks.” Jack grabbed the box and nodded. “Come on wife.”

“Wife?” Bethany stopped short.

“Ink’s not even dry on the paper and already we’re in a domestic spat.” He leaned close to her ear and whispered. As Bethany sank against him, he nipped her earlobe. The woman had no idea what effect she was having on him. “Come on sweetheart, I was just teasing. I won’t call you wife.”

“But I am your wife.” She spoke softly. “And I want to be teased, just not like that.”

He straightened, looked down at her, those green eyes danced with a need that mirrored his own lust. He swept his hat in a grand gesture and extended the arm with the box of condoms. “Lead the way, my lady.”

“Come on, Cowboy.” Bethany grabbed the box of condoms and headed to the elevator. She examined the box closely as they stepped in.

“I know how to use them, trust me.” Jack snatched the box back as the elevator doors closed. She took offense he could tell. Her body language spoke volumes. Her cute button nose tilted up in the air, her shoulders pulled back, and her head lifted high. “I didn’t mean to insult you.”

“You didn’t.” She said too quickly.

“You have done this before right?” He caught a sudden chill up his spine and turned the box of condoms to read the back. It gave directions for how to use them, as he suspected. What he did not suspect was that she did not already know how. “Right?”

Bethany shrugged as a response. “A lady never tells.”

“Come here.” Jack reached for her and pulled her firmly against him. Looking down at her, he smiled a full smile. Bethany was soft, softer than any woman he had held before. Her heavy breasts teased at his chest and actually had give to

them when he held her tight. They were hers all right, and he could not wait to see them in the flesh. “Tell me what you like and don’t like so I can be sure and get it right.”

“I like it all.” Bethany smiled right back. “What do you like?”

“I like you.” He answered and swallowed hard. He did like her, and he liked her last admission best. Women had the most fickle ways about them when it came to sex. Jack enjoyed a variety of positions and to hear she did too, just shifted him into overdrive.

“Do you like me enough to make love to me until I pass out from the unyielding power of it all?” The little temptress stroked a hand over his heart.

“Do you like me enough not to make me pass out before we get to the room?” He laughed. “Jesus. You’re a firecracker, Mrs. Bethany Johnson.”

“You lit the fuse.” Bethany tiptoed up to kiss him. Using his chest for leverage, she held on and leaned in.

He had to keep his cool. Bethany was testing his control and winning. He wanted to throw her up against the elevator wall again, only this time he wanted to release his dick and drive it into her until he heard her calling his name. Yes, he wanted to hear her calling out to him. Begging him for more as he made her scream out wave after wave of orgasm. Sex was definitely the key to keeping her around long enough to get his inheritance. She seemed to be an experienced woman who had no problem asking for what she wanted.

Hell, at this point, she asked to come to the room, she dared him to marry her, and now she was kissing him in a manner, which communicated everything she needed. If he were a gambling man, he would swear he just hit the jackpot!

Room 2212 was actually a suite with a huge bed and a great space. It reminded her of the room in *Pretty Woman* only smaller.

Here she was in a hotel with a man she did not really know, about to have sex with him, but she was not a hooker, and he was not a millionaire.

“Champagne and strawberries, just like they said.” She picked up a chocolate covered berry from the silver tray and bit into it.

He grabbed the hand the berry was in and directed the next bite to his mouth. “Sweet,” he said. “But I bet you taste even better.”

She sucked in a breath as his hands moved to the buttons on her sweater and undid them one by one. Of course, in her mind, things would move slower, but her body kept urging her forward, faster. Jack was not interested in strawberries; he was interested in getting right down to business. She let out a shaky breath.

“Relax.” He whispered then kissed her neck. “I’ll be gentle.”

Her heart was racing like a horse in the Kentucky Derby and he wanted her to relax? Bethany tried to exhale slowly but it came out shaky, so she just blew out a short quick breath before sucking in the next. She tried to pull her abs tight as his hands undid the last buttons. She had not been self-conscious about her weight before, but then again she had not been naked in front of a man either.

Once he undid the last button, Jack pulled the soft sweater slowly down her arms and tossed it in a nearby chair. His hands grabbed her forearms, moved them high above her head, as he slid his callused hands over her smooth flesh and down her sides before yanking the top over her head.

She gasped and immediately covered her stomach pushing her breasts together in the process. The cool air chilled her skin and Jack’s warmth heated her back.

“Lord have mercy.” Jack said in a deep hungry voice while he dipped a finger between her cleavage. “Those are beautiful.”

His erection now nuzzled the back of her ass and Bethany tried to remember she was an experienced woman in his eyes and experienced women did not hide their bodies, no matter what size they were. *Did they?*

Her hands moved from her stomach to his thighs. She hoped he could not feel them trembling with nerves. If he did, maybe he would think she was trembling with need. He rocked into her backside again and traced the cup of her bra up to the shoulder straps then pulled at them. Yes, she decided as she noticed his fingers

tremble as they tugged on the straps. Her nervousness would be hidden by the overwhelming need. "You're making me move faster than I wanted to sweetheart."

"How so?" Bethany smiled at the fact she had been able to make him move with any urgency, especially in this arena where she was often over looked. The cool air seemed to disappear as her body warmed to his touch. Resting her head against his shoulder, she was enjoying his fingers along her cleavage. The feel of his muscular thighs through his jeans was definitely a treat. Her entire body seemed ready to submit to his touches. Her lungs inhaled his scent, her ears tuned to his breathing.

"I want to take this bra off, rip that skirt and plunge myself so far inside you, you won't know where I end and you begin." Jack whispered in her ear then sucked on the lobe. Bethany was glad she had forgone the earrings. The man would have swallowed one by now.

"So then do it." In a bold move, she slid her hands up and cupped his erection through his jeans. She was shocked at how big he actually was. He must not have been fully hard before because he was impressively so now. Certainly, he was much bigger than the small vibrator she had tried out.

Jack struggled with the small button on the skirt. He cursed and stepped back. "Get that thing off before I loose all decency and tear you out of it."

She easily unzipped the skirt and let it fall past her shapely hips to the floor. She took a deep breath for courage, and turned to face him. He had already removed his shirt, and was pulling down his jeans. Her mouth hung open at the sight of his naked form.

"Wow," she cleared her throat. "You must work out a lot."

Smiling he stepped toward her. His broad tan shoulders and washboard abs moved and rippled with each step. His legs were long, tan and lean. A light dusting of hair covered his chest and narrowed down his stomach leading to the thicker patch of hair surrounding what could only be the biggest erection she had ever seen. Jack was porn star quality, and film was the best reference she had.

"You still have clothes on." He said in a husky voice. His lids seemed heavy and his chest flushed with color.

Bethany had completely forgotten about her own body at the sight of his. He reached around her back and unsnapped the bra. Without the support, her breasts dropped a little and she could breathe easier. He went straight to his knee and hooked his thumbs in her white cotton panties with little yellow ducks on them. Immediately she felt mortified, but when she put them on this morning, she thought they were cute. Now she felt childish.

“Cute duckies.” Jack stripped the panties down her legs and left them at her ankles. He started to get up but instead pressed his nose into her warm inviting sex for a long inhale. The neatly groomed triangle of curls tickled his nose. The scent of her arousal stirred on the air. One lick was all he got. Her legs began to quiver. She needed him inside her as much as she needed her next breath. “How do you want it?”

Unable to speak she opened and shut her mouth without saying anything.

“Here’s fine with me, too.” Jack snatched the box of condoms off the tray next to the strawberries, pulled one out, and rolled it on. All the while, he watched her extreme fascination at the process; it was as if he understood how mesmerized she was by his cock. “I love the way you look at my cock, Bethany.”

“How do I look at it?” She tore her eyes away from his erection to look at his face again. Jack moved close and hugged her. Slowly he began urging her to the floor.

“Like it’s the only one you’ve ever seen. Like you could spend hours, maybe even days exploring it. Hell, like it’s amazing.” He chuckled. After a deep breath, he grew more serious. “Like you want me.”

“I do want you.” Bethany lost the last word to his lips. He began kissing her slow and deep. Making love to her mouth and relaxing her entire body to his touch. His hand gently urged her legs apart and then his fingers began exploring her. The most she had done with Douglas was kiss and a little over the clothes petting. The feel of Jacks fingers on her naked skin, inside her most private place was overwhelming. So many thoughts raced through her mind, but her body was reacting to his touch, and it wanted more.

“You really do. You’re already wet and warm and ready.” Jack parted the lips to her sex and settled between her legs.

Bethany felt the broad head of his cock at her opening. How he was going to get it in was a mystery. Yes, she wanted him and yes, she had been gushing since the dance floor. Her panties were soaked and she knew her sex was still weeping for him. Nevertheless, he was bigger than she expected and she fought to hide her fear.

Jack had started kissing her again. Slowly his tongue pressed in and then his cock made the same motion to her virginal flesh. Bethany gripped his back and took a deep breath.

Pulling back for air he ground out, “Damn you’re tight.”

“Jack.” Bethany pleaded. She did not want him looking at her right now. He must have taken her plea for impatience because he pushed himself all the way in with one thrust. His knees gave out. She heard them hit the carpet.

“Bethany?” He struggled for breath. He knew it the instant he felt it, but there was nothing he could do by then.

She just hoped he was not mad that she did not tell him. She fully intended to deny it anyways. Fighting tears, she forced a smile and kissed his neck as she adjusted around his rod inside her. It hurt, for like a second. With each moment after, it felt better. “Mmm?”

“You are a…”

“Jack you’re supposed to be making me writhe in passion, not asking me silly questions.” She gripped him tight and lifted her hips.

“Yes ma’am.” Jack fought the constricting feeling in his chest. A virgin. Shit! He had never fucked a virgin before. If he had known, he would have taken his time, made it special for her. Instead he had rammed in thinking he would get a moan of pleasure not a maidenhead.

“Jack?” Bethany prompted.

It was not what he had expected, she knew this much, but he was to far gone to turn back now. He began making love to her.

She decided he definitely was not fucking her. Not with the slow careful strokes he made, though she knew he wanted to go faster, harder. His arms shook. His breath was labored, and sweat transferred from his forehead to her neck and cheek. He was enjoying it, even if it was torture.

So was she. In fact, she was really enjoying it. She wanted more.

“Faster, Jack. Harder.” Bethany lifted against him driving him deep. She gasped at the same time he did.

“I don’t want to hurt you.” He rasped.

“You’re not hurting me. You’re killing me.” Bethany gripped him tight and wrapped her legs around his hips. She could feel his firm butt on her left calf. “Please Jack.”

He did not answer her. Instead, he made a low and deep rumbling noise then picked up the pace. Bethany reveled in the sheer force of him. The push and drag of his cock against her tender flesh had her aching for something just out of reach. An unfamiliar feeling began to tighten in her womb. She had tried masturbation before, attempted to use a vibrator once, and though she enjoyed herself, she never felt like this. She had never let herself go completely.

“Jack!” Bethany squeezed her thighs tight against his hips.

“Oh yeah, that’s it baby, let it come Bethany. Come for me.” Jack closed his eyes and maintained his position.

Her tight walls clenched even tighter as they prepared for her release. She said his name again as he felt her body shudder beneath him. He opened his eyes and watched her arch against him, her teeth bit into her bottom lip and her eyebrows made a crease between them as they tried to draw together. Her delicate neck stretched and the blue vein throbbed with her wild pulse.

“You’re so beautiful when you come.” He kissed her lips as the pulses around his cock slowed and her head tilted back toward him.

“Look at me.” Jack swallowed. “I’m going to come, Bethany. Tell me you want me.”

She opened her eyes, looked into the most sincere expression and wondered who want Jack? “I want you Jack. I want you to come for me.”

And just that easy he plunged forward and remained there. Steadily he pushed against her, going as deep as possible, with only small tremors and jerks counting for movement. He did not close his eyes at all. His gaze remained locked on hers the entire time. She noted his clenched jaw and the slight motion on the left side of it.

“You look pretty damn good yourself.” Bethany admonished.

Jack smiled and collapsed on top of her. He could never have done that with other women. He would have crushed them. Bethany on the other hand just adjusted her legs and stroked his back with one hand, before running the other hand through his sweat soaked hair. He had never made love to a woman before, but if he could guess at it, certainly what they just did qualified.

He propped up on one elbow and stared down at her. Her soft green eyes twinkled with fulfillment and humor. “Why didn’t you tell me you were a virgin?”

“What makes you think I was?” Bethany continued to lazily stroke his head.

“You had a maidenhead. There’s probably blood between us right now.” He watched her easy smile fade then her face screwed up in defiance.

“What the hell is a maidenhead?”

“You know. The thin tissue in a woman, it breaks when she loses her virginity.” He soothed her eyebrow by stroking it. Bethany made the most interesting faces.

“I’m sure I don’t have one.” She stopped playing with his hair. Her relaxed eyebrow puckered back up with her serious expression. Her face bushed. “And why do you call it that?”

“That’s what it was called in the book I read.” He shrugged then nodded. “You had one, trust me.”

“What book did you read? No doctor calls it a maidenhead, and I am sure I did not have one!” She stopped stroking him completely and pulled both arms to cross them over her breasts between them.

“My momma’s romance novel, when I was thirteen. She left it out and I was glad she did. She looked for it for about a week but it took me a while to read it since I had to sneak and hide to do it.” He pulled back and then pulled out. Looking

down between them he nodded. “And you were a virgin Bethany. Proofs right there.”

Chapter 3

Jack landed on his back with a thump as she scrambled off the floor. She ran to the bathroom and slammed the door. By the time he got there, the door was locked. She turned on the shower and paced. She was embarrassed, but he was out there and needed to clean up, too.

“Bethany, sweetheart, unlock the door. I didn’t mean to upset you honey, I just don’t understand why you didn’t tell me is all.” Jack tried the knob. “Bethany, I would really like to get in there, too.”

“Go. Away.” She could hear him twisting on the doorknob. Her gut told her to unlock it, but her pride told her she had just made a huge mistake. Her plan to get married and stay married long enough to get a new identity, a new social security card and drivers license with a new last name on it, was backfiring.

“Humm. Not happening. Now open the door and let’s talk about this.” Jack tapped on the door then tried the knob.

“This is so embarrassing. I thought for sure this wouldn’t happen to me.” She sobbed. Everything was closing in. She was naked in a bathroom and a naked man was on the other side of the door. Not just any naked man, her husband!

“What sweetheart, open the door, tell me what wouldn’t happen.” He waited a beat. “You’re making me nervous, honey, open the door.”

She padded back and forth across the bathroom floor. It was not unnatural but it made the fact she was a virgin an irrefutable fact. Now he would definitely want a divorce as soon as possible. She could not leave him out there. Certainly not in his current condition! And she was making *him* nervous?

Ha! She was the one who just lost her virginity! She should be the one who was nervous. She rolled her shoulders back, took a deep breath and decided to face this with the same false arrogance she faced all challenges. She unlocked the door slowly so he would not know right away, then she got into the shower.

Jack heard her sniffing by the door. She was crying. What the hell had he done? He heard her snuffle again but farther away. He tried the knob one more time. The knob turned easily. He stepped into the room filling with steam. Bethany was in the shower, her voluptuous body silhouetted through the glass door. He disposed of the spent condom and stepped in behind her.

Double brass showerheads let warm water beat down on them from both sides of the shower. Neither attempted conversation. They both took a minute to let the water cleanse them, and the situation. Jack thought about the moment he saw her walk in the bar. She had fidgeted with her little purse, straightened her blouse by pulling it away from her breasts then smoothing it down. The skirt fell below her knees and concealed what he now knew was a very nice ass and set of legs.

For whatever reason, Bethany did not want him to know she was a virgin. He decided to let the issue drop. It was only important to him because she was the first virgin he had ever slept with. His taste in women prior to Bethany tended toward the wild side.

He had definitely never been where no man had gone before. Until now, and somewhere deep inside his instincts took over, made him want to protect her. A sense of responsibility struck him and he considered that he just might be an honorable man. Jack turned to face her and realized she was still sniffing. Her back shook as she tried to regain her composure.

He started toward her.

She turned towards him. She spoke slow and deliberate, trying to appear calm and composed. "You know I used a vibrator, I did. Several times actually. Of course I wasn't anywhere near as big and thick as..." She gulped, "you. Anyway, I didn't want to be a thirty year old virgin. But with a father like mine, no guy stood a chance at getting near my cherry."

She wiped her eyes and took another deep breath, she had completely regained control. "I guess I didn't put it in far enough."

Jack almost choked at her revelation. For a woman who was in a tantrum over a blood spot a moment ago, she was speaking her mind without any problems now and giving him details about her practice with electronics. *Holy Shit!*

“So if you don’t want to...”

“Bethany. I want to.” Jack stroked a finger down her arm, chasing the water as it rolled over her skin. She was brazen and matter of fact as she spoke. It was like she had this wall up and he was not allowed to see past it. Like being vulnerable was a bad thing. Then he realized how vulnerable he was and pulled up his own wall. “Now, if you’re over this crying spell I can get back to the challenge you issued.”

She smirked and looked up at him.

“You’re not drunk.” She said as if she just realized it.

“Neither are you.” He shrugged.

“But, but...”

“Do you want to tell me why you were so quick to marry me or should I go first?” He lifted off the shower wall where he was leaning and turned the water off. “Because I can explain myself in the morning. I’d much rather make you pass out from passion tonight.”

“I said unyielding power, not passion. Passion indicates feelings you can’t possibly have for me.” She opened the shower door and started out of it.

He pulled her up short by grabbing her arms. He turned her to face him and covered her mouth with his. He nipped her top lip and then licked it. He teased at her tongue until she was flush against his body, holding on to his biceps and ready to submit to him completely. Then he pulled back.

“Don’t tell me what I feel. That, little lady is passion.” Jack nodded and with a smirk of triumph, grabbed his towel and headed for the door.

Bethany pulled the towel off the bar and dried herself in the bathroom. She decided she had never met a man like Jack Johnson in her life. He was either the most intriguing man or he was going to turn out to be some sick-o serial killer. Wouldn’t it be her luck?

He had married her of his own free will, not an alcohol induced haze, though the buzz must have helped them both take the chance. He had a reason for it. She knew now. The question was; did she want to know tonight, or in the morning?

As she walked into the great room and looked across to the bed where Jack lay, butt naked and hard, she decided to wait. She only wanted to know one thing tonight.

“Bout’ time.” He drawled.

“I had to dry off.” She climbed into bed next to him and lay on her back, just as he was. It was the strangest feeling, crawling into a bed naked with a man there waiting. It felt good. She felt empowered. His erection let her know without words that she had something he wanted, her.

“What are you doing?” He asked and looked over to her.

“I don’t know. What are you doing?” She met his challenging stare.

“Waiting on you to touch me.” Jack licked his lips.

“Oh.” She turned to her side and propped up on an elbow. “I really don’t have a lot of practice, I mean I’ve had some, and not all of it self induced, I’ve actually kissed other guys...”

“I don’t want to know what you have or have not done with other guys.” Jack cut in. “I want to know what you want or don’t want to do with this guy.”

“I thought you were supposed to make me pass out from passion.” She challenged.

“Sweetheart I will tend to your needs, don’t you worry about that. I just thought you might want to explore my body a little bit.” He said arrogantly.

“Nope. I’d really rather you just do what you said you could do.” Bethany gulped. She wanted to explore him all right but she was not stupid enough to admit it to him. He would use any weakness against her for the rest of her life if she said yes now. She blinked and shook her head. How did thoughts of forever enter her mind at a time like this?

“Alright, you don’t have to shake your head. I can hear.” Jack stroked a finger down her side, watched her skin tighten into little goose bumps. “But you will need to touch me, too.”

“If I must.” She shrugged.

Jack stopped. He could see her biting her cheek trying not to smile. The little lady was trying to play games with him. She really was cute though, her puffy eyes

and pink nose. He just wanted to pull her in tight and assure her everything would be fine. Whatever happened from this point on, it was the two of them making the decisions and he was not in any hurry to get divorced.

Hell after a few hours with Bethany, he kind of liked the idea of being married. He really liked the idea of being her first lover. The urge to take her in every way known to man was a live thing.

“You must.” He said as he leaned into her lips, taking them with his own. Bethany was welcoming and hot. She kissed with an urgency her words denied. Pulling her against him, aligning her sex with his, Jack realized he could be satisfied just kissing her for hours. Holding her like this. It was strange and comforting all at the same time. But little Miss Bethany, was not in the mood to be slowly seduced. She wanted to be devoured.

The tenderness of his kiss turned into something more primal, biting. He used his teeth, he pushed his tongue in farther, and he grabbed her ass.

Bethany came up for air, gasping as though she was emerging from the ocean. Jack did not give her time to catch her breath, he simply rolled her to her back and made his way down her neck, over her collarbone, and under her left breast, before he finally latched on to the nipple crying out on top. While he teased and sucked the left nipple, his fingers tugged and tweaked the right.

They could both feel the wetness between her legs, her silent plea to urge things faster. She felt the tug on her womb from the tugs on her breasts. His tongue danced and played keeping the nipples erect and wet, while his fingers took turns stroking and rolling them.

“Jack, Jack.” Bethany tried to lift her hips enough to get him inside her, but he shifted and placed a muscular thigh against her crotch instead. Like an uncontrollable force, she rubbed against it. Seeking any release possible. The need to feel an orgasm again was a driving force. Like an addict, she was hooked.

“What is it, sweetheart?” Jack whispered in her ear. He kissed the shell, licked the lobe, and then nipped it gently.

He knew she was anxious. She had been bucking against him for several minutes. But he was not going to let her off the hook. She wanted to be so worked

up she might pass out from the pleasure of it all. He took it as a personal challenge. Though she probably would not pass out, she sure would not be up for round three when he was done. At least not till morning.

“I want you inside me Jack.” Bethany confided.

“Soon.” He lied. He went back to her nipples. Bethany moaned as if she was being tortured. He laughed a low laugh and had mercy on her.

He moved farther south.

She had defiantly met her match. She issued a challenge and Jack rose to the task. She called him a chicken, he married her. She told him to make her pass out with sex, and he was well on his way to doing just that.

His fingers caressed the inside of the sole on her left foot. He was sitting back on his heels, her foot in his hand, his erection looking ready for battle, and his face looking entirely too mischievous. He brought the foot to his lips and kissed the arch of her sole. She tried to wiggle her foot away but he simply grabbed her leg with his other hand and continued to focus on her foot.

She tried not to giggle, but it tickled.

Then he did something she had no idea would feel so good.

He closed warm wet lips around her big toe, and sucked.

He had never had the urge to suck a woman’s toes, but he wanted to explore every inch of her in the most carnal ways.

Her light moan encouraged him to do the same to her other foot. Once she crossed her big toe over the one next to it, he nipped at it and started toward her ankles. His hands or lips touched every inch of skin between her toes and her thighs. When he rolled her over, she seemed so startled he had to laugh.

“Lay back down.” Jack instructed and kissed the small of her back.

“Shouldn’t I be on my back for this?” She looked over her shoulder at him. God he looked good enough to eat. And he had been eating her body up for so long now if he did not get to the actual sex she would pass out before it happened. Who knew a knee was an erogenous zone? Jack apparently.

“Trust me.” Jack licked a line up her back to her neck. He placed a gentle love bite there, marking her. Bethany yielded and lay back down.

His hands traced the perimeter of her ass then his finger traced down the center of her cheeks and followed the trail to her throbbing vulva. When he inserted one finger, she could not believe the relief it brought to her aching sex. This must be how a cat in heat felt. Why it would rub against anything to get relief. She gripped and released the pillow by her head. Trying not to let him know how much she was enjoying it. She did not want to give him the impression he had any power over her.

His lips followed and his tongue traced the same trail over her ass and then met his finger. "Lift up on your knees, sweetheart."

Bethany struggled to her knees. She was sure she trembled on the outside as much as she felt it on the inside.

He did not seem to pay any attention to the growing urgency she felt. He leisurely stroked and licked her labia. Occasionally putting a finger inside, then two and as she finally started to feel the tension tighten he would pull them out and move away from her clit. The need, the urgency, was making her feel violent.

"Jack, damn it!" Bethany collapsed back onto the pillow. Each time he built her up, she rose onto her elbows and moved against his fingers and tongue. Then he would withdraw and nip at her butt cheeks or thighs until she calmed down.

"Well, well. You seem a little upset." Jack smiled and pressed his fingers back into her aching pussy. He could have made her come several times by now, but she was holding back and he did not want her to.

"Jack I swear if you... Oh, oh my..."

Jack pressed her clitoris in a sweet circular motion and wiped all the anger out of her tone with ease. "If I do not what, sweetheart, tell me?"

"Juh, Jah, Jo, oh please...don't stop...Oh God don't stop!" Bethany could not hold back any longer. She had to come. She had to feel the sweet release he had built and torn down over and over for the past hour. It was not optional. It was necessary.

As the wave hit her, she moved without restraint against his hand. Jack loved it. She was finally free with him. He had every intentions of teaching her just how good it could be if she would give him the chance. He bit his lower lip as she yelled out her release. His own orgasm beckoned to be set free.

Without thinking, without warning, he pulled up behind her and sheathed his starving cock with her drenched pussy.

She cried out and collapsed on a moan. He continued to pump into her for three more strokes and then spent when her walls clenched down on him and her body shook with another release. Collapsing on her back, he kissed her cheek. They both breathed heavy, the sheen of sweat sticking them together.

His lips caught the dampness from her tears.

“Did I hurt you?” It felt like a kick in the gut, not a sensation he enjoyed after the strongest orgasm of his life had just rocked him.

Bethany smiled. “No. You feel wonderful.”

“Why are you crying?” He pulled at her brown hair as he tried to find the rest of her face. A sigh of satisfaction left her and he realized she was drifting off to sleep. Another tear escaped the corner of her left eye but Jack could not tell if she even realized she was crying. Another kick hit him square in the gut as he realized he cared. He cared a lot. His mind started turning over how he ended up in this situation. How could he possibly be falling for this total stranger?

When he got up and looked down, he realized he had taken her without protection.

“Shit!” He grumbled and smacked himself in the forehead. He had never been so careless in his life. Bethany did not stir. She lay there, her perfect ass pink from being bit, and then smacked up against his thighs, asleep like all was right in the world. Jack looked around and took it all in. Lust he decided, he was in lust.

Chapter 4

Bethany stretched like a cat as she opened her eyes. Her hands were holding on to something warm and smooth. Blinking she realized it was a man. Not just any man, Jack. He was sound asleep. Her head was not on a pillow, it was on his chest. Her arm draped over him and her thigh was lying right over his crotch.

Last night filtered in like a porn flick. She had been thoroughly deflowered by this man. And she was married to him to boot. Her friends might even be worried right now, if they were even back to the hotel room. Bethany hugged him slightly. She slowly inhaled his warm male scent and lifted her left hand to brush her tangled hair away from her face.

It was then she noticed it. The ring that was definitely not there when she passed out last night, sparkled in the light. Blinking she brought it closer and realized it was no small gift. It was not large like the ring Douglas had presented to her, but it was beautiful just the same. A quarter carat princess cut diamond set in a platinum band circled her ring finger perfectly.

How the hell had he done this?

“Jack.” She gently shook him. He grumbled and stirred the hand on her thigh she had not realized was there. “Jack!”

“Huh? What, what, what is it?” He awoke with a start, sitting up immediately knocking her off his chest in the process. “What’s wrong?”

“Where did you get this?” She drew her brows in together and gave him a serious look. Though, she could not help appreciate his sleep-rumpled hair sticking straight up and pointing in all directions, or his massive chest, and blinking eyes. He looked better in the morning than he had last night.

“Jesus woman I thought something was wrong.” Jack scrubbed his big hands over his face then looked at her. “You don’t like it?”

“I.” She was not sure what she wanted to hear but his question certainly was not what she expected. His eyes were tracing her body, over her belly then up to

her breasts. She tugged at the sheet and covered her stomach. "That's a question. You can't answer a question with another question."

"I got it at the jewelry shop on the fifth floor. Do you like it?" He lay back down and closed his eyes.

"I." She looked at it. This was her ring, on her finger, it looked right, it felt right. But she had no idea if he could afford it.

"If you don't like it we can exchange it. I told the woman the diamond would be too small for you." Jack made a huffing sound then turned away from her.

She looked at the line of his back. He reached back to pull the sheets over him and she noticed the platinum band on his finger. "You just have a plain band."

"I won't be able to wear it when I work, plus I'm not a very...stylish man." His voice dripped with aggravation. He tugged the sheets up to his shoulder.

"Why didn't you just buy me a band, too?" She twisted the ring and did not want to like it. They were not really married. Well, they were legally married, but they were not in love. Still it seemed perfect for her. Simple, yet elegant.

"Bethany, if you don't like it we will take it back. I made sure I could exchange it when I bought it. The woman convinced me that based on the butterfly ring you would be a woman with simple taste, but quality was important. Something big would make you feel flashy and something too small would be insulting. But apparently she was wrong, so give me another half hour to sleep and we will rectify the situation pronto." Jack pulled the covers even higher. Only his short brown hair stuck out above them. He was cranky, and rightfully so.

She realized how much thought the man had put into the ring and her heart hurt. Jack may not love her but he sure made more effort than any other man had. Her father had never put much thought into anything he had ever given her. He would just hand her money and send her on her way. Her mother would take her shopping and they would both fill up on stuff, lots of stuff, but it never filled the void. Douglas purchased the gaudiest piece of jewelry she had ever seen. It impressed her mother and father, it also let her know just how unimportant what she wanted was to him.

The woman in the store was exactly right. The butterfly ring was the only ring she ever wore because she picked it out herself on her sixteenth birthday. It was simple and sweet but it would hold its shape for a lifetime. Bethany looked around the room. The tray with the strawberries and champagne was gone. Her clothes were not on the floor or in the chair. Jack had cleaned up the place. He even cleaned her up! She did not feel all sticky and she did not smell like sex either. She knew she slept hard, but damn!

“Jack?” She touched his shoulder and stroked his arm. “I love the ring.”

“It took you long enough to decide.” He shrugged.

“Jack.”

His growling and grumbling made her laugh. He rolled to his back and looked at her. His face was serious, almost angry.

“You look so cute in the morning. Do you always wake up in a bad mood?” She teased. It was like pulling a tiger’s tail, she wondered if he would snap at her.

He opened his mouth then shut it.

“Thank you.” She leaned over and kissed him on his lips.

It was a fleeting kiss, one that was over before it started and only seemed to fuel his anger more. Again she laughed.

“Where are my clothes? I have to go to my room and talk to my girlfriends.” Bethany slipped out of the bed. Stretched and turned to face him again.

Jack realized he just tented the sheets but damn she stirred him. He had put a lot of time and effort into a ring for a woman he doubted would wear it past three months time. “I’ll go with you.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea.” She put up a hand as if to halt him.

“Are you bailing out on me?” He felt the vise-like grip on his chest as he realized this woman could easily walk out on him today and never look back. He could get divorce papers in the mail a day, or year from now, and there was nothing he could do about it. If she did not live with him in Montana for three consecutive months, his inheritance would not be released. But more than his original goal of getting his inheritance, he wanted to spend more time with her. The thought of another man ever touching her the way he did last night made him nuts.

“No. But I need to go see them so they don’t think I got kidnapped.” She rolled her eyes and he imagined that these “friends” of hers were not that important to her. “And I need to explain to them what happened last night.”

“You tell them about me making you pass out and they may all try to marry me.” He winked with a confidence he knew he did not have right now.

“I’ll be sure to leave out the important details and just tell them we are married.” She rubbed her arms. She seemed to chill easy and that detail worried him. It was the main reason his mother had no interest in the ranch. She never wanted to be in Montana. She was from Florida and hated the winters. He started thinking back to watching the weather channel and wondered what winter was like in Kentucky.

“We still need to talk about the important details of being married.” He got out of the bed and walked to the closet. “I hung your clothes in here, figured you wouldn’t want that Ann lady’s skirt all wrinkled on the floor.”

Bethany smiled at his back. He had no idea how he knew when she was looking at him, but he felt it, like a touch.

“You’re doing it again.” He said in a low voice.

“What?” Bethany squeaked out.

“Eating me up with your eyes. I can feel it.” He bent over and heard her gasp. He grabbed his duffle bag and pulled out fresh clothes. Turning back to Bethany it took all of his strength to walk past her and not pick her up and throw her back in bed to have his way with her. Her nipples were tight from the chill in the air or her arousal, maybe a combination of the two, and they beckoned him to suck on them.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Bethany straightened herself and with the same air she put on in the elevator the night before, she strode to the closet and pulled out her clothes.

Bethany realized Jack was dressed in two seconds. He was brooding about as though she were trying to leave him. It comforted her to know he wanted her around, but also made her worried about his reasons for getting married. Was she going to walk into some strange ordeal or Twilight Zone situation?

As she pulled on her skirt, she realized she would be going without the panties until she got to her stuff. Her bra was nowhere to be found either and since Jack

was in the bathroom, she decided to pull the sweaters on and go without it as well. Her Coach wristlet was on the dresser and her butterfly ring was on top of it. She slid the ring on her right hand and then held out both hands to look at them.

The diamond sparkled and the light revealed its brilliance. Bethany sighed. He did do a good job at getting her ring.

“You ready?”

The male voice behind her startled her and she jumped. The last thing she needed was for him to think it meant more to her than it did to him.

“Yes.” She slipped the wristlet on her wrist and turned. He looked like he was every bit as intent on going as she was. If her friends blew her cover and told him she was engaged, he would bolt on her for sure. “You’re staying here right?”

“Hell no.” Jack looked at her as if she was crazy.

“Um, I think it would be best if...”

“No it wouldn’t.”

“Yes, it would.” Bethany bit out.

“I’m going. You can either walk with me or I’ll walk behind you, but I’m going either way.” Jack crossed his arms practically daring her to tell him no one more time. She thought about it. His brows drew tight, his jaw was set, and she decided not to test him.

“Well, don’t say I didn’t give you the opportunity to stay behind.” She started toward the door. This was going to be ugly. Three women awaited her, and they were all going to be shocked to realize she had no plans of going back to Kentucky. “And besides, you can help me carry my stuff.”

“Your stuff?” Jack held the door for her.

“Yes, unless you plan on dumping me already?” Bethany hoped the comment did not reveal how much truth was in the statement. If he did not live in Las Vegas, she did not care. As a matter of fact, she would be satisfied if they could run away to Mexico or Canada. The farther she was from her family, the better she would feel.

“Nope. You’re safe on my end for at least three months.” He said.

She took a minute to respond as she worked it over in her mind. Three months was a good time frame. She could get a lot set up in her new name by then. She was a thirty-year-old runaway. Jack just did not know he was helping her. And she was not about to tell him. "Then three months it is."

He walked behind her anyways. His brothers were going to have a field day with this. He needed to get her out of Las Vegas and into Montana as soon as possible. He smiled, knowing his older brothers were going to pitch a fit over marrying a woman he did not know, but he could not help it. He liked her, he liked following her too, watching the sway of her hips. She walked with a confidence most men did not have, and it turned him on. She was so...independent. He got the creeps just thinking about her independence. Would she be able to settle on a ranch? Not every woman could handle the life, much less the weather.

Turning his mind to better things, he watched the skirt sway back and forth, as she strutted to the elevator. The length hit her calves when she walked. The shoes patted against her heels making little clicking sounds with each step. The tangle of curls had been finger combed but still looked wild and bed rumped to his mind.

"You're doing it now." She said as they approached the gold elevators.

"What?"

"Eating me up with your eyes." She looked at him through the reflection in the gold elevator doors.

"You caught me." He smiled as the doors opened. They stepped inside. He wrapped her in his arms once she pressed the button for her floor.

The simple gesture eased them both a little bit. Bethany relaxed against him as they waited for the elevator to get to the next floor. Jack squeezed tight then released as the elevator dinged and the doors opened. It was crowded this morning, unlike last night. As another couple filed off, a woman stepped on. They were left with two others in the large space.

His hold tightened and his thumb stroked the side of her breast. Bethany inhaled sharply. Her face heated from the touch in front of strangers.

“They aren’t paying attention.” Jack whispered in her ear and stroked more boldly down the side of her breast. “You’re not wearing a bra and your nipples are calling out to me.”

Three months with Jack and she would never be able to survive without him. She felt the heat between her legs and hoped she did not get so wet it dripped. The wish was futile when he continued talking to her. The man should wear a muzzle. His voice was so dangerously seductive it should be outlawed.

“I bought you panties but I never heard the dresser drawer open so I assume you went commando.” He nipped her earlobe. “I wish I could drop to my knees, crawl under that skirt and...”

She whimpered a little louder than either of them expected and the other people finally took notice. The guy in the back cleared his throat and the woman smiled and played with her necklace nervously.

The elevator stopped and the doors opened.

Bethany stepped forward and Jack followed. “This your floor?”

“No.” She turned and grabbed him. She pulled him down into her kiss almost bringing them both off balance. It was outrageous, insane, but she needed to taste him, to feel his body right then and there.

Jack picked her up, moved a couple steps forward regaining balance, and set her back down. He kissed her, speaking in their newfound language, he asked what she wanted, and Bethany answered. He pulled his head back and looked down the hall both ways.

“If we get caught we will be arrested.” He said while pulling her further down the hall to a vending machine area. He looked around the ceiling making sure there were no security cameras.

“Then do it fast.” Bethany reached for the button on his jeans.

“No. Just you.” He bent down and lifted the skirt. He ducked underneath and urged her legs wide.

She could not believe how careless she was being. Arrested? Her father would kill her and Jack. But as Jack’s fingers soothed the savage beast, all the fear of

being caught turned to an aphrodisiac, suddenly she wished he were fucking her against the wall and not just stroking her with his tongue and fingers.

“Oh yes, Jack, yes.” She whispered encouragement and placed a foot on his thigh to give him better access. Her hand pressed against the back of his head through the skirt. Her back pressed against the wall and she needed every bit of its support to remain standing. Jack made quick work of satisfying her. “I’m going to come, Jack. God I wish it were on your cock.”

Bethany ground her hips against him and pulled at his head forcing his lips tighter against her clit as his fingers fucked her hole repeatedly. He almost lost it when she started telling him how she liked it. The urge to stand up and take her against the wall was almost too powerful to resist. Then she started coming and he resigned to enjoying her release.

She slumped against the wall. He placed her foot back on the floor and came out from under the skirt. “Feel better?”

“You’re an animal.” She smiled down at the man who was on his knees before her wiping her juices from his face.

“Yes, apparently I just can’t control myself.” He stood and kissed her. He pressed his erection between her legs letting her know just how much control he had exercised on her behalf. “We need to go or I really am going to get us arrested.”

“How?” She teased. This was a whole new side of herself. One she liked. One she could not control. She did not want to control it.

“Don’t tempt me Bethany. I’d love to pull your skirt up and pound into you but we have to get your stuff, tell your room mates...” He waved his hand in the air and looked at the ceiling.

It was all the time she needed to move. She quickly peaked around the corner of their hide out and did not see anyone coming or going down either side of the hallway. She turned, facing the wall and lifted the skirt over her hips. “Do it Jack. You know you want to. I want you to.”

With her ass in the air, offered up to him how could he say no? Jack stepped out, checked the hall. Looked around the vending area one more time for security cameras, then finding none, released his dick.

“Quick, Bethany. This has to be quick.” He slid the head of his cock over her opening then pressed in. She still gasped as if it were her first time. “Talk to me, Bethany. Tell me you like it.”

“Yes, Jack. I like it. I love your big cock.” She braced against the wall as Jack moaned. He liked it when she talked to him huh? “Fuck me, Jack. Give me every inch of your big...thick...”

Jack spent before she could finish saying cock. He pounded into her hard and fast. He called her name on a groan. It was the first time she actually felt the throbbing of his cock as he released, the first time she was not coming with him. The burst of semen shot out and she realized he was not wearing a condom. Slow jerks signaled the end of his release. Slowly he pulled out.

“Better?” She asked and straightened her skirt. He looked dazed, but satisfied and more relaxed than earlier.

“I feel a lot better.” He tucked his cock back into his jeans and fastened them. Coming out of the haze, he smiled.

“I’m on birth control. I was going to tell you last night but I didn’t get the chance.” She stepped closer and then patted him on his chest. She was not familiar with intimacy. Her parents were like two robots together. It was awkward to be with him in between the wild sex they were sharing. “My room is on the next floor down. Think we can make it there without having sex on the stairs?”

“I make no promises.” He laughed a hearty laugh that she enjoyed hearing. He followed her out of their hiding spot. As they neared the stairwell, the elevator dinged and a whole family filed off. “Glad we finished before they got here.”

Bethany chuckled as they started through the stairwell door.

“Where the hell have you been?”

“What the fuck is going on here?”

“You’re mother has been blowing up both phones Bethany, where have you been?”

The three women merged on her at once. Jack sidestepped the group and went into the bathroom. He thought he had gone unnoticed as they all continued to

squeak and squawk in high-pitched angry voices back and forth. But as the bathroom door opened, he realized they just had not gotten to him yet.

Standing there, cock in hand, taking a leak, he never felt so exposed in his life. The four women clustered in the doorway and collectively gasped.

“Jack!” Bethany shouted as if he could stop midstream.

“Who the hell are you?” The short African American woman crossed her arms and asked as she gave him the once over, twice.

“That’s a big dick.” The blonde nodded as though she alone made the observation.

“Jesus, Katie!” The Spanish looking woman elbowed her friend.

With no other option, Jack shook his member, tucked it into his jeans, and faced the audience. Holding his left hand up, he curled all fingers but one, the one with the ring on it. “Can I wash my hands alone or do you need to call a press conference?”

Looking offended, as if he were the one being rude, they allowed him the privacy to wash his hands. As soon as the door shut, he heard them start in on Bethany again. He waited to turn on the water, he wanted to hear what they had to say, how much they influenced her.

“You are not married to some strange man!” He recognized the Spanish woman’s voice. No Spanish accent, she just reminded him of someone from Spain or Puerto Rico, somewhere exotic, like she looked, like a Spanish Rose.

“Your parents are going to kill you, and him!” Miss Brown Sugar pointed out.

“He has a really big dick, Bethany. I know you didn’t sleep with him.” Miss Blonde Ambition commented.

He turned on the water. He was not going to leave her out there to fight these crazy bitches alone. And they had to be crazy. The conversation had totally drifted from being about Bethany to the size of his cock. If these were her friends, who were her enemies? He thought about that as he opened the door. Maybe she only married him to escape trouble.

“You ready to go, sweetheart?” Jack looked over all of them toward the only woman in the room worth looking at.

“She’s not going anywhere.” Brown Sugar crossed her arms and stared at him. Blonde Ambition started up next.

“Look here buddy. You can’t just walk in here with your big dick in hand and think we are going to turn our friend over to you. Plans have been made, invitations sent out.”

As she said it, he could feel her eyes all over him. Yesterday morning she would have been everything he wanted to marry and divorce. Blonde, tall, beautiful and somewhat deprived apparently. Now all he wanted was the warrior looking back at him with eyes silently pleading for understanding.

“Katie, will you stop with the man’s dick size?” Spanish Rose stepped up to him. “Look, our friend here has made a huge mistake. She can’t get married in Los Vegas. I mean she doesn’t even know you. So if you’ll just leave, we’ll take it from here.”

“Bethany, what do you need me to carry?” He asked as if the other women did not exist. He watched her back straighten, her chin lift, the look of stubbornness and propriety took her over and he prayed whatever came next, it would not be directed at him.

“Jack darling, grab my bags. They match this.” She held up her little purse.

Bethany walked to the bed still made and picked up the matching cosmetic bag and a larger purse with a phone hanging off the side. He grabbed the large and small suitcase and carried them by the handle. She sure did not pack light.

“Ladies. It’s been fun all these years. But it’s over.” She said.

Bethany marched out the door and he followed. Once they were both on the outside she turned back to face three shocked women. Jack feared she was changing her mind but her posture had not changed a bit.

“Katie, Rosetta, Mercedes. I love you, I really do. But I am an adult not a child. I don’t need your support or approval. If you really want to be friends, you will respect my decisions. I never judged you Katie even though you try to sleep with any guy who gives you the time of day. Mercedes, I never told anyone how you were cheating on Rodney the first three months of your marriage. Rosetta...Rosie...I

know you want to be diplomatic and be all things to all people, but you are not my mom, old friend. Which means you should stop fucking my dad!"

She slammed the door. He was certain he felt as much shock as her friends.

"So where do we live?" She asked as if she had not just rocked everyone's world in that room. He took a moment to collect his thoughts.

Bethany headed toward the elevator and Jack followed behind her. He never wanted to be on the receiving end of this woman's wrath. No one would see it coming, she seemed so meek and mild mannered. The little lady he met in the bar was like a viper, if she coiled up, a strike was deadly.

"Montana." He said as he sat the bag down in the elevator.

"It has wheels." She reached over, and tried to pull the case upright. He grabbed the side handle and righted the suitcase on the small wheels. Bethany unzipped a small patch of material on the top and pulled up a handle. Well that explained how she carried the damn thing. It weighed a ton.

"Thanks. I was wondering if you pushed it to the airport. It's heavy." He attempted to lighten the mood.

He placed the smaller one on top and Bethany pointed to the strap, which apparently attached it to the larger bag. He would not feel like an idiot. No sir. Men did not carry fancy bags. He carried a plain black duffle for crying out loud.

"It has a lot of stuff in it. I didn't plan on going back home right away. I mean I didn't know I would be going to Montana either, I had planned to stay here in Vegas a while." She looked at the small phone. As if she had revived it, the ring tone began, sounding like a soundtrack from an oriental restaurant. The chimes played but she ignored it.

"Do you need to get it?" He was getting nervous. She had not let down her business like posture one bit. There was a lot going on. He planned to meet a woman and dupe her, now, he had the sneaking suspicion he had just been duped!

"No. It's my mother. I'll call when we get to Montana. We *will* be leaving today right?" Bethany looked at him and for a fleeting moment he read insecurity and fear in her eyes. Then they tightened back into a no nonsense expression.

"I'll grab my bag and we can leave now if you like." He rubbed his forehead.

This was not exactly what he planned. He needed to tell his brothers he was coming home and tell Bethany they all lived in one house temporarily. His sister was the only one who had gotten married so far. To save on expenses his two brothers moved into his place.

“Can we grab breakfast first?” She sighed and visibly relaxed. “Then we can hash out our own arrangement as well.”

Now Jack put on the business face. “Sounds good.”

Chapter 5

Bethany took a shower as Jack ordered room service. She contemplated how much she wanted to tell him and how much she wanted to keep to herself. When she entered the great room, she realized that she wanted to tell him everything. For that reason, alone, she could not. Jack was already getting under her skin and not just because he made her feel beautiful, sexy, and wild. He did all those things, yes, but even with all of her perky friends surrounding him, he only watched her. He did not care what they said or did, he was on her side.

Never in her life had anyone chosen her over them. Douglas had even slept with Katie. Though he refused to admit it, she knew. The same way she found out about her dad and Rosie. The house staff told her. Malina had been her nanny since childhood, the only person who really cared for her. She encouraged her to escape.

She dressed in her favorite J-Lo jogging suit, perfect for travel. She would not say she looked like the star, but the suit was made for a woman's body and accentuated hers without making her look fat. Bethany took one last look in the mirror then entered the room.

Jack sat at a table with a cup of coffee in his hand and stared out the balcony doors, which he had opened. She could not help but to appreciate his profile. His strong nose and jaw line gave him the look of a man who could easily dress in the finest clothes and walk on a runway for Calvin Klein or Ralph Lauren. But Jack sat there in a plain black t-shirt and well fitting Levi's, drinking coffee, oblivious to the world around him.

"You're doing it again." He smiled and then sat the coffee cup on the table.

"How do you know when I'm staring at you?" She walked over and took the seat across from him. He started to stand but she waved him down. "You don't have to pull my chair out anymore. I'm yours, you got me."

He seemed bristled by her comment and she felt a lecture coming on.

"I'm a real gentleman. Most of the time anyways, and you are a lady whether I hooked you or not. Which by the way I should remind you, it was you who called me the chicken and goaded *me* down the aisle." Jack nodded. "So, as you eat your cold breakfast, I have a few things I need to explain."

"Okay." Bethany removed the plate cover and realized the food was still warm but not hot. She poked at the eggs while he talked.

"I live on a ranch. It's nothing fancy, but it's mine, well ours. My brothers are there. We all live in my house right now because it's a big house and until this weekend, we were all bachelors. It saved on money for us to live in one house rather than be spread out, paying utilities and what not for three." Jack pulled the coffee to his lips. He took a fortifying gulp, looked at her as if he were gauging her reaction, then continued. "They will move over to Heath's place since it's finished, but it may take a week or two. Until they get out it will be the four of us."

"Okay." Bethany started eating. This was not bad news at all. She had never been part of a large family, as an only child she had been a miniature adult most of her life. Her three friends were the closest to siblings she had, and they were all just as spoiled and privileged as she was.

Jack obviously was not expecting such an easy agreement. "So you will be okay with living in house with three grown men?"

"Sure." She shrugged, not understanding why he seemed unsure.

"You're okay around animals, right?"

"You're brothers aren't animals, Jack. I'm sure I will be fine." She waved it off. She did not know why he was making such a big deal over nothing.

"My brothers? Right. Well okay. As long as you're okay with it, I'm okay with it." Jack shook his head. "Now what do you want from this situation?"

"Your last name and a job." She looked at him, all male, he probably thought she would stay home and cook and clean...her temper flared. "And I will work Jack Johnson and make my own money, and I will work, you won't stop me!"

"Fine by me. I'd just as soon keep our finances separate, all things considered." He lifted his coffee mug to her like a toast then took another drink.

For some reason the thought of keeping things separate hurt her feelings. No, she did not expect him to want to stay married, but did he have to be so blunt about it? Yes, she wanted independence but on some level, she realized she wanted him to want her. To be the big brooding man he was and stake a claim. "So I'll open my own account. In three months time, I should have a job, enough money saved to get my own place, and we can go our separate ways."

"It may take longer than three months for my paperwork to go through. The lawyer has to check in on us and he has to believe we will be married a reasonable amount of time. At the end of three months he will release the money to my account and I can finally get enough equipment to really start the ranch." Jack turned the coffee cup in a circle on the table not looking up at her.

"I'll stay as long as you need me to. After three months, I'll chip in, but you have to give me those three months to find a job. I'm not taking a dime from my daddy, well no more than what I already have anyways." Bethany was not about to tell him how much it was, but she had enough to stay in Vegas a while so it should be enough to put down roots in Montana.

"Sounds fair. So we will set this aside and in three months revisit the issue." He sipped the last of his coffee and stood. "In the meantime we will act like newlyweds. You ready?"

"As I'll ever be." Bethany took a deep breath and smiled. This was a new beginning. A fresh start. Her chance of a lifetime. And she was damn sure going to take it!

"I bet you'll hate giving this thing up." Bethany looked at the truck and nodded.

"Why would I give her up?" He loaded her suitcases and his duffle bag in the back seat. She was wearing some soft little outfit. It made her curves stand out and his libido kick into overdrive. He had not been this insatiable since he was a teen and yet here he was, eyeing her at any possible moment and so turned on by the way she looked at him it was impossible to keep his hands off of her.

"You mean this isn't the rental, from the airport?" She gave him a new expression, one indicating she thought he was nuts. He smiled.

“No ma’am. This is mine.” He opened the front door to the truck and held out a hand to help her up into the cab.

She took his hand and climbed into his truck. He shut the door and looked at her for a moment. She smiled out the window to him. With her brown hair pulled back in a ponytail and her face free of make-up, she looked like an all-American beauty sitting there. It was an important test for a woman to pass.

“So does it have a hemi?” She asked as he opened the driver-side door.

He stopped. Her words smacked him out of his daydream. She looked real good in that seat, but foul language could not be tolerated.

“Woman, there are three things you don’t do to a man. You don’t curse at his truck, you don’t mess with his horse, and you don’t poke fun at his dog.” He shook his head. “This is a Ford, not a Dodge. I’ll let it slide, this time.”

He winked and proceeded to get into his beloved Ford. Bethany rolled her eyes at him. She obviously did not understand the relationship between a man and his vehicle.

“How long is the drive?”

“About 13 hours, most of it straight up I-15.” He started up the truck. “Listen to her purr.”

“You seem a little too excited about being in this truck. I have to tell you.” She smiled.

“I love this truck. It’s the only new vehicle I have ever owned. It beats the hell out of my last truck. By the time I got it, it was like the truck on Sanford and Son. I think I pushed it more than I drove it.” He laughed recounting the memory. “Don’t be jealous.”

“Of a truck? Are you serious?” She crossed her arms obviously jealous. He ignored it and continued to talk about his old hand me down truck.

Bethany watched him tell his story and witnessed how his eyes lit up and his dimples popped out. He may think he did not like his old truck but the memories were good ones. Of course, she had a BMW delivered to the front door on her sixteenth birthday. There was no love or hate for the car. It just was. But then she

never had to ask for anything material, and she never got anything more than material things.

“Jack.” Bethany decided she had to tell him about her father. It was not fair to let him risk the ranch he was so in love with. “I don’t want you to get worried when I tell you this but...”

“You’re not really on birth control are you?” Jack sighed heavy.

“No, I...”

“It’s okay, I mean we are married, we will be together a while and...”

“Jack, Jack. I am on birth control.” She almost laughed at how nervous he was. His fingers had gripped the steering wheel, his head bobbed side to side as if mentally working it out, and rationalizing.

“Oh, thank God.” He let out the breath he had been holding. “I mean we could work things out, but I would really like to take this time to get to know you Bethany, I mean I really want us to be friends when it’s over.”

She swallowed the lump in her throat. What a sweet man. She would not tell him she thought that way because then his ego would move to macho overdrive. But he was sweet, and if she let him, he would just break her heart in the end. “Of course we’ll be friends. Don’t be silly.”

“So what were you worried about?” He asked as if their only problem would be pregnancy. Forget the fact that they did not even know each other!

“Nothing, it was silly. Really, forget it.” She decided not to make things harder on him before they got that way anyhow. When her father found out, and she was sure Rosetta had called and told him she was married, and she knew about the two of them by now, he would be furious. Dodson’s do not face public embarrassment. And Bethany would marry the man he chose.

HA!

“If you say so.” He shrugged. “Do you have any questions about Montana, my house, my family?”

“Yes, tell me about all of them.” She nodded.

“Well, I have two brothers and a sister.” Jack explained. “My older brother Heath is 35, Rafe is 34, I am 33, see the pattern?”

Bethany nodded.

“My sister Janice, we call her Jan is 19.” He laughed. “My momma thought she was going through the change, is what she called it, sure changed things all right.”

“How old was she?” Bethany smiled.

“Let’s see, I was fourteen, so that would make her forty-six, forty-seven.” He shook his head. “Doctors say it happens, not often but it does.”

“Wow.” She nodded. It was unbelievable. “She must have been shocked.”

“Happy. Especially when she found out it was a girl. She had given up trying for a girl once we popped out, three in a row.” He laughed again then went quiet. A solemn mood came over him; she could see in his eyes that whatever he was thinking about was painful for him. “My daddy died not long after Jan was born. Cancer. Momma stayed in Montana until last year when Jan decided she was old enough to get married, and now my momma lives in Florida.”

She considered his statement and then blurted. “She’s only nineteen how can she be old enough to get married?”

“She’s legal Bethany; believe me, your preaching to the choir. Heath shot Buck in the ass with a B-B-gun trying to scare him off. Only made the kid more afraid of us. And Jan more determined than ever to marry him.” Jack sighed. “Such is life. Momma said we were not allowed to interfere with them, she had married my daddy young, and they were together till he died.”

“So where do they live?” Bethany asked.

“On the ranch. We all have a house there. My grandpa made sure of it.” Jack nodded. “It’s a dude ranch. Hadn’t been put to use in that manner since my Grandpa was alive, my mom didn’t like it, and my dad didn’t have the education to run the business, as much as my grandpa tried to teach him, so it went dry when my grandfather died.”

“He didn’t want to learn or was it your mother’s father?”

“No he was my dad’s father. My momma is from Florida.” Jack explained. “Daddy was a cowboy, he could do work, but he had no interest in learning the books and business end, thought he would have time to learn about those things later. Guess not.”

“So why does everyone live in your house?” She was fascinated by his life story. He had suffered hardships, loss, but he obviously cared about his family and their legacy. It was going to be hard not to fall head over heels for Jack Johnson.

“You know, I don’t really know. Heath’s house is the one we grew up in. Maybe because I was the first to move out? Next thing I knew they just moved in with me. Then when momma left, they stayed. Rafe has been making changes to his house over the years, Heath hasn’t changed a thing. And Jan, she moved into hers the day she got married and it has been an uphill climb for her. She won’t let us help, but we see them struggling.”

“Didn’t she get an inheritance, too?” She was trying to remember as much information as she could about his complex family relationships. She was an only child so there was never anyone to debate with, share secrets with, or any of those fun things. Just her girlfriends, and since they each in their own way thought they were better than she was, she kept her secrets to herself. Jack talked more than any man she had ever known, personal conversation anyways. Her father and Douglas could talk business for hours. But she never could hold a real conversation with either of them.

“No, not yet. The will was very clear. We have to be over twenty-five, married or wait until your sixtieth birthday.” Jack smiled. “I think he did it because he wanted us to at least be old enough to make smart decisions. Of course we’ll be married by the time we are all sixty, it just gave us a little push to think about it sooner rather than later.”

“So why haven’t you all married before now?”

“That my sweet wife is the question everyone asks.” He looked at her and winked. Strange how such a simple gesture sent goose bumps down her arms. It was delightful to have his attention.

“At first we rebelled against it. We didn’t need the money and we didn’t want it if we had to get married in order to get it. Ranching isn’t easy and women can get in the way. We all worked outside the ranch, saving and building. Of course a couple years pass and we realized even with our jobs, especially with our jobs, there was no way to work and build the ranch.”

“So you decided to come to Vegas and get hitched?” She nodded, ignored the part about women getting in the way, and smiled. “I understand.”

“No. You don’t. I was supposed to bring my ex-girlfriend to Vegas and get hitched.” He snorted.

“What?” She sat up straighter and looked at him. Something inside her was fired by his revelation. It was not anger exactly. Maybe hurt, but that did not make sense. As the next words fell out of her mouth, she knew exactly what it was. Jealousy. “What bitch were you planning on marrying, Jack Johnson?”

“Christina, we dated off and on since high school. So I figured it had to mean something right?” Jack shrugged as though it meant nothing. “She’s a nice girl really.”

“No. That doesn’t mean anything.” She still peered at him as she crossed her arms. Christina. The word was permanently branded on her skull. What did she look like? Had they been lovers? She snorted. Of course they had been lovers. She could feel the tiny hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. She had never been so angry in all her life. To think of some other woman draped on Jack just fueled her more.

“Okay. I thought it meant something, but then she told me she wouldn’t divorce me unless I gave her half.” He shook his head again. “I have no plans of giving our money to anyone. We need it for the ranch.”

“You didn’t think she knew and you weren’t planning on divorcing her were you?” She knew the feeling in the pit of her stomach now. Loss. She had experienced it over and over with her father. Now she knew Jack was not hers, he really cared about some other woman and in three months, she would be out the door.

“It’s not like that at all.” He shook his head.

“I need to use the bathroom can we pull over at the next stop?”

“Are you okay, sweetheart?”

He asked in a sincere tone, which alone was like tossing gasoline on her already burning flame. The nerve of him! Marrying her when he was planning to

marry another woman instead! Was she okay? Yeah right, she was fine, now that she knew what kind of man he really was.

“Fine.” She bit out.

The cute little smirk was back on her face. Her nose was tilted up to the air and she was sitting straight as a board. Jack knew he was in it, he just did not know how deep.

Bethany marched into the ladies room, handled business, and marched back to his truck. He reluctantly took his turn in the men’s room. When he came back, her rump was hanging half out of the back seat of the truck. Her flip-flop sandals were on the pavement. She seemed to be digging for something in the bags.

As he reached past to help her, she jumped and screamed.

“It’s okay.” He stroked her back and tried not to laugh as she bumped her head on the roof of the truck. “What did you need out of here. I’ll pull it out.”

“Everything!” She wiggled past him and out of the truck. “I’m leaving.”

“I was afraid you might say that.” Jack shut the back door leaving the bags inside. He leaned against the truck and crossed his arms and then his legs. She slid the shoes back on her feet and he took note of the bright pink nail polish, and how cute her toes were. Good Lord, he was getting a foot fetish! “You’re not leaving me. We had a deal.”

“Well you broke it.” Bethany pointed at him. She was pouting one minute and ready to attack the next.

“How?” He clenched his jaw and tried not to get mad. He had no idea she would react this way. He was explaining how he thought his old girlfriend would be a good friend and not try to rook him. He was wrong.

“You loved her, you probably still love her. You were going to marry her for real. That’s not a bad relationship Jack. Love’s not something you walk away from. It’s...”

He could not take it any longer. She was really pissing him off, but more than pissing him off, she was turning him on. She was jealous and no woman had ever been so sincere about it. He did not love Christina, not since high school. Even

then, it was puppy love. Bethany mistook his intentions and she was mad. They were making a scene in the parking lot and he had to shut her up.

He lifted off the truck, grabbed her face, and kissed her mid rant. He ate the words right out of her mouth. Her hands moved to his chest to push him away, they ended up grabbing his t-shirt and pulling him closer instead. Once Bethany whimpered, he knew it was safe to let her up for air.

"It doesn't change anything." She said with the weakest protest he had ever heard.

"You changed everything. I didn't love her, I couldn't be with you like this if I did." He kissed the top of her nose and opened the front door. What had his grandfather gotten him into? "Well?"

Bethany tried for her air of indifference but it was lacking since she was now all warm and fuzzy from his kiss. "Well I don't want to be stuck out in the middle of nowhere."

He laughed as he helped her into the truck. With a sigh, he smiled. "You'll be glad you changed your mind when we get home."

"You're not driving straight through are you?" Bethany asked. Apparently, she had never been on a road trip. To his way of thinking, you do not stop until you get there.

"Hell yeah. I prefer my own bed any day." He closed the door and headed to the driver side. She moved to the center of the truck and leaned over to unlock the door for him. The words I love you stalled in his throat, almost paralyzing him. He realized he was just standing there with his hand on the handle.

"Are you okay, Jack?" She smiled. Her full lips curved as her big brown eyes batted at him, taking the strength out of his knees. What the hell was going on?

"Yeah." He nodded, realizing he was lying. He was not okay. He was in love, or maybe just lust, he did not know. But he did know she was going to leave him at her first opportunity. He had to make it hard for her to get a chance, at least until she gave him a real chance.

He sat in the seat and placed a hand on her thigh. "Don't move."

"You want me to stay here?" She was still in the center of the truck seat.

“There’s a lap belt. I like having you close by. Just in case.” He started the engine as she buckled the middle seatbelt.

“In case what?” Bethany said with distinct humor.

“In case I need to do this.” He stroked her with two fingers, gently, from her knee to her hip then back again. The soft coordinating jump suit she wore was soft, like velvet. When he returned to her knee, he made the same line only this time he traced toward her inner thigh.

“Jack. That’s not funny.” She closed her eyes and let him continue to trace circles and lines over her thighs, coming close to her sex but not close enough to touch it.

“I’m not trying to be funny.” He bit back the smile. She was so responsive to his touch he felt like a warrior. His ego pumped up as his lungs filled with her sweet scent.

“You should be paying attention to your driving. How would you like it if I were feeling you up?” She stroked her hand along his thigh and then traced her finger over his fly. The soft touch had the desired effect but not before she pulled back with a gasp. “You’re not even hard, you, you, scoundrel!”

Fast as lightning, she undid the seatbelt and moved to her side of the truck, buckled back in and crossed her legs. “I can’t believe you were just toying with me. I mean I’m sitting here, soaking myself and you’re over there just driving away.”

He smiled a devilish smile. He was just toying with her until she confessed how much she liked it. “I think you should test it again.”

“No. I will not touch it while you’re driving, Jack.” He watched as she tried not to smile.

“Fine. Touch you then. It’s all I really wanted anyways.” he winked.

She gasped again. He had shocked a few people in his lifetime, but apparently, he shocked Bethany more than most. “The nerve you have! You think I’m just going to sit here and masturbate for you?”

“What else are you going to do for the next oh, ten hours?” Jack watched the road for a moment longer then looked over to her. She was sitting there thinking about it. He knew as much because her heart was pumping her soft little jacket off

her left breast like a jackrabbit kicking out of a trap. He had not started with these intentions but Bethany got him going and he did not want to stop.

“I can’t.” She shook her head.

“Sure you can, I’ll help you. It’ll make the drive more interesting.” He nodded then reached over and stroked her arm from her shoulder to her elbow. “Live a little.”

The words fell on Bethany like a warm blanket. Living a little was the point, right? She wanted to live like the woman without fear. To be in charge of her life and experience all the world had to offer. Bethany Dodson would never, ever, think of doing such a thing. But Bethany Johnson really liked the way Jack thought. It was like being in the hotel again. Anyone who drove by, though they would have to be in a truck just as high and actually look or pay attention, could see her doing it.

“All right.” She said softly.

Jack swerved and straightened again. He was not expecting her to actually go through with it. She liked the fact that she had shocked him for a change.

“But not if you can’t control the wheel.”

“I can, I will, I just...I will.” He tightened two hands on the wheel for a moment.

“Okay.” She said.

He could feel the heat creep over his cheeks. She had him, and she knew it.

“Where should I start?” She said in a purposely low and seductive tone.

“Take your top off.” He could not control the timbre in his voice. He was now turned on and as a safety precaution put the vehicle on cruise. His foot was liable to get a little heavy.

She unzipped the soft jacket and slid it off her arms. A plain white t-shirt was underneath. He balanced his attention between the road and Bethany. The inside of the cab was warming up even with the air on. “Shirt next.”

She pulled the top over her head slowly and folded it neatly. The stack of clothes beside her was piling up.

“And?”

“Pants.” He nodded. He swallowed the drool gathering in his mouth. She had to be the most voluptuous woman he had ever seen nude. She looked soft all over, no bones sticking out anywhere.

“Not the bra?” Bethany licked her lips and batted her eyes. She liked this, he could feel it.

“Not yet.” He shook his head. Oh, what had he unleashed?

Bethany unsnapped the seat belt and lifted her hips to remove the pants. She was not wearing little yellow ducks today, oh no, she had a thong on.

“Take off the thong.” He shifted uneasily. His cock strained against his fly and begged for freedom. Freedom it would not get. This was about her, at least for now.

Slowly she lifted her hips and pulled the thong off. She then proceeded to neatly fold the scrap of material, as if it needed to be folded, and placed it on the pants. She reached for the bra strap and stopped as another vehicle drove past.

“I dare you.” He whispered.

She took that challenge. She removed the bra and adjusted her position so she faced him.

“Shouldn’t you be in the slow lane anyways?” She asked as she folded the bra and sat the stack of clothes on the suitcases in the back seat.

“I was getting over when you took off the thong sweetheart, forgive me. I got distracted.” He laughed.

“You’re hard aren’t you?” She asked. His laugh ended in a groan.

“Very.”

“So why don’t you take off your clothes?” Innocently she quipped.

“This isn’t about me. But I will make an adjustment now you noticed.” Jack unbuttoned his jeans and his cock sprang free. He sighed in relief. “Much better. Now back to you.”

“He looks angry.” She bit her lower lip as she looked at his dick like it was the most amazing thing she had ever seen. The way she looked at him alone was enough to make his knees weak.

“He is angry, but he doesn’t boss me. So what are you going to do next?” He wiggled his eyebrows. He had to get the attention back where it belonged. On her.

This was his fantasy and she was fulfilling it. But he suspected she liked his wild side. His cock agreed and bounced on its own accord.

“Take your hat off.” Bethany waited until his arm stretched over the back seat to set his cowboy hat on the luggage. As soon as it was fully extended, she ran her nails gently along his forearm. He closed then opened his right eye as goose bumps prickled along the skin beneath her fingers.

“Now, can you drive with one hand, Cowboy?” She said in her sugar sweet voice. He was not sure where this was going but he damn sure wanted to find out!

“Yes.” His voice sounded deep to his own ears.

“Good.” Bethany guided his right hand to her left breast. “You look good Jack. Good enough to eat in fact. But since you want to make this about me, I want you to touch me and tease me, and make me come.”

She lifted his fingers to her lips and kissed each one in turn. Then she pulled the rough index finger into her mouth and sucked on it. The warmth and wetness of her mouth brought thoughts of other things being in there. It was becoming more difficult to resist her idea of playing in the truck while driving.

“If you keep doing that, I swear I am going to come without you.” Reluctantly he pulled his finger from her lips.

Bethany directed his now wet finger to her nipple. He tickled it softly then tweaked it a little harder, giving a tug, making her insides like fire. She pulled the ponytail free and let her hair free. The curls bounced wildly about her head and she did not care. All she cared about was Jack and his fingers, and how good they felt. “Mmm. Jack, oh...you feel nice.”

“Come closer.” He drawled.

“Move lower.” She challenged. He answered her challenge by leaning over to grab her under the knee and pulled her closer. The truck swayed a second but straightened as he did. Her eyes widened and her lips parted. “I was going to move.”

“Spread your legs, Bethany. Let me see you.” Jack apparently found no humor in his current situation. She looked at his face. His cheeks were flushed. In his lap, a very deep red, almost purple head lurched toward the steering wheel under her

scrutiny. Satisfied that he was as turned on as she was, she propped her left leg on the seat and her right leg on the dashboard. Never in her life had she felt so exposed. The position was worse than at the gynecologist. But Jack did not look at her as if he wanted to examine her. He looked at her as if he wanted to devour her. Her pussy throbbed with need. "Touch me Jack."

"Touch yourself." Jack licked his lips, focused on the road then looked back to her. "Open yourself up to me."

She spread the slick lips, exposing what little mystery was left to Jack. The door, hard and uncomfortable, irritated her back. But there was no way she could stop. With her index and middle finger, she began circling her clit. His face grew pained and he fought to look back toward the road.

She was so turned on by his reaction. She was climbing up to the peak faster than she imagined possible without help. He groaned, sucked in his bottom lip, and bit down on it. He lifted his hand. Pressed his index and middle finger into his mouth and pulled them out wet. With great care, he touched them to her already weeping pussy hole. "Yes!"

She arched into him, lifting her hips, driving the relief of those fingers deeper. "God I needed this. Don't stop, please."

"I may have to pull over." His voice crackled on the air, thick with lust. He drove two seconds farther then pulled off to the side of the road. He hit the seat release, making room between him and the steering wheel.

"Get up here, quick." He pulled her with one hand and placed the other on top of her head so she did not hit the roof as she straddled his erection.

Bethany did not wait for his hands to land on her waist. She was wet, wanting, and she was going to take this man. She seated herself on him, taking his full thick length in one hard thrust.

They both cried out.

She began moving in a fast rhythm up and down on his shaft. She watched his face tighten and his whiskey brown eyes fight to stay open. The wet slurp and slap of their bodies echoed in the small space. His scent combined with hers filled the air and their lungs. She never knew it could be this good!

“You are so beautiful Bethany.” He whispered with what breath he had left.

“So are you Jack.” She gasped as he pressed his thumb to her clitoris and stroked it in a circular motion, taking her to the top in seconds. “Yes, oh yes Jack, that’s the spot.”

“Come for me, sweetheart. I can’t hold on.” Jack said right before groaning with sweet release. His cock throbbed inside her as he filled her with his sperm.

She continued to pump his cock, milking it dry. She reached her own orgasm as he ended his. He watched her body shudder. They felt the surge of wetness release over his cock. Gasping for breath she finally stopped. Her brown curls were wild and unruly, giving her the look of the woman she was. Wild, sexy, and his.

“I better get up before we get arrested.” She laughed. “I really needed that. I feel a lot better now.”

“Glad to be of service.” Jack swatted her butt as she dismounted him. She slowly crawled back to her seat. “You can spend the rest of the ride naked if you like.”

“I plan on sleeping the rest of the ride.” Yawning she stretched like a cat. Her body was limp and well sated. Lazily she pulled her pants and t-shirt back on foregoing the bra and panties. She buckled herself back in and settled against the seat.

Chapter 6

“Bethany.” Jack shook her gently. The woman slept like the dead. “Bethany, this is your last chance to go to the bathroom.”

“What?” She said sleepily and stretched. Her nipples pebbled against the t-shirt and he reminded himself they needed to get home. This was not the time or place to start making out again.

“We’re just outside of Salt Lake City, It’s a straight haul from here, and I shouldn’t have to stop again for gas.” He smiled at her and helped her out of the truck. She stretched her arms and legs, going up on tiptoe giving him a fabulous view of those breasts.

“It’s chilly.” She rubbed her arms.

“Here.” He fished out her jacket. “Do you want anything to drink or eat sweetheart?”

She nodded sending her long brown curls bouncing. Her sleepy eyes blinked, and she leaned into his chest. He was surprised by the gesture. Aside from when she was trying to have sex, she did not really touch him. Then he realized she was just trying to get warm. She did not wrap her arms around him; instead, she kept them tucked in tight against herself. “Come on. Let’s get in and get out. We’ll be home in about five hours.”

“It’s late.” She followed him into the gas station.

It was not his idea to leave right away, it was hers. They had woken up late, confronted her friends. She took an hour in the shower and then another to eat the breakfast he had to beg the kitchen to make at lunchtime. It was almost two when they finally left. He was exhausted, and here she was complaining? “Yes, it is late. Once we get home, we can get right in bed and sleep till noon tomorrow. I promise.”

He kissed her forehead and motioned toward the bathroom sign. “We’ll meet right here okay?”

Bethany nodded. She did not look convinced as she headed off into the ladies room.

Jack had grabbed two Coca Cola's, a large bag of Corn Chips and a couple Slim-Jims. She took one look at his selection and put all of it but one Coke back. She returned with a Diet Coke, a bottle of water, 2 pre-packed bagels with cream cheese, and a Hershey bar.

"What am I supposed to eat?" He asked as he took in the selection she placed on the counter.

"This. It's much better than the grease and junk you were going to eat. You'd stink up the truck with that stuff." She grabbed her soda and opened it as the cashier rang them up.

"Don't try to change me woman." He laughed as he grabbed another Slim-Jim from the counter display.

"Those are so gross." She scrunched her nose. "I'm not kissing you if you eat it."

"Sat right?" He picked up the bag and followed her back out to the truck. He had pumped the gas before waking her so they were all set to go.

"It's really beautiful out here." She looked up at the night sky.

"This is nothing. Wait till we get home. You won't believe the stars you can see when no lights are around." Jack realized he was getting a little too melodramatic and straightened. "I mean it's good, it's the sky and all."

She laughed as though he just told a joke. He helped her in the truck handed her the bag of groceries then walked around to his side. He watched her toss his Slim-Jim out the window toward the trash can.

After settling in, and driving a ways down the highway, he asked for it.

"Huh, they must not have put it in the bag." She looked off to the right as she said it. Good. Now he knew what face she made when she lied.

"Really? Because I put it in the bag myself." He wanted to see how far she would go. Moreover, he wanted to know why she tossed it.

"Oh, well. It must have fallen out." She did the same little look with her eyes.

"I saw you toss it."

“Oh. Well in that case, I uh, sorta dropped it out the window back at the gas station.” She fidgeted. He wondered what she thought he was likely to do over a stupid Slim-Jim.

“Why?”

“It’s bad for you, has lots of calories, it’s processed, and it stinks. You can’t eat stuff like that without eventually paying the price.” She frowned at him. Her voice sounded sincere.

“How do you know?” He looked at her and realized he just stepped into something he was not aiming for. Her expression turned sad, and then quickly turned hostile.

“How do you think I know? I’m fat. And you know what, I feel really good about my body right now because I used to be fatter.” She glared at him. He regretted making an issue over the stupid piece of greasy junk food. Hell, he really did not like the damn things. He only ate them on road trips because Heath always brought them back to the car. It seemed wrong to drive through three states and not have the traditional gas station junk food to eat.

“Bethany, you’re not fat. Trust me. You have a great body, a real body with curves. But that’s not why you threw out the Slim-Jim because you didn’t throw out the Hershey bar.” He called her bluff. She was not going to make him feel bad about her weight. Women were known to be sensitive over weight issues even if they were no bigger around than a stick.

She opened her pretty little mouth then shut it.

“Just tell me the truth.”

“They’re gross, and I didn’t want you to eat it.” She said exasperated.

“Why?”

“Jesus Jack, because I still want to kiss you! Okay, I want to be able to kiss you and not have to worry about tasting that awful thing.” She crossed her arms and sighed heavy in frustration. “I swear you are such a...”

“A what?” He was torn between being mad about her lying to him over something stupid, and being flattered she did it so she could have her way with him.

“A man.” She said it like it was a bad thing.

He laughed.

“Come here sweetheart.” He stretched out his arm toward her.

“No.” She looked at him with an evil glare.

“Don’t make me pull over.”

“Are you threatening me?” She genuinely seemed shocked. “Jack?”

“Threatening to bend you over my knee, maybe. But I would never put a hand on you in anger, sweetheart.” He watched her relax. Had she thought him capable of striking a woman? “You didn’t think...”

“No. I didn’t.” As she said it, her eyes darted. *Damn it!*

“Bethany, has someone hit you before?” He felt his gut twist and he knew she was going to lie to him before her lips moved. God help the man if he ever met him.

“No.” She undid her seat belt and slid over to him. Once she buckled into the middle seat, he placed his arm around her and pulled her close. Who could hit such a sweet little thing? She had fire, a sassy mouth, and a lot of nerve to throw his food out the window, but she also had passion, and heart.

“I guess I never have to worry about you kissing Heath.” He snorted.

“Why would I kiss your brother?” She leaned into him keeping her hands in her lap. He kissed the top of her head and squeezed her a moment.

“You wouldn’t, he eats those things like candy. But one old girlfriend did, back in high school.” He laughed. It was not funny at the time but he should have seen it coming a mile away.

“Tell me about it.” She relaxed against him. He started up the story about Heath and his other high school sweetheart, Chance. About half way through he heard her snoring. Low and soft. He looked down and her arm was wrapped around him. Her neck might end up sore from the position but he liked having her close so he did not bother to wake or move her.

Chapter 7

Bethany awoke to some of the loudest noises she had ever heard. It was like a herd of buffalo were running through her mind. As she sat up, she realized she was in a bed. A big bed. And she was alone. Her eyes adjusted as she took in the very masculine surroundings. There were log cabin style walls, wood floor, huge ceiling, even the bed was wood. It was beautiful, no doubt about it. The room looked like it belonged in an expensive retreat, or vacation house. The noise sounded again. A big thump, another thump.

She wondered if she should stay in the bed and wait for Jack to return. Or go see what the hell was going on outside the door. More noise sounded and a bunch of masculine laughs followed. The sound of laughter was all it took. How dare he leave her in bed alone!

She got out of the bed and realized she was butt ass naked. *I really needed to sleep lighter.* There was no telling what Jack could have done to her. Somehow, she knew he did not do anything except undress her and tuck her in.

Expecting to find her stuff in the closet, she opened the door. Clothes were hanging in there all right. Jack's clothes. Her suitcases were nowhere in sight.

With no other choice, she pulled one of the flannel shirts off the hanger and put it on. Lucky for her Jack was a big man. The shirt hung mid thigh and covered her completely as she buttoned it up.

Taking a breath, she inhaled the smell of a mild detergent or fabric softener on his clothes. Squaring her shoulders, determined to face whatever was on the other side of the door with the same brave face she gives everyone, she turned the knob. The bedroom led to a small hall. Voices seemed to be coming from one direction, but straight ahead was the living room. She decided to go straight into the living room area.

Big windows opened up to a breath taking view. The morning breeze filtered through carrying the sweet smell of summer on the air. As she wistfully tried to take in the scenery, she heard the thumping again.

She barely had time to see it before it sounded like thunder rolling around in the next room on the floor. She followed the sounds of who knew what. She heard the men talking, but she could not hear what they said over the commotion. Stepping into the next doorway, she found everyone had gathered in the big country kitchen.

Three big men and two gigantic dogs were there. The dogs were running around wild, jumping and playing. She had never seen a Great Dane up close before. She met two at once this morning. They stopped tugging on either side of the same rope. They looked at her for a heartbeat, and all of a sudden they ran over.

“Jack?” She took a couple steps back as the dogs advanced.

“Big Blue, Jessie Boy!” Jack shouted as the two big dogs decided to welcome Bethany to the family. Blue jumped up on her, effectively knocking her down. Jessie stepped on her and proceeded to lick her face. While Blue tried to get Jessie aside so he could greet her, Bethany tried to escape. High feminine squeals, matched the hands working to keep the shirt from revealing her.

Poor thing, she turned over after Jessie let up and tried to crawl back into the living room. Her decision gave him, the dogs, and his two nosy brothers a great view of her ass.

“Damn it!” He shouted as she continued to squeal and the dogs continued to lick and paw at her.

“Sit!” He reached for the dogs collars and gave them both a yank. Not hard, but enough to halt them. “Stay.”

They both remained like good dogs. He reached for Bethany who had almost made it to her feet. “Sweetheart, I am so sorry...”

“Jack.” And so much warning was in her tone.

“Oh don’t be mad, they were just trying to welcome you.” Heath said and leaned against the hall doorway.

“Heath.” Jack laced his own words with warning. Then he spoke to her in a much softer voice. “Let me help you up.”

She stood on her own steam and faced the crowd. Jack wanted to kick himself for not waking her up earlier, but she seemed so peaceful sleeping.

“Where are my clothes?” Bethany asked, ignoring the gawks of everyone around her. The two dogs sat still but looked as though they desperately wanted to jump on her again.

“How many times have you heard that one?” Another male voice sounded. Heath, apparently, moved aside so Rafe, she imagined, could step in.

“Rafe.” Jack was looking at her with pleading eyes and warning his brothers with his tone.

“So where did Jack pick you up, sweetheart?” Heath asked.

Her heart sank. They all called women sweetheart. Here she had fooled herself into thinking Jack used it as an endearing term. Stupid, stupid!

“That’s my wife you’re talking to.” Jack said and turned away from her to face his brothers. The two Great Danes then turned eyes to Heath and growled.

“The hell you say.” Rafe clapped. “Well shit, Jack. We thought she was just another one-night stand. Come on out here, girl, let us get a good look at you.”

“I got a good look at her.” Heath teased.

Scoundrels, the whole lot of them!

Jack took a step forward with a curse. She grabbed his arm. No way was she going to have him fighting them, especially since they were going to have to live together at least a couple weeks. Maybe it would only be days if this were any indication of their hospitality.

“Jack, it’s okay. I’m sure he wasn’t raised to be a prick, he just is.” She stepped up beside him, put her arm around his waist, and faced the two brothers.

“I like her!” Rafe clapped. “Woman’s got fire. So where did you meet?”

Heath stood there with a hint of blush creeping over his cheeks. She could see he was not going to be the most fun to be around. Rafe on the other hand seemed unalarmed and just fine with everything. Like his brother got married on a regular

basis or something. Maybe he was just one of those people who took everything in stride.

“Online.” She blurted before Jack could respond. “We’ve been e-mailing for about six months, decided to go to Vegas and once we met, well. Here I am.”

“Online?” Heath lifted off the doorframe and gave her a look letting her know he was not buying it one bit.

“That’s what we plan to tell everyone anyways.” Jack squeezed her shoulder and gave her the same look his brothers were giving her. Was he planning on telling them she was nothing? Just there for three months? A joke? Then he explained to them. “It makes it less shocking than the fact we had a few shots of tequila and fell crazy in love with each other.”

“Love?” Heath snorted. “You drink a couple shots this morning?”

Heath lifted from the doorframe and left the room laughing.

“Ah, don’t pay him any attention...”

“Bethany.” She supplied to Rafe.

“Bethany, yes, nice name. Well, Heath is a little, what we like to call damaged goods, if you know what I mean.” Rafe looked over his shoulder toward the doorway as if Heath might hear. “Had his heart broke, been a bitter bastard ever since.”

“Oh.” She felt bad. How could she not? Here she was kicking him out of his home, though he had one of his own to go to, and she would be gone in a few months anyways.

“Thanks Rafe. Now she thinks he’s always an ass.” Jack squeezed her again.

“He isn’t?” Rafe chuckled. “I’ll make you some breakfast B. What do you like?”

“Don’t go to any trouble on my account.”

“Steak and eggs it is then.” Rafe headed back to the kitchen.

She looked at the last two men facing her. The two Great Danes. Their tails thumped against the floor and she realized these were Jacks dogs, not his brothers, and one of the three rules was not to mess with his dogs.

“Are they going to bite me?” She had never been around animals. Her parents did not have time for animals. How could they when they did not have time for her?

“No.” He laughed. “But you can’t run from them or let them know you’re nervous. They just want to smell you and say hi.”

“Okay.” She looked up at her new hero. Willing to fight his brothers, jumping up to tame his wild dogs, she could learn to trust him a little.

“Come here boys.” Jack called and they were on their feet in a flash. “Now be nice.”

She held out her hand and they both tried to nuzzle it. She gave them each a hand and realized they just wanted to be pet. “They are very friendly.”

“Yes, they are. Big Blue is blind in his left eye, and Jessie Boy has one leg just barely shorter than the other on the back. Bubba found them one morning at his feed shop. Tried to keep them but as they got bigger they got into everything, so I brought them home with me.” Jack smiled and patted his chest. Big Blue jumped up and placed his paws on his shoulders. The dog stood eye to eye. “He’s going to be taller than me pretty soon.”

“What do you mean? They are huge now.” Bethany was touched by how he got the dogs. Was he always so responsible? Was he always taking in strays? First the dogs, and now her?

“Only two years old.” He hugged the dog and patted his back. “Down.”

She watched the dogs interact with him and realized when they were growling at Heath, it was no joke. If Jack wanted them to, they would have bitten his brother.

“Come on. Let’s get some clothes on you.” Jack took her hand and led her back to the bedroom.

“I looked in the closet.”

“My closet. Yours is on the other side.” He shook his head at her. Like she knew that!

“What the hell do you make of this?” Heath asked Rafe as he watched him pull out the skillet and turn on the stove.

“I think he’s in for a wild ride.” Rafe laughed.

“You think light of everything. That woman could screw up our future here.” Heath sat at the table. He wished it were Monday, he could just go to work.

“No. Jack is always the one to start things. He always makes the first move. So if he married her then he has good reason. I know he put his notice in over at Elroy’s, told him he was dedicating all of his time and energy to his own ranch.” Rafe placed two large steaks in the skillet then continued. “She is here for three months. We know that much for sure. But we don’t know if she knows, and we won’t bring it up. So don’t you screw it up for all of us by being a dick to her! She’s not Chance.”

“Don’t say her name!” Heath snarled. Damn woman, he hated to hear her name. What she had done to him was unforgivable. He hoped Bethany did not do the same thing to Jack.

“Good Lord Heath it’s been almost a year. Divorce the woman or go track her down, but you gotta shit or get off the pot man.” Rafe flipped the steaks. “You think she likes it rare or well done?”

Heath shrugged. “You know you’re a fine one to talk about making things happen.”

“It’s different.” Rafe warned.

“How is it different?” Heath crossed his arms.

“Layla has two kids, an ex-husband who’s a drunk, and moved here through some woman rescue program, organization, or something.” Rafe shrugged, put the steaks on a plate, and put two more in the skillet.

“So she says.” Heath did not trust any woman before Chance walked out on him, he sure did not trust them after.

“You don’t know her like I do.” Rafe flipped the steaks.

“I know a lot about women.” Heath said distinctly. “I know the only one I can trust is in Florida.”

“Why did you tell my brothers we met online?” He asked as he pointed out the closet on the opposite side of the large bedroom.

“I don’t know. I was afraid you would tell them we were business partners, and at the end of three months I was out of here.” She knew now she could not lie to Jack. He was in tune to her somehow. She stared, he knew it. She lied. He picked right up on it.

She had lied a lot in her life. She lied to her parents about Douglas Rainey, when she told them he was a nice guy. It is what her father wanted to hear. And she tried to believe it. Then the night she confronted him about Katie, he smacked her. He immediately apologized and swore it was the first time, but Bethany did not believe him. So she told Malina, the only person she could trust. The old woman urged her to leave. She had been planning to leave for years. Left with no choice, she jumped on the offer to go to Vegas for the bachelorette party. “How could I know what you’ve told them?”

“I think it would be rude of me to point that out. They probably suspect you don’t know about the money, and that’s fine by me. But as far as anyone is concerned, we are in love, and couldn’t help it. So what if we’re not. We seem to get along fine.” He said as she walked into the closet.

It was a full walk in closet. Bethany was surprised to find something this grand and more so, he was giving it up for her. “I can’t believe you’re giving up this closet.”

“I’m not. It’s a woman’s closet. My grandpa always said a woman had to have a place for her things. A secret place. So each house has this closet in the master bedroom.” He continued. “You could probably live in there if I hooked up a refrigerator and stove.”

“It’s magnificent.” She realized how dusty it was. The room was obviously never used and really was impressive. Already set up for boxes and shoes, two bars for different rows of clothes on one side, one long bar on the other.

“Glad you like it.” Jack called out.

She opened her suitcase and pulled out some clothes. He seemed to wear a lot of jeans and she imagined it was practical for the ranch. Pulling on underwear, she asked a silly question. “What should I wear?”

“Something else in addition to my shirt.” He laughed.

She grabbed one of the two pair of jeans she had packed and slid them on. She did not take off his shirt, but she did put on a bra underneath it. Socks and tennis shoes seemed fine for the unattractive outfit.

“What do you think?” She entered the room and found Jack lying on the bed. His feet were still on the floor but he was obviously tired. “Are you awake?”

“Yes.” Jack sat up. Looked her over, head to toe. She realized then she had not brushed her hair or anything. “You look great.”

“Liar.” Bethany snorted. “Where is the bathroom?”

“Right there.” Jack pointed at yet another door on what he apparently thought was her side of the room.

“Wait for me?” Bethany did not want to go back out there without him.

“All right.” Jack said as he lay back on the bed.

Bethany entered the bathroom and was faced with more of the same. She took in the double vanity sink, a large round tub with Jacuzzi, a walk in shower and the commode offset by a wall for privacy. Jack either had more money than he let on or ranching was the most expensive business to start up ever. She had no idea which, but she wanted to know more. The last thing she wanted was to fall into another money trap.

Chapter 8

Rafe was not kidding when he said steak and eggs.

Bethany sat at the large table and looked at the plate in front of her. A huge steak and a pile of scrambled eggs covered the plate entirely. The three men dug in and were eating as though this was a typical breakfast.

“You don’t like it?” Rafe asked. “I should have cooked it less. Layla likes her steak well done so I cooked yours well done.”

“No, no, it’s fine. I just, well it’s a lot for breakfast.” She took another bite of the eggs. No way could she finish them, and the steak was out of the question.

“I’ll eat what you don’t, don’t worry, sweetheart.” Jack reached over and rubbed her back.

“So Bethany, right?” Heath asked.

“Yes.” She looked him eye to eye. Jack was right. She could not back down from any of the dogs in the house. His older brother included. When he stroked her back, he made her feel loved and appreciated, yet he had already told her he did not love her. She could not keep letting him touch her. It mixed up her signals, made her feel things that were not there.

“What do you do exactly?” Heath asked.

It was a genuine question. But one she did not have an answer to. She looked at Jack but realized he did not know either. She could not lie like she wanted to, Jack would know. Besides, she already had enough skeletons in her closet to fill up the one he just gave her, no need adding more. “Nothing.”

“Surely you do something.” Rafe laughed uncomfortably.

“No, actually I don’t. I have an education. I’ve just never had a job.” She put on her best so what attitude.

“Never?” Heath looked to Jack. “And how did you get to Vegas?”

“I got on a plane.” Bethany answered. Jack snorted.

“I’m glad you think it’s funny, Jack. We all know you just met her. What do you know about her?” Heath asked.

“I know as a grown man I don’t need my big brothers approval, and as my wife, she doesn’t either.” Jack said it and she sensed the tension in the air again. Something bigger than her marriage was between them she just did not know what.

“So what do you want to know, Heath?” She asked but continued before he could respond. “No. I’ve never had a job. I’m a Dodson, my daddy is rich, and I never had to work. I went to Vegas for a bachelorette party, I met Jack, he rocked my world, and here I am.”

Rafe tried to hold back his laugh. Jack looked at her with a distinct smile of approval and even Heath tilted his lips in a grin.

“That was a little more information than I wanted. Please understand, we don’t have a lot of luck with women around here. Our mother didn’t like it here, but stayed for my dad and then us. My sister is nineteen and married. My own wife ran out on our wedding night.” Heath caught himself. “Just...I don’t trust women. They have a tendency to bring out the worst in me.”

“It’s true.” Rafe agreed. “But they bring out the best in me, sweetheart.”

“Don’t call her sweetheart.” Jack must have kicked Rafe under the table because he yelped. “Only I can call her sweetheart, unless you want me calling Layla sweetheart...”

“Don’t you dare.” Rafe laughed and rubbed his shin under the table. “Speaking of my goddess I need to get over there. She has to work today and the kids are expecting me.”

“Your kids?” She watched Rafe stand and clear his own plate. The men seemed so self-sufficient. Cooking, cleaning, and certainly the house was kept up. She had a new appreciation for them. Yes, all three were gorgeous. The longer she looked at them the more resemblances she could see. Heath had the longest hair, and no dimples. Rafe had shorter hair and one dimple. Then Jack, he had the shortest hair and two dimples. A woman could drown in this house of hunks.

“Not yet, but someday they will be.” He grabbed his hat off the large island in the center of the kitchen and headed out.

“You call Jan yet?” Heath looked at Jack. “She will be hurt if you don’t tell her.”

“She didn’t tell us.” He smiled as he stood then headed to the phone.

“You keep your eye on him.” Heath warned. “He’s a wild one. Don’t let him talk you into something you’re not ready for.”

“Like marriage?” She bit her lips not to laugh. Under Heath’s big rough surface, he seemed to be a mother bear, genuinely concerned about his little brother.

“Little late for that, I’d think. More like ranching. The three of us are committed to it, but its hard work and there are a lot of things a woman could get hurt doing. Ask Jan.” Heath then stood, walked to the island, picked up his cowboy hat, and headed out.

“Do you guys always wear those hats?” She asked but as Jack started to answer he stopped, held up a finger and started talking to the phone.

“Jan. Hey, just wanted you to know I got married this weekend.” Jack smiled. “No, I’m not yanking your chain she’s sitting right here. No. No.”

Bethany did not like all of the “no’s” coming out of his mouth. It was frustrating to only get one side of the conversation.

“Yes. Alright. See you then.” Jack hung up the phone.

“Do you want to see the rest of the house or do you want to see the outside?” He picked up his hat letting her know his preference.

“I’d love to go out and take a look around.” She smiled, picked up both of their plates and Heath’s then headed to the sink.

“Thanks, sweetheart.” He took the top plate with the food on it and headed to the back door. “They would die if I threw a whole steak away.”

“Oh.” She watched him put her cut up steak in two bowls. She had cut it up trying to make it look like she was eating it. She fooled no one.

“Let’s go.” He winked.

Bethany was handling herself pretty good against his brothers. It was a relief since he was not quite sure how they were going to take it. Jan still did not believe him but not many people would. He had lived life as quite a bachelor. Heath actually slipped and mentioned his own marriage. A subject so taboo, no one spoke of it, or

Chance. Apparently, Bethany did not put two and two together when he told her about it on the way, but she had fallen asleep somewhere along the line.

She stepped out of the garage and into the afternoon sun. Her reaction made his chest swell with pride and his heart swell with hope. She liked it. But could she love it?

“Oh, Jack.” She grabbed his arm. “It’s beautiful. It’s huge.”

“Come on, let’s take a walk.” Jack whistled and the two big dogs came running. “They were on the front porch.”

“This house is gorgeous Jack.” She grabbed his arm tighter as the dogs closed in.

“Treats. Go get em.” He called to the dogs. She was still a little nervous but luckily, they wore themselves out during the day and chose to stay in the garage at night. If she had any idea they were sniffing her like crazy when he carried her inside she would probably freak out.

“They are so big.” Bethany eased her grip as the dogs passed.

“Babies. You’ll get used to them. And in no time they will be listening to you like they listen to me.” He turned to point at the house. “This is it. Our home. Up there, is where Heath’s house is.”

Bethany put her hand up to shield her eyes from the sun and looked in the direction he was pointing.

“Over there is Jan’s and up a bit in the same direction is Rafe’s. You can’t really see much from here but you get the feel of it. Right there, is the guest lot. All those little brown bumps, they’re cabins, and over there is the stables. I can house three hundred horses in those stables. Right now there is only twenty.” He stopped looking at the ranch and looked at Bethany.

“So all this land is yours?” Her mouth was a little open and her face held shock.

“I told you, it’s a big deal. I need the inheritance so I can hire some staff, get some more horses, set some of the cabins up with a few more amenities. Then I have to get the license, repair some roofs and windows, just general things we have been working on over the years but now it will all get done.”

“You have horses?” Bethany lit up like a little girl with the question. Apparently, the mention of horses sparked her interest.

“You know you look better to me every minute I’m with you.” He tugged at his flannel shirt she was wearing and motioned toward the stables. He never wondered how a woman would look in his clothes. This woman looked damn fine.

“How did I look when you met me if I look better now?” She looked down at her attire and laughed as they walked.

“I don’t know, you looked, like a princess or something. I thought to myself, what in the world is this little cupcake doing in a country bar? Then you came over and put your moves on me.” Jack laughed.

“Moves?” Bethany laughed, too. “I fell off a bar stool.”

“And I caught you. You could have fallen into the other guy.” He teased.

“Thank God I didn’t.” Her admission stopped him in his tracks.

“Do you mean that?” He looked down into her soft green eyes, pushed a loose curl behind her ear, and smiled.

“Yes. I like you. You’re the most decent man I’ve ever met, so far.” She bit her lower lip as she teased.

“So far?” He followed as she headed to the barn.

“Yes. You could still turn out to be a jerk!” She laughed and took off running.

He gave her a head start. Then he chased her. Like a lovesick teen, chasing a girl into the barn. But when he got there, she was standing stock still, her hands at her heart and he feared she was not used to running.

“Jack, look at them.” Bethany breathed hard as she looked down the row of horses.

“I look at them every day. You’re from Kentucky, surely you’ve seen horses.” He walked past her to the first stall.

“Just at the Derby. My father wouldn’t let me actually go down and see them though, he didn’t like animals.”

She moved to stand next to him. He looked down at her. She was chewing her lower lip and looking at his favorite horse like she just fell in love.

“This is Jumper.” He had named the horse according to his affinity for jumping things.

“What kind of horse is he?” She did exactly the same thing he did. Her hand came up slowly and stroked Jumper on the cheek.

“A Morgan, did you know the American Morgan can be traced back to one horse?” He watched carefully as Jumper let Bethany touch him. She had no idea how impressed he was. Jumper tried to nip everyone, including him sometimes. “Lucky guy.”

“Jack.” She rolled her eyes at him. Apparently, he was not as funny as he thought he was.

“Come on before he bites you.” Jack tugged her by the hand as he headed to the next stall. “This is Sheba, a Tennessee walker. If you want to ride, this is the horse I would put you on.”

“What if I wanted to ride Jumper? He looks so sweet.” She looked at Sheba and got the same expression of awe. “Look at her.”

“She won’t jump and throw you off. I’d like you to live long enough to meet the rest of my family, maybe grow old, and have some kids. I put you on Jumper, all that is out the window.” Jack kissed Sheba above her nose. “You’re a sweet girl aren’t you, darling? Yes you are.”

“She lets you get so close?” Bethany moved closer and the horse mouthed her hand. No teeth just lips.

“She’s kissing you. Very good sign.” He turned his attention to Jumper who neighed loudly. “Jealous, old boy? You were going to bite her.”

“No he was not.” She said with certainty. “You’re not scaring me, Jack Johnson. These horses wouldn’t hurt a soul.”

He shrugged his shoulders. Hopefully, she would not have to keep learning about animals the hard way. “Let’s let them back out to the pasture. Come on.”

He walked to the front of the barn and closed the door, leaving only the back side open. He then opened the stall next to Sheba’s and then the next, Bethany watched him open two then she opened the next one on her own. Helping him.

“Why don’t you let Jumper and Sheba out?” She asked as she worked the next gate.

“I’ll show you.” He put a rope lead around the Arabian’s long white neck and the line of horses came out of their stalls and followed his lead. “Stay with me, if they get antsy you might get kicked.”

“Jack.”

Bethany said his name as though she were tired of him warning her. But the last thing he wanted was for her to find out today was horses kick, they bite, and if she got in their way they would push her, especially if they knew they could. None of his animals were mean, not even Jumper, but they lived by a hierarchy, and Bethany was not established in their chain of command.

“Open the gate, will ya?” Jack pointed ahead. She jogged to the gate. Two reasons he asked her to do it. One, because the White Queen, the Arabian he had harnessed, did not like to back up and wait for the gate to open, and two, Bethany bounced and jiggled in great places when she ran. “Thank you.”

He let the White Queen go and smacked her on the hindquarter letting her know she could take off now. The horse loved to run, itched to do it, the reason why she went out first. She would plow through everyone else otherwise. “Watch out now.”

The horses filed past. As they got to the end of the corral and made their way to the pasture, Jack turned to Bethany. She was smiling in wild wonderment, her eyes as big and bright as a kid on Christmas. “Wait here, when you see me coming, open the gate.”

“Okay.” Bethany shrugged and looked back out toward the horses.

Jack disappeared back into the barn. She inhaled the crisp clean air and looked around at the wide-open space, now her home. *Her home* with horses, cabins, dogs, family, a beautiful house, and a walk in closet...what more could a girl ask for?

“Open the gate, sweetheart.” He called and she snapped out of her daydream, only everything still looked the same. She pulled open the gate and Sheba walked

past. Jumper followed. "Now you made it seem like he's a handful. He's following her like a puppy dog."

"Yes he is." She watched him close the gate. They stood there next to each other looking at the two horses as they made their way to the field. He leaned over. His scent carried on the breeze. Her stomach tingled with expectation. "Watch when he gets there."

She watched as the two entered the field. Jumper started jumping. The horse ran, trotted, kicked, and well, jumped. "What in the world?"

"She's his girl. He won't follow any other horse, and he will bite or kick any male dumb enough to come near her. He bit her once. She kicked the shit out of him and I thought for sure she broke his back leg. But no, he just limps now and then to get attention. She falls for it every time. This is just to show her he's still got it." He laughed a hearty laugh. "Reminds me of my brother if you want to know the truth."

"Heath?" She knew it was Heath, the man practically oozed testosterone.

He nodded. The sun did amazing things to his eyes. The starburst of red and gold glinted in the brown pools. The man had the most seductive eyes. She could barely pay attention to what he said. "Makes an impression doesn't he?"

"Yes, he does." She smiled a secret smile. Here she was in her own little fantasy. She turned her attention back to the horses and watched as Jumper finally settled down. He walked away from everyone else. "He's not even standing next to her."

"But he's not too far away from her either. She stands with the other females. Jumper thinks he's got a harem but the White Queen belongs to Shadow. He's the solid black one over there."

"How do you remember all their names, the horses, the dogs, the family, I can't keep up." She followed Jack back into the barn. He did not open the front door. Instead, he detoured up a ladder. Once at the top he looked down as though he expected her to be right behind him.

"What are you waiting for?" He wiggled his eyebrows and she knew he wanted her up there.

“I don’t like heights.” She said as she grabbed onto the ladder. Like them or not she wanted to know what he had in mind.

“It’s not high.” He declared as he disappeared to the loft. Looking down she decided it was definitely high enough!

Once she reached the top, she found him laid back in some hay. It was apparently a storage area with lots of hay, feed, and equipment. “What do you think you’re going to do up here?”

“Relax. Talk a while. Come sit next to me.” He held out his hand and she took it.

He pulled her down into the hay with him and hugged her tight. They were married, they had had sex more than once, but the intimacy of being held seemed awkward. Bethany was not sure she wanted to make their relationship more than physical since it was ending in three months time.

“What’s wrong?” He let her loose and she lay back next to him.

“Nothing. I guess I’m not a touchy feely kind of girl.” Her laugh fell flat.

“I see.” He stared at the ceiling for long moments. She was not sure if he was mad, hurt, or what.

Minutes ticked by and the silence was killing her. The closeness was unbearable. She was lying there, not touching him, and suddenly all she could think about was touching him. “Jack, I didn’t mean I don’t want you to touch me at all, I just meant that I’m not used to...you know, being held and stuff. It makes me think things are different when they are still the same.”

“I see.” He said bluntly and continued staring at the ceiling. His left leg propped up, his hands folded neatly on his abdomen.

Seconds turned to minutes. She could not fight it anymore. The longer he remained silent and not touching her the crazier she became with the need to be touched. Bethany could feel her hand inching toward him. Her fingers touched his elbow and then slid over his forearm. Each hair she touched directed her toward his hand. Once there, she laced her fingers on top of his. “Jack?”

He made a grunting noise as a response.

“Jack,” she thought about it. She did not want to ask, but apparently, he was not going to do it otherwise. “Will you hold me?”

“Are you sure you want me to? Don’t do it because I want you to, do it because you want to. If you don’t want to have sex anymore then fine. I understand, but you have to tell me.” He shifted to face her. His serious expression made his masculine features stand out more.

He ran his hand down the side of her arm. She watched his whiskey brown eyes soften as he leaned in for a kiss. Her heart began to race. Her body betrayed every thought her head sent to it. She did not want this. She did not want to like him so much. She never planned to like his house, his animals, or his stupid big brothers.

But once Jack’s lips met hers, everything else went out the window. The only thoughts she had were of Jack, his soft lips, his warm wet mouth, and his long tongue.

She sighed in surrender to his kiss. The man had a way of kissing and it chased everything else away.

His heavy body settled over her and he wrapped his arms around her back lifting her closer to him. He did not seem to be in a hurry to get her clothes off, or do anything else besides kiss her.

She felt it as it moved up her throat and into his mouth, a moan of pure enjoyment, of complete satisfaction. And as always he pulled back, nipped her lower lip and smiled his bright smile, full dimples, and dared her to resist him.

“You are the devil, Jack Johnson.” Bethany was limp, warm, and ready to do whatever he had in mind. And he knew it.

“Don’t say that. I just want to make you happy, sweetheart. If you don’t want me...”

“I want you. I want you too much. It’s confusing because I know it’s going to end. My head tells me that I shouldn’t want you, my body can’t seem to resist.” She sighed, traced his cheek with her fingers. It was no use. She wanted him. Should, should not, it really did not matter. No one had ever made her feel as alive as Jack did.

“Let’s just take it one day at a time.” He whispered against her lips and then kissed her silly all over again. His hand moved to her breast.

At the same time, a loud sound came from downstairs. The sunlight filtered back through the main door to the stables.

“Shh.” He covered her mouth. A woman’s voice could be heard.

“I don’t know who let them back out. It’s my day to feed them.” The woman said.

“Well be thankful one of them helped you out.” A man said to her.

“Buck, they are always trying to help me out. I can pull my own weight around here.” Jan, the sister, and her husband, Buck, were below them. Jack could apparently see them from his angle and he still had his hand on her mouth. Bethany bit his finger and he moved it, giving her a disapproving look before smiling.

“You are the most hard headed woman.” Buck sounded exasperated. Maybe the whole Johnson family was exhausting.

“Jerk.” Jan apparently did something as she said it because he laughed but said ouch.

“I’m just teasing you.” Buck soothed.

“So, the horses are out, and we’re here, just the two of us. What do you want to play? Cowgirl ropes cowboy, or the other way around?” Jan’s voice changed and Bethany tried not to laugh as Jack’s face blushed. He looked mortified. Then he looked angry.

“Get your hands off my sister!” He yelled as Bethany tightened her whole body against his rage, his voice rung in her ears. By the time she sat up, he was already on the ladder heading down. He was fast when he was angry.

“Jack!” She and Jan both yelled.

“Sorry, Jack.” Buck obviously felt embarrassed himself.

“We are grown and married. We can play whatever we like whenever. Besides, what were you doing up there? Huh? You and your little bimbo taking a roll in the hay?” Jan asked with such venom Bethany almost did not want to go down there. But she was not little, and definitely not a bimbo and no one was going to accuse her of being the latter.

“I’m not a bimbo.” Bethany said at the top of the ladder as Jack said she was not a bimbo at the bottom. She smiled. At least he would take up for her, though in this case it was true. “I have a masters’ degree from Ohio State University.”

“And you’re not blonde.” Jan looked shocked. Her auburn hair hung long down her back like a horsetail. Her brown eyes were rounded and perfectly set apart. She was almost as tall as Jack was and had a body like a supermodel. It made Bethany sick. “I...”

“I get it. It’s no big deal.” Bethany smiled. It had to be tough being so young. Buck stood behind her, blushing, his blonde hair, and blue eyes a stark contrast to the rest of the men. He was taller than Jack, and bigger. She doubted the three brothers really wanted to tangle with him. He had youth and about twenty pounds or more on his side. “You must be Jan and Buck. I’m Bethany.”

Jan and Buck both met her half way and shook hands. Buck was such a sweet cowboy; he tipped his hat, and called her ma’am. Bethany blushed. Jack harrumphed.

“So when will we get to really visit with you guys? Dinner, lunch?” Paying no attention to Jack, Bethany asked and the couple seemed surprised. “Jack?”

“What, they can come over anytime they like.” He sounded like a spoiled child and Bethany wanted to spank him.

“How about tomorrow?” She continued as if he really did not mind.

“We both work all week, but next Friday night would be fine. If the boys can behave.” Jan looked around Bethany to Jack.

“I didn’t shoot him.” Jack threw up his hands.

“You didn’t stop him either.” Jan crossed her arms and Buck shook his head. He was obviously over the incident but Jan was not.

“Jan honey, can we just let it drop?” Buck quietly asked.

“No. Not until they apologize.” Jan looked at Buck then back to Jack.

“Sure, as soon as you apologize for not inviting us to your wedding.” Jack now crossed his arms and mirrored her stance.

“I told you they were mad.” Buck again attempted to negotiate. “I don’t need an apology. I got you.”

“Good luck.” Jack mumbled.

“And good luck to you and your new bride. I’m sure she’s just wowed by all your charm and manners.” Jan meant it to be hurtful.

The only problem was Jack had been charming and using his manners, up until this moment when he was being defiant and rotten to his sister. Not like Jan was being all that loving back.

"I have been the perfect gentleman, Bethany is my wife Jan, not just some bimbo I brought over to screw in the hay loft." Jack then sidled up beside her and Bethany nodded in agreement. Though she now wondered exactly how many bimbos' he had screwed in the hay loft.

"And Jan's my wife. I'm young. I know. But I love her, and it would be easier for her if we all just got along." Buck had a quiet manner. It made a stark contrast to his size.

"I'm sorry Heath shot you in the ass, kid. He is too, ripped his heart out not to walk Jan down the aisle. He won't say it, but it did." Jack pressed his hand in the small of Bethany's back and started walking them out of the stables.

Once outside Bethany looked up at him. It took a lot for him to apologize, she could tell. His sister was almost crying through her anger and Jack apparently could not bear to see it.

"You're a good man, Jack Johnson." She liked saying his name. Jack Johnson, it rolled right off her lips. Bethany Johnson, Mrs. Jack Johnson. She placed her arm around his waist and leaned into him.

"Do I get some sort of reward for my apology? I only did it for you and Jan. I like the kid, but it was funny when Heath shot him in the ass." He squeezed her tight.

"Why did he shoot him?" She ignored his reward talk and did not find it funny one bit.

"He asked us if he could marry her." Jack chuckled. "Now, about my reward?"

"I didn't offer you any reward for doing the right thing." She teased.

"Then why did I do it? I should go back and throw a rock at him, hold on..."

"Jack!" She grabbed his belt loop as he turned around. "Behave. And maybe, if you're good the rest of the day I'll...make something for you."

"Make something?" He picked her up and put her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. "I'll make something for you all right."

“Jack!” She squealed in protest though she loved every minute of it. He carried her all the way to the house. It was an interesting view of the kitchen and living room, as she hung practically upside down. He did not stop until they were in the bedroom. He closed the door behind them.

“Will you put me down now?” She propped her head on her fist, resting her elbow in his back. Feigning boredom.

“Almost.” He said and carried her to the bathroom. There, he sat her on the large marble surface between the double sinks. His eyes danced as he looked at her. “Let’s take a bath.”

“What?” She blinked as the dizziness from being upside down subsided.

He did not respond at first. He was already turning the water on in the large Jacuzzi tub. “You will love this thing. The jets pulse out and hit every muscle like a masseuse massaging away any tension.”

As the water flowed from two faucets filling the tub quickly, he stripped.

He unclothed as if they had been getting naked in front of each other for years instead of days. “Come on.”

He stepped into the water then sat down and looked at her. “Will you get naked and get in here. I’m not trying to seduce you.”

“I didn’t say you were.” She stopped gawking at him. She hopped off the counter and moved out of sight to undress.

Chapter 9

Jack relaxed as the jets soothed aching muscles and relieved tension. Bethany was like a rollercoaster today, up one minute, down the next. Hell, she had him so confused seducing her was the last thing on his mind. He wanted to relax, but he wanted her close. She almost had him in the stables. First, she was not touching, and then she was all about touching. What a little tease she turned out to be.

When she stepped into the tub and sat next to him, he could feel her staring. Like a touch just stroking him from head to toe. He opened his eyes and sure enough, she was fixated on his penis. For a woman who did not want to be seduced she sure asked for it a lot. "See something you like?"

"I." She snapped her eyes up to meet his. She could not hide the flush of color creeping over her chest and neck.

Her cheeks blushed as she tried to cover herself by putting one hand over her lap and the other around her waist. She was not covering up her breasts or groin. She was hiding what he suspected were the areas she was self-conscious about, her stomach and thighs.

She was rounder than any other woman he dated, but she was not fat. More like healthy, and soft. He was not afraid to pick her up or play. He did not feel her hips jabbing him when he hugged her or every bone along her back and rib cage. He loved the way she felt.

"Put your foot up there like this." He ignored her self-consciousness.

"What?"

"Put your foot up here next to mine on this jet. It feels good." He watched her foot move next to his.

"I can't feel anything with your boat covering it." She teased.

"Oh." He moved his boat as she called it and watched her reaction. Bethany had very sensitive feet. He knew she would enjoy the pressure. Her toes flexed and

she moved a little closer. "I just love your toes. All pink and pretty, you got them dressed up like they are really going somewhere."

"They did go somewhere." Bethany gulped, put her other foot up next to the jet, and grabbed his knee.

"Are you all right?" He leaned over and whispered in her ear. She was turned on in a big way. "You seem a little...I don't know, maybe a little..."

"Yes. I am a little." Her voice was low, she bit her lower lip.

"Feels good doesn't it?" He asked and she nodded. He put his big boat foot back up over the jet knocking both of hers off the pulsing water. "Ah."

"Jack!" She shouted in surprise. She looked so put out, like he was supposed to let her have all the fun. The woman definitely could not hide her expressions. She would be lousy at poker.

"What?" He teased.

"Why are you being such a jerk?" She splashed him.

"You get water all over the place you're cleaning it up." He shrugged acting very much like a jerk. The jets had worked their magic and soothed sore muscles and stress. Bethany had worked her magic by amusing him, and turning him on again.

"Jack," She drawled his name and lowered her eyes to give him the same look all women give when they want something. "Doesn't all this warm water and pulsing jets make you want to lie back, relax, and maybe even...you know."

"No. I have no idea. Why don't you spell it out for me?" *Now look who was trying to seduce whom.*

"Well I was thinking maybe...if you want to that is, I mean I know I put you off in the stables, but it was about intimacy, this is about...sex." She tried to convince him there was a difference. And there was a difference, with other girls. He did not generally marry other women, bring them home, or ache to kiss them. From the moment she fell off the bar stool all he wanted to do was kiss her.

"I see." He nodded. "So what you want us to do over the next three months is fuck?"

"No!" Bethany gasped, her eyes bulged, and her lips rounded to a perfect little circle.

“Well that’s what sex is without intimacy. You’re a woman, you know you can’t keep sleeping with me and not have feelings. I don’t know. I might not mind if you do, to be honest. I like you, and I definitely like what we’ve been doing so far, but I’m not in love with you, and you’re not in love with me.” He thought real hard about what he was saying. It was entirely too soon to be talking about love. “We can’t be. So what we are in right now, is lust. And if you want to exhaust our lust over the next three months then I say we go for it.”

She would either buy it or not. He had not decided if he loved her or not, there was a lot to think about and more to know before he could make a decision. But lust, hell yeah he was in lust with Bethany. In three months time he would be well sated on her. Ready to part ways, and just call when the need arose. Or he would have her strung out on him like a drug addict, unable to part ways. Either way, he won.

Bethany blinked a few times, opened her mouth, shut it, opened it again with a new expression, shut it. Then finally said something.

“Why not?”

“So climb on up.” He pulled her by the hand and she straddled him, resting her knees on either side of his hips. “If you don’t want me hugging you and touching you outside the bedroom, tell me, but it will be damn hard to keep my hands to myself, understand?”

“Yes. I understand now.” She nodded.

Jack knew she was lying because she darted her eyes to the right when she said it. She did not understand a damn thing but what could he do about it? Giving up he cupped her face in his hands and brought her lips down to his. This she understood. She understood as soon as he kissed her, she would relax and let all of her fences down allowing him to run right through. Whoever hurt her, they did a great job at it. Bethany wanted to be sexual, but not intimate. She wanted to be free, but he knew if he left her in Vegas, she would have been lost.

As she eased down on his cock, he gripped her hips and moved to the center of the large tub. As he suspected she would, she stretched her legs wide putting her

feet on separate jets. Lifting her then seating himself completely inside with one thrust he said, "I'm glad I don't have any kinks."

"I'm giving you better access." She closed her eyes on a moan.

"You like it don't you?" He whispered as he kissed her neck. "It's okay. I like your kinks."

She nodded, unable to speak. He could feel her already trembling. Her thighs tightened, her back arched. Moans of pleasure became louder. "Mmm. Come for me, sweetheart."

He slid a hand between them and pressed her clit just slightly. She was already there it just added another stimulus to her over stimulated body. The warm bath water bubbled and pulsed around them from the jets, she had her sensitive feet getting full jet action, his cock was inside her and his lips teased her neck, breasts and lips in turn. One little touch on the swollen bud set her off like a rocket. She came like a wild woman, her feet moved from the jets to help balance her as she shook from it. Her face contorted and her nails bit into his biceps. "That's it Bethany, God I love it when you come."

"Mmm. Jack, it really was good." She slumped on his shoulder her nose in his neck. She was spent, lifeless. He felt pretty good about that. But he was not through with her yet.

"Glad to hear it. Now turn over." He slid back and turned the jets off.

"What?" Lazily she nuzzled him again, if only she could be so open when they were not having sex. Disgusted by his thoughts of snuggling, he pulled out a little then pushed back in. That got her attention. "Oh."

"Oh? Oh yeah, there are two of us in this equation." He lifted her off him completely. "Hold on to the side of the tub, put your foot there, and don't fall out."

"Gee thanks, Ja...Oh...Jack."

"Yes. Talk to me Bethany. Tell me you like it." He said as his breath hitched. Oh, he liked this position, deep, her womb tight around his cock, sucking it back in as he pulled out. "God you feel good."

"Do you like it, Jack?" She groaned as he hit her uterus with the head of his cock. "God Jack, it's so deep. You're so big."

“Tell me you like it.”

“I like it, Jack. Faster, yes, yes...oh God Jack! I can't, I'm going to come. I can't stand up...Jack!” Her knees gave out as she came. Her leg slipped off the edge and she pressed back against his thighs, getting herself as tight and as close as possible.

He spent, in long fast bursts. Every orgasm with her was better than the last. Every one threatened to take his knees out. His groans matched hers. He knew as it ended, as soon as she was able to sit up straight, she would be all wound up and inaccessible again. He hated to think about it. He hated the fact he wanted to cuddle with her, he wanted lay beside her and talk. Jesus, he felt like a woman! Bethany did not want any of it. She did not want intimacy, she just wanted to fuck.

The realization of his circumstances made him mad. He was a man damn it. He did not need to cuddle with her. He sure did not need her conversation. They had nothing other than the marriage agreement and sex in common anyways. In three months, both of those things would come to an end. Bethany would become a friend and possibly a lover. He had been lovers with Candice off and on for years. Why the hell was this eating him up?

Jack was out of the tub and drying off before she could stand up. He stormed out of the bathroom as she gingerly dried off. Once she stepped into the bedroom, the mood around them changed. He was already in jeans and pulling a t-shirt over his head.

“What's wrong with you?” she asked.

“Nothing. I need to do some work is all.” He pulled on his socks then shoes. She thought all cowboys ever wore were boots. But he just pulled on a pair of running shoes. “I'll be in the loft if you need me.”

And out the door he went.

Faced with her first real moment alone everything started to sink in. She looked at the solid wood door and knowing it was closed, gave in to the moment of privacy. She looked at the ring on her finger again. Holding it up to the afternoon light streaming through the picture window she realized just how beautiful it was. A smile spread across her face. She looked out the window and sighed.

“You are one lucky woman, Bethany Johnson.” She said aloud. Then the ring tone went off on her cell phone. The noise was faint, but she knew what it was.

Time to face her family.

“Hello.” She answered the phone and remained in the walk in closet for extra privacy.

“What is going on, young lady? Where the hell are you?” her mother asked.

“I’m home. My new home that is. And I am married.” Bethany said with finality.

“You’re what? Bethany Dodson, you get your butt back here right now. I don’t know what is going on but you have a fiancée back here in Kentucky and we have a business deal, and wedding plans, and...”

“Cancel them. Cancel it all. I am not coming back to Kentucky, mother. I am married. My name is not Dodson, anymore.” She could feel the power from taking the stand with her family. No, she was not theirs to give away as part of a business deal.

“You’re serious aren’t you? You really went off and married some poor man who has no idea what he’s gotten himself into, didn’t you? When your father finds him, he will destroy his name. Why would you do this to him?” Was her mother upset for Jack or her father? She could not tell.

“He better not try it mother. You know about him and Rosie. You know for the last thirty years I have been pulled out of the closet to pretend to be a happy family for the press, or business partners. And when the interview or lunch was over, I was put back away until the next time. You know she is in some of those pictures, with her father, on our birthdays. And I’ll tell you what other pictures she’s in...”

“Shut up! Just shut up. You know he had nothing to do with you as children!” her mother yelled.

“I know. I didn’t call him a pervert. But I won’t have to. He’s the one who called himself a family man. Hell, he may not even realize Rosie is Eddie’s daughter. But he sure realized she was old enough to have an affair with. How do you think Eddie will feel to find his trusted partner is having an affair with his daughter?” It was a hard punch to throw at her mother, but the woman had not been there for her at any time during her life. Even after she gave birth, all the pictures are of the nanny

feeding her, holding her, she was not a mother. She was just the woman who gave birth to her and taught her shopping cured everything. Not this, and not this time.

“You wouldn’t.” her mother gasped.

“Oh I would. I have the pictures. You can check the credit card bill if you like. The private investigators have been watching you both for months. Thanks for paying him by the way. And unless you want Emanuel to get a little visit from INS, I would tell your husband, my father, he better stay far from me and my husband, from now on.”

The lump in her throat was like a rock. There was no going back from this moment. Once she cut ties to her family, she cut ties to the purse strings as well. She had money. Cash she had saved over the years, her purse was full of it. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to be exact. Bethany had been taking cash advances against the various credit cards her parents threw at her over the years. She could not open an account. They would have seen her saving. They would have known she was going to run. All through college she planned, and schemed and now she was free. It was a clean break.

“I’ll cancel all your cards, you little brat!” Her mother yelled.

“I only have the Visa. You’ll find almost everything you ever gave me in the guesthouse. I don’t want it. I don’t need it. Money isn’t the answer. You never loved me. You didn’t even want me. You had me so he would have his image and you would have your bank account full. You both got what you wanted for thirty years. All I want is the rest of my life. And I’m taking it. Goodbye mother.” She disconnected the call. She was aware of how numb and emotionless she sounded. The speech was rehearsed a thousand times in her head. It was over, she was finally free. A smile crossed her lips as she powered down the phone. There was no one else she needed to talk to.

As she stepped out of the closet, she felt drained. So much had happened in the last few days. She went to the big welcoming bed and curled up. She inhaled deeply and smelled Jack. His aftershave, his essence. Curling up in the warmth and comfort of the bed, she drifted off to sleep.

Jack had been working on business plans, financial spreadsheets, and list after list of things needing to be done before he could open the ranch to the public. The sun had gone down hours ago. The loft provided a space away from everything else; it was his sanctuary, a place for privacy and peace and quiet. His stomach rumbled. He looked at the clock. Seven p.m., how had time gotten away from him so fast? Where the hell was Bethany? What was she doing?

He headed to the kitchen. As he entered through the living room, Bethany entered through the hall. She looked as though she just woke up. Her hair was wild and tangled. The left side of her face was pink and lined as though she slept on something uneven. "You just waking up?"

"Yeah. What time is it?" She stretched and walked toward him. He was not going to touch her. No sir. He would not touch her outside of sexual contact unless she touched him first. It was what she wanted.

Looking down at her, he thought that she really looked like she needed a hug. "Hungry?"

She nodded. Her brow was drawn together as though she was working something out in her head. Again, he resisted the urge to touch it, or her. Man he had like to kiss her right now.

"What do you have?" She asked.

"I don't know, lets see." He stepped past her and toward the refrigerator. She followed close and leaned into his side as they looked in the refrigerator. Even the slight contact made his hands ache to stroke her back. To push the tangle of curls out of her face and tuck them behind her ears. Or just wrap around her and squeeze. *Damn It!* "Steak, eggs, milk."

"Beer. You don't have any food." She straightened and headed to the pantry. "Cereal, beans. Jack, how do you guys live on steak and cereal?"

"We usually only eat breakfast here. Up until last week, we all worked other places. Heath and I grab dinner on the way home. Rafe eats at Layla's most of the time." Jack shut the refrigerator. "I'll call Heath, have him pick something up. He should be on his way home now anyways."

“Where did he go?” Bethany asked and shut the pantry door. Great, he thought, now he would have to make a grocery list and go shopping.

He shrugged then headed to the phone. “What do you want? Pizza?”

“Why don’t we just go out?” She propped her hands on her hips.

“Sunday night sweetheart. I have to get up early and would rather just stay home.” He picked up the phone and dialed Heath. “So is pizza fine or...”

“Fine.” Bethany straightened her shoulders and marched past him. Maybe she did not realize that they were not exactly close to anything. Three of the ranches combined to help pay for satellite to offer internet service in the area. She was probably used to being able to get whatever she wanted at the drop of a hat. He hoped she would get used to planning trips to the city.

Chapter 10

A week. Seven days. Bethany was beginning to feel like the guy in *The Shining*. The ranch was amazing, yes. There was plenty she could do, yes. But Jack was out of bed before she woke up and came back late in the evening. A week of wandering around the house, cooking for only herself, cleaning, and watching television had made her almost crazy.

Jack had not touched her since the bath in the Jacuzzi tub. She had not made any move to touch him either. Of course, she had not seen him long enough to touch. Apparently, his plan to binge on sex for the next three months was not the same as hers. Each morning she awoke to his cold pillow. It smelled like him. She hugged it close, inhaled, and had flashbacks of all the ways they had touched filtered through her mind. She would like to tie him up and have her way with him at this point. But he was being a jerk, avoiding her.

She looked around the living room, sighed, and then decided to go where she was asked not to go. The loft.

In the spacious loft was two desks, a bookshelf, and lo and behold, a computer.

“Hello new lover.” She spoke to the machine. Her fingers slid across the key board and itched to punch the keys. Pressing one button down, the screen hummed and lit up. What she saw made her sit down and read. The business plans for the ranch.

“Sorry about missing dinner last week.” Jan said as she approached. “Buck had to go in to work and I needed to finish a paper for school.”

“No problem. I had a lot of work to do anyways.” Jack had been avoiding the house, so had his brothers, therefore the cancellation came as a relief. He did not know what he was doing anymore. Bethany slept next to him in the bed. As soon as she fell asleep, she would curl right up to him and claimed him. But in her waking life, she barely acknowledged him.

“So how’s the newlywed phase going? I mean its Sunday and you’re down here. Buck and I barely let each other alone for the first three months.” Jan looked at the paperwork on the clipboard he held.

“Supplies. Just going over the inventory again.” He ignored the question.

“I see.” She stood there a moment longer then put her hand over the paperwork.

“What?” He looked up. Her face was serious. Jan always looked a little more like Heath when she got mad.

“I asked you a question Jack. How are things with you and Bethany?” She stared him down. He realized in that moment that Buck was perfect for her. It would take a man bigger than her brothers to overwhelm his little sister. Her smart mouth and temper was no easy task either. Buck had to be the mildest mannered person he knew. They balanced each other perfectly.

“You sound just like mom...”

“Jack!” She put her hands on her hips. Did he compliment Bethany the same? Were they balanced like Buck and Jan? He could not stop thinking about the woman who crawled into his arms every night. She consumed his thoughts, and his dreams.

“I don’t know I haven’t really talked to her. Paul hasn’t been able to get out here. He said he would be out next week with the will and all. She sent off for her new social security card and Rafe brought her a copy of the DMV book to study. Soon she will get a Montana license, maybe a vehicle. She really wants a job.” He sighed heavily. “Who the hell am I kidding Jan. I don’t know what the hell I’m doing here.”

“I don’t know either.” She took the clipboard. “Go spend some time with your wife.”

“I don’t know what to say to her. I don’t even know her.” He protested.

“And you won’t if you keep hiding out. You like her. I know you do so don’t make that face. It’s the truth and we all know it. So go, just go talk to her. Maybe take her in town for an early dinner. She hasn’t been anywhere but the ranch. I’m surprised you haven’t even taken her riding.” Jan’s look of disapproval again reflected his mother’s words.

“You’re turning into mom.” He laughed and pointed at her.

“No. Mom thinks your just using this girl. She hasn’t bothered to come home because she doesn’t want to lose another daughter-in-law over her pig-headed sons.” Jan said.

“She did not say that.” Jack worried for a moment his mother had in fact called them pig-headed. After Heath’s performance with Chance, and the way all three of them acted toward Buck, she might have.

“Well, she did say she didn’t want to lose another daughter-in-law.” Jan smiled.

“All right. Point made.” Jack hated his little sister was the family sage. She had always been an old soul. And like it or not so was Buck. The man was mature beyond his years and an asset to the ranch, and the family. Hating to admit his own ego sometimes, he headed back to the house. The two Great Dane’s lay on the front porch sunning, and as soon as they caught sight of him came running up to greet him. At least his dogs still loved him unconditionally. However, they had stayed back a few times when he went out this past week.

“Shit!” Bethany tried to get the paperwork back the way it was. When she heard the door open and the two dogs jumping around downstairs she knew Jack was home. He called out her name. She knew she was busted. No way would the computer go to standby and no way would he forget where he had left off. With no other choice, she answered. “I’m up here.”

“Where?” His voice came closer. The dogs took the stairs to the loft. She heard a set of boots coming up behind them.

“Up here.” She called as Blue Dog and Jessie Boy ran to greet her. She gave them a command to sit and they did. She loved on both of them, petting their heads and telling them what good boys they were.

“Hey.” He said and stopped at the top of the stairs. Wow. He looked delicious. His brown hair was mussed. A thin line circled his forehead at the hairline from his cowboy hat. He wore a navy blue t-shirt and well fitting jeans that accentuated everything long and strong about Jack.

“Hi.” She stopped stroking the dogs, resisted the urge to fan herself. He did not seem mad about her being in the loft but she was not sure. Looking at the evidence around her, she started to think of an excuse. “I uh...”

“Do you want to go to dinner or something?” He said as he stepped closer and looked around his desk. He took a seat in the big leather chair. He looked at what she had on the screen.

“Jack, I know you told me not to come up here, I just...”

“How the hell did you figure this out?” He scooted in closer to the desk and pointed to the screen.

“I, well... I have a degree in business. Only from one of the best colleges in the nation, I just wanted to use the computer but when it came on, this spread sheet was up. I wasn't trying to pry. It just caught my attention so I looked at it. It's not a big deal, I just...”

“The hell it isn't. I've been working on this thing for months. You mean to tell me you just figured it out today?” He did not seem pleased but she would not call him angry either. Frustrated was a potential word.

“I'm sorry?” She bit her lower lip and wondered if she gave the right response. She did not know Jack well enough to know his moods.

“For fixing it? Don't be.” He scrubbed his hands over his face. Looked her up and down. “So do you want to go out for dinner or what?”

“Um, okay.” Slowly she smiled. She was used to going out often. But he seemed to be content on the ranch, closed off from the rest of the world. She had been too, the first few days. Then when she realized she was just as alone as she was in Kentucky, she did not like it anymore. She wanted to do something useful, and watching television was not useful. Though, she did persuade the dogs to stay behind on two occasions. Jack would kill her if he knew all the bacon was used in training the Dane's not to jump on her.

“All right, let's go.” Jack stood.

“I need to get ready. Can I have half an hour?” She looked down at herself. Jeans and a t-shirt. Jack looked divine in them, but it was not who she wanted to present herself to the town as. His frumpy wife.

“Sure.” He shrugged then sat back down. “Let me know when you’re ready.”

“Okay.”

She could not contain the excitement she felt inside. They were going somewhere. Out, in public together. She would know how to get somewhere if she wanted to go out again on her own. And she did. She needed to find a job. Rafe had promised to sneak her out and let her drive his truck since Jack showed no interest in letting her drive his.

In fact, as she got dressed she realized Jack had taken his truck even when he was just going to the horse stables. And doing so made no sense because they were only a short walk away. The cabins were farther out and spread out, so it made sense to load gear and just drive. But the dining hall and stables were in close proximity to the four houses. She came up with a plan right then and there.

“Jack, I’m ready.” She called from the bottom of the stairs. He had reviewed the spreadsheets she had made changes to. Bethany really knew her stuff. His head and heart started battling over ideas. If he could get her more involved with the ranch, no, if he did, she would be able to hurt his family as much as help. It was too much to risk when everything was depending on his inheritance to make it work.

He walked down the stairs and into the living room. Bethany was already in the kitchen. As he walked into the kitchen, he caught sight of her going out the door to the garage. He followed, picked up his hat, and reached for his keys. They were not there.

He walked out to the garage and saw the prettiest woman he had ever laid eyes on, all painted up and ready to go. Only problem was, she was in the driver seat.

“Sweetheart, you look real nice tonight.” He leaned in the driver side window she kindly rolled down. Her face was made up and she was wearing one of those sweater sets he liked so much.

“Thank you. Get in.” Bethany gave him a mega-watt smile. She made it hard to tell her no.

“I’m driving, sweetheart.” But it was not impossible.

“Oh please, I haven’t driven a car in over a week. Come on, pretty please.” She gave him the eyes with the fluttering lashes and all.

“Nope.” He smiled. “Cowboys drive, cowgirls ride.”

“Pretty please, with whip cream and a cherry on top.” She now pouted her lower lip and dared to look as though she might even try tears.

“Bethany...”

“Anything, Jack, come on. I’ll do anything you want me to. Just let me drive this once.” She pouted. Her lower lip pushed out.

He took off his hat, considered it a moment then shook his head no.

He could see her mind working. Her pouting stopped and she looked him over. He knew whatever came next was going to be a big deciding factor. It had been a week since he had touched her. Her eyes traveled up his legs, over his groin, then up to his chest. He could sense the change in her mood. By the time she locked eyes with him again, they were burning with desire.

“What if I put whipped cream and a cherry on you, Jack?” She seductively licked her lips. His groin tightened.

“This truck, I worked hard for this truck. And men don’t ride shotgun with women...”

“I bet you taste good with whipped cream. You know, it just occurred to me. You have done a lot of things to my body. Selfishly, I have not reciprocated on you. I think...”

“You are playing dirty.” He ground out. His dick was already taking her side.

“I think it’s a fair trade. I drive the truck into town, and then you drive back.” She licked her lips again, slowly with purpose. She looked right at his bulging jeans and sighed. “You can drive and get a blow job at the same time can’t you?”

“Manipulating, conniving,” He started as he made his way to the passenger side. “I can’t believe I’m letting you drive my truck. For a blowjob no less. Jesus! What has my life become?”

“Good.” She beamed in triumph. “Now tell me how to back this thing out of here.”

“Shit.” He laughed. She could not even get out of the damn garage. He had been had! But he liked it.

“Potty mouth!” Bethany teased.

“I’ll get out and guide you.” He opened the door.

“You’ll have to guide me later, too, Jack. I’ve never...”

“If you want to get out of the garage, you want to stop right there.” He decided he was a pig-headed idiot for staying away from her all week. He could have been making love to her for days. Instead, he was brooding about something, though for the life of him he could not remember what anymore.

He ground guided her from the garage. She almost hit the post separating the two-vehicle garage, but cleared it just in time. His heart was pounding into his ears as he got into the truck. “Cutting it close, sweetheart”

“Sorry.” She said. He could see she meant it. She was nervous driving the truck, her knuckles where white from clenching the wheel.

“What did you drive in Kentucky?” He buckled in and looked at his truck from a new angle.

“A little BMW, cherry red, got it for my sixteenth birthday.” She kept both hands on the wheel and looked straight ahead, as they pulled out of the driveway onto the road to the ranch. “I’ve never driven something this big before in my life. It’s...I don’t know it’s nice. Powerful. Like if I want to get over in traffic, people will let me.”

He laughed. “Yes, they do let me in.”

“Where are we going?” She remained focused on the road.

“You’ll see when we get there.” He relaxed in the seat. “Keep straight and I’ll tell you where to turn.”

Bethany pulled into The Big Barn, what seemed like a cross between a restaurant and a honky-tonk. Country music could be heard as they got out. Jack tipped his hat to a few people as he made his way around to her door.

“Little dine and dance on a Sunday night.” He winked.

“Am I over dressed?” She looked down at her self and then around at a couple leaving the establishment. They were both in jeans and cowboy hats.

“You’re beautiful sweetheart. You remind me of this cupcake I met in Vegas one time. Girl got me drunk and tried to marry me.” He winked at her.

“I did marry you, and you weren’t trying to keep me sober might I remind you.” She smiled back at him. She looked like a square peg going into a round hole.

“I was hoping to get in your pants sweetheart.” He slid his hand across the small of her back. Such a simple touch almost made her too weak in the knees to walk. God how she missed his touch! Why had she fought it the other day in the barn?

Linking her arm around his waist, she felt him jerk in surprise.

Had he been avoiding her all of this time because of her comments? *Stupid!* She realized now she may not have been a touchy-feely kind of woman, but Jack was a touchy-feely kind of man. Regretting the week she lost she squeezed him tighter.

“You do like good ole fashioned cooking right?” He led them to the entrance. The doors opened and delicious aromas wafted out. Fried foods and fresh vegetables filled the air and made her mouth water.

“It smells fantastic in here.” She commented.

“Glad you like it.” He said as the hostess approached.

“Jack Johnson!” The busty blonde put down the menu and bustled over to see him.

“Hi Mary, this is...”

He tried to introduce her but the woman, had not realized they walked in practically joined at the hip, or did not care. She went right in for a lip lock. Jack’s arms flailed as though he would rather fall backward than embrace the woman.

“Excuse me!” Bethany stomped. “That’s my husband you’re kissing.”

Jealous again. And this was not the dreaded Candice. She really hoped that when they had kids they had boys. She would hate to compete with a daughter for his attention. Shocked by her own thoughts Bethany crossed her arms. That was how her mother felt about her.

Jack finally came to his senses and pushed the woman back. Holding her off at arms distance while trying to collect himself. His face was bright red, his eyes were so big, and his expression so shocked Bethany almost laughed.

“Mary, this is my wife, Bethany.” He said breathless.

“Real funny, you didn’t have a wife a few weeks ago.” Mary smiled and winked at him.

“Well he does now.” She said in her best no nonsense voice. “And you can rest assured I’ll be there from now on.”

He let go of the woman and finally looked at her. He looked as though he wanted to crawl under a rock or something for a second. Then his pure male pride took over and he looked like a champion again, only with a little blush left in his cheeks, and a little lipstick on his lips.

“Oh my God. You’re serious. I…” Mary seemed flustered now, her face turned red and she nervously attempted to gather the menu’s. “I’m so sorry…”

“Bethany.” Jack supplied and grabbed her hand. “My wife’s name is Bethany.”

“Bethany, I really didn’t mean to, well I meant to, but I didn’t know he was married. I mean a guy like Jack just doesn’t up and get married.” Mary picked up the menus sat them down, picked them up again. “I’m so flustered right now.”

“We’ll just go to my usual table, okay?” Jack picked up the menus.

“Thank you.” Mary appeared on the verge of tears.

He escorted them to the farthest corner booth. She wanted to feel bad but she did not. Jack was her husband and not up for grabs, at least not as long as they were married. “So have you slept with every woman in town?”

“No.” He snorted. “But I would be lying if I said I had only slept with you.”

“So how many women have you been with?” She took the seat facing the wall and he settled into the seat facing the rest of the restaurant.

“Never kept count, but I always used a condom.” He nodded.

“Not always.” She reminded him.

“You’re my wife, that’s different.” He frowned at her.

“Can you at least wipe her lipstick off?” She popped the napkin and laid it across her baby blue skirt. She did look like the cupcake he had met in Vegas. Mary

on the other hand looked like a showgirl. Wearing tight jeans, a low cut sparkling red blouse, matching her sparkling red lips. She understood why he would have slept with her. She was tall, blonde, and beautiful.

“Sorry.” He hung his head sheepishly and wiped his mouth with the napkin.

“Do you like her?” She nervously pleated the napkin on her lap. She was feeling the anxiety level rise within. What did Jack see in her when he could be with women like Mary? Oh, she remembered. He needed a wife for three months. A woman like Mary or Christina was a wife for life.

“She’s a friend.” He said coolly. He looked pained but she did not care.

“Obviously she’s more than a friend, Jack.” She placed her hands on the table.

“No.” He started to say something else but the waitress showed up.

“Hey sweetie, where have you been?” The woman asked as she approached. Bethany was ready to scream but as she turned to face another lover, she saw a sweet older lady, hair in a bun, apron on her waist and smile on her face.

“Getting myself hitched to this beautiful young woman right here.” Jack stood and hugged the woman.

“I don’t think I have ever met you before. I’m Patty. My boy Jasper owns this place, I run it, but he reaps all the rewards.” Patty extended a hand. Bethany shook it. “I know why you didn’t bring her in here before. I’d have set Jasper right out to court this pretty lady.”

“Now, Ms. Patty, you know me well, tell Bethany I’m a catch. I’m afraid after Mary tried to lip wrestle me she’s having second thoughts.” He put on a wounded puppy dog face and the woman fell for it.

“Oh honey, pay that girl no mind. She greets all the guests with a smooch, well all the young ones anyways.” Patty winked at Jack. “You want the usual?”

“Yes ma’am.” He nodded and took his seat.

“And for you, Jack’s bride?” The woman made a point to look at the ring on her finger. Maybe she did not believe it. But when her eyes moved to Jack’s hand, Bethany worried he would not have it on, but they were both surprised he did.

“I’ll have what he’s having.” She hoped it was something other than steak and eggs, the boys ate the same thing every morning. The cereal was only there for

afternoon or evening snacks. She did not know what Jack or Heath did for food. Rafe was the only one in the last week who bothered to talk to her for any amount of time.

“Fine then.” Patty said with a smile and left.

“No. Mary is not more than a friend. We have rolled in the hay a few times but that’s it. I can’t tell you a whole lot about her beyond the bedroom.” He said bluntly.

“You can’t say more about me either.” She pointed out a cold hard fact.

“But I want to be able to say more. I already know more about you.” He reached over the table and grabbed her hand.

“Like what?” She tried to stay upset but he began stroking her fingers and tickling her palm until she could not help but smile.

“There we go.” He simply held her hand over the table now. His hand was so big and rough compared to hers. The reassuring connection was unexpected, but welcome. “I know you are a kind woman, you’re smart, beautiful. My dogs like you.”

“Well I’ve got the dog vote.”

“Aye, it means something. I’ve never had a woman sleep over before. Why do you think Heath and Rafe were so anxious to see who you were? I’ve never been so attracted to anyone, and I’ve also never been so confused.” He said the last word as a whisper.

“About what?” She knew he was not trying to have a deep conversation, but their evening out turned a whole new direction the moment Mary attacked his face. She was not going to let herself get involved any farther if he was just a womanizer.

“This.” Jack pointed between them. “Us. You know my mother had no interest in ranching. It killed my grandfather because my grandmother loved it. I can learn things, business wise that is, but you know them already.”

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?” Her heart began to swell with emotions. Her father had paid a lot of money for an education in business, but would not let her work as a secretary much less help out. It was not a paying job. But it was a job to put on a resume nonetheless. In three months, she could make a difference to Jack and his ranch. Then she would get her own job. “You’d let me help out at the ranch?”

“I’m saying I am thinking about it. I have to discuss it with the family; it’s not just my ranch. We all own it.” He explained. She watched him smile in recognition and sure enough, Patty was back with drinks.

“Food will be up in a few.” Patty smiled. She shook her head after looking at them a moment longer. “Does my heart good to see one of you boys finally settle down.”

“She’s nice.” Bethany smiled as the woman walked away.

“Her son’s a dog. We went to school together. Jasper has been with every woman in this town, except my sister, and you.” Jack laughed. “He’s known as the local florist.”

“I don’t get it.”

“He deflowers all the virgins.” He shook his head.

“What about Candice?” She hated caring if he was her first, but she did not like knowing another woman would be like her, always remembering him as the first man to make love to her.

“Junior year. Mary, too. I’m telling you, no man has gone where Jasper hadn’t already gone before.” He shook his head and laughed.

“You have.” She smiled. “How many flowers have you taken?”

“Just one.” His gaze turned heated in that instant. Her insides began to melt. She wished now that they were home so she could lead him to the bedroom and do everything she had ever dreamed of doing to a man.

“So, I’m sorta special?” She felt a new sense of pride. His thumb stroked her knuckles. Her stomach flip-flopped in anticipation. She was going to love this man’s body tonight.

“You’re more than special, Bethany Johnson. You are something else all together.” He turned serious and her gut tightened in anticipation for what he may say next. “You even got to drive my truck. After you ride one of my horses, hell, you may be through with me. Take everything I have and leave.”

His attempt at humor fell flat.

“I would never do anything to hurt you. You’ve given me so much. You’ve given me your name and everything that comes with it. Your family, your dogs, I get to live

in the most beautiful house. I have to tell you, I might not be able to divorce you in three months. I mean my closet alone is..."

"Do you like me?" He asked abruptly.

"Of course I do." She wondered where this was coming from.

"And do you like the ranch?" He spun the diamond ring around her finger.

"I love the ranch. I wasn't sure what it would be like. Being cooped up in the house with nothing to do can be a little nerve racking, but I love the ranch." She caught the words in her throat. She almost said she loved Jack, but it just was not possible. They did not know enough about each other.

Ms. Patty returned and set two plates on the table. Country fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy and green beans served in huge portions filled the plates.

"Thanks, Ms. Patty, this looks great." Jack smiled showing off his dimples.

"It smells delicious." Bethany nodded.

"It's on the house kids. Don't you even, Jack. Just shut your mouth before you say something to make me mad, and then you'll be without dessert." Ms. Patty nodded and walked away.

"She's serious." Bethany inhaled the food again, nothing fancy or chic, just good old-fashioned food.

Jack nodded. Picked up a fork and started eating. "The only person around who can cook better than Jasper is Chance."

"Heath's wife?" She took a bite of the potatoes. "So good."

"Told you." He continued. "I'll have to show you the prom pictures when we get home. Only have two of them, and I had to hide them but they are hilarious."

"Of Heath and Chance?" Bethany was trying to keep up with the new turn in conversation.

"No silly, of me and Chance. I told you about it on the way home from Vegas. Chance was one of my high school girlfriends. I dated her and Candice senior year. Chance was my date to the prom. But Heath showed up. And in every picture I'm looking at Chance, smiling, because she's looking at Heath." Jack stopped talking and looked directly at her. He did not say anything, did not make any faces

revealing his thoughts. He just stared at her.

Bethany began to wonder if she had something on her face. Finally, he looked back at his plate and started eating and talking again.

“Like you look at me sometimes.” He said then shoveled in the next bite.

“How do I look at you?” She knew how she looked at him. Like he was the most amazing man she had ever seen or known. It was not something she wanted him strutting around acknowledging.

“Like you want me.” Jack winked.

“I do want you.” She relaxed. Want and Love were not the same. Or were they? She did not know anymore. They continued eating the rest of the meal without much conversation. Jack retold the story of Heath and Chance and Bethany finally understood why Heath was so devastated.

As Ms. Patty approached with pecan pie. A familiar song came on.

“Jack?” Bethany looked for the speakers, trying to make sure she heard the right song. “Is it...”

“Come on sweetheart, let’s dance.” Jack got up, pulled her by her hand, and led her past Ms. Patty. “We’ll take those to go ma’am.”

Jack pulled her into his arms and held her tight. Bethany melted against him, letting her white sweater leave more fuzz on his navy blue t-shirt. Her head naturally fell in line with his shoulder and it took more than a little willpower not to break down and cry. Jack’s body was like home. Every time she got close to it, she knew who she was and what she wanted. Him.

“I must be doing something right.” Jack whispered.

“Mmm. Yes you are, Jack.” She did not care they were the only two people on the dance floor, or the fact it may not actually be a dance floor. She cared about how Jack could pull the square peg through a round hole and make it fit. She looked like a cupcake, all pastel and pretty compared to the casual appearance of everyone else in the place. But she fit. She fit right there against him. And Jack would not let anyone see it another way. “You definitely are.”

Chapter 11

Jack sat in the truck feeling like ten million bucks, all thanks to the woman sitting next to him trying to play coy. She was not fooling him. He knew she was just as ready as he was to play. He had not pulled out of the parking space yet because he needed to kiss her.

“Well?” Bethany prompted.

“Well?” He had not buckled in and neither had she.

“Well are we leaving or what?” Her attempt to hide the mischievous deed about to take place was useless. The air practically crackled with sexual tension.

“In a minute.” He reached for her hand. “Come sit next to me for a moment.”

“Oh no you don’t. This isn’t about me, Jack Johnson. There will be no removal of my clothes this time.” She said it as she took off the outer layer of the sweater set.

“I hate to point out the obvious, but you seem to be taking off your clothes.” He traced a finger down her now bare arm. The soft fuzzy sweaters she wore just drove him nuts. He could imagine the texture, soft and luxurious along his shaft. Shaking his head, he snapped out of it. He was getting kinks, first her feet, now sweaters.

“Just the sweater.” She tossed it over the seat and then grabbed his hand. “You did wash this in the bathroom correct?”

“Yes ma’am. I always wash my hands.” Jack laughed. Then he croaked as she pulled his index finger up to her lips. The lipstick was gone so there was only soft pink skin sliding back and forth over his rough fingers. “My hands are too rough.”

“No. They are strong, and sensual, and I like how they feel.” Bethany held on as he tried to pull his hand back. “Now stop it. I want to practice for a second.”

“Practice?” Jack let her have full control of his hand. She put it right back up to her lips and began stroking it again. It was so warm, wet, and welcoming.

“Yes. I’ve never, you know. So tell me if you like this.” Bethany licked her tongue out over the tips of his fingers before opening her mouth and closing it

around them. Jack's eyes crossed.

"Bethany. I will love anything you do with your tongue, sweetheart. Now come kiss me so I can get us out of here." He moved toward her and she leaned in.

Their lips met in an explosion of sensation. He had missed this all week long. Bethany was the best kisser. She met him with the same intensity, the same desire, and equal pressure. It was a joint effort to get as much out of it as they each put into it. But Jack always got more. His hand on her throat he could feel the vibration as she sighed a sweet moan of release. Nipping her top lip then pulling back, he looked into those light green eyes of hers and smiled. This was his woman.

"Now let's go home." He said before kissing her just a minute longer.

"Mmm." She nodded.

He buckled up and winked at her. As he pulled out of the parking lot, Bethany buckled in at the center of the truck. They were not far from home, but they were far enough she could definitely fulfill her promise.

Bethany sighed. Jack had to be the most amazing kisser. He always kissed her senseless. She had heard the phrase before but never believed it, at least until now. He was doing a lot of things right this evening. He came home early for starters, took her out to eat, let her drive his precious truck, and danced with her in the middle of the restaurant.

"Why do you wear Levi's?" She had noticed most of the men at the restaurant and his brother Rafe, wore Wrangler's.

"Button fly." He said shamelessly.

"I see." She gently placed her hand on his muscular thigh and began making gentle strokes and circles, not touching his button fly, or going anywhere near it.

"No you don't. But if you will unbutton just one or two I would be a relieved man."

"Well alright." She sighed as though it was a chore but she really looked forward to getting his pants open. The first button was tight then the second, but the rest popped out easily freeing him completely. The small task of undoing them was more

than just unbutton then zip. It made a woman pay attention, and since he never wore underwear as far as she could tell, it was like undressing him slowly. “Now what?”

“Do whatever you want to, sweetheart. He’s captivated by your imagination right now.” He let one hand off the wheel long enough to push a loose curl behind her ear.

The gesture made her desperate to kiss him again. She could not possibly, as he drove. Instead, she had made a deal. And she planned to see it through. She had not really touched Jack when they made love. He took the lead and touched her a lot. But she had been rather hands off. Now was her chance to devour him.

She stroked the tip of his cock and felt the sticky drop of pre-come. Unable to stop herself she lifted her fingers to taste it. Salty, sticky, not too bad. His penis moved on its own volition it seemed. As she touched it, again it jerked. “Are you doing that?”

“Hum?” Jack grunted.

“Are you making him move?” She stroked her fingers along the soft smooth skin. Veins roped his shaft and she wished it were still light out so she could see the details better.

“It’s all you, sweetheart.” Jack said in a low voice.

Bethany continued to explore him with her hand. “It’s amazing.”

He chuckled. “I think so. But I’m glad you confirmed it.”

“I’m serious. It’s so soft and smooth on the outside, but underneath he’s like, steel or something.” She gripped the shaft harder. He growled his approval.

Encouraged by his reaction she undid the seatbelt, slid away from him so she could lean over, and put her face in his lap. Holding on to the base of his erection, she pressed her nose and lips to the shaft, then inhaled the spicy scent of Jack.

“God woman, you’re going to kill me.” He shifted in the seat.

She opened her mouth and slowly flattened her tongue against him. Then, like an ice cream cone, she licked, from root to tip. Once, twice...

“Bethany, please.” His voice was rough and ragged.

“Please what?” She licked again, slower.

“Please, open your mouth and put me in.” He stroked the back of her head for encouragement.

She did as he asked. He definitely was not a small man. She took him in as far as possible and then pulled back. Jack’s noises were loud, and unrestrained. She had no idea it would feel this good to make him feel good. Her own body was reacting to it. Her sex warmed and wanted what her mouth had.

“Yes, sweetheart, just like that. Now, suck on it.” He stroked her back with his right hand ending at her butt cheek. “Oh yes, good, really good.”

She liked the praise and wanted more. She let her hand get in on the action and began pumping against the rise and fall of her mouth. He liked it. He squeezed her ass cheek and groaned. She really started getting into it, sucking harder, licking the rim of his glands as she neared the top.

“Stop!” Jack shouted and pulled her up fast.

“What? Are you alright?” She looked around and saw nothing out of the ordinary. They were almost home now. He just had to turn down the street.

“I can’t see straight.” He breathed in a heavy rhythm. “We’re almost home. Let’s finish in the bedroom.”

“I blinded you with passion, huh?” she felt proud of herself.

He snorted.

Jack turned down the road leading to the ranch.

“We’re on your property now right?” She eased her hand back around his throbbing erection.

“Yes.” He practically growled the word.

“Good.” She nodded and leaned back over. She pulled his penis back into her mouth. He slammed on the brakes and put the truck in park. She almost fell out of the seat as he pushed it back. But she did not let go, and she did not stop licking and sucking him. Jack’s hand fisted in her hair. His entire body tightened and he became the most vocal man she had ever known.

“Oh! Just like that, right there, Christ!” He moaned. “Bethany, sweetheart. Your mouth feels so good. I don’t want to come yet.”

Bethany took his reaction as incentive to make him come even sooner. If she

could make him wild for her in the bedroom, maybe she could start wiggling her way deeper into his life. If she let him get all touchy feely, maybe he would miss her when she was gone. Maybe he would miss her enough to keep her around. She sucked him off for all she was worth. His shaft grew impossibly harder. Jack tried to say something but she had no idea what, it was gibberish at best.

Then he came.

Like a volcanic eruption she was not prepared for, warm fluid shot into her mouth and down her throat. She swallowed, wanting to see his orgasm through to the last pulse. Jack tasted salty, with a hint of something sweet. His shaft throbbed and pulsed, until nothing was left inside of it. Bethany licked lazily at the tip. His entire body went limp, but for the semi-hard cock in her hand.

His hand opened and gently stroked the hair he had fistfisted. It had pulled a little bit but the discomfort faded behind the excitement of making him lose control. She slowly sat up to look at him. He had a thin sheen of sweat on his brow, his hat had fallen into the back seat, and his Adam's apple bobbed slowly as he tried to regain his breath.

"Did you like it?" She asked a question with an obvious answer. Jack's lips twitched into a smile, both dimples popped out and his head lifted to look at her. She had never seen a more peaceful look on any man's face than in that moment.

"I almost passed out." He lifted his hand and stroked her cheek with his knuckles. Bethany leaned into his hand and he opened it, cupping her cheek, and drawing her near. "Come here."

She was surprised he wanted to kiss her. After all, she probably tasted like him. But he did not seem to mind. He pulled her onto his lap and hugged her tightly. His lips opened and closed on hers, his tongue slid in, teased then retreated. He was starting a fire inside her, one she was not sure he would be able to handle since he seemed so relaxed and well sated.

His hand cupped her breast and a moment later, she felt his growing cock along her butt. His kisses turned more biting, more powerful. Her breathing sped up, and her heart began to race.

Then a horn blew.

She jumped, reached back to feel if she had accidentally hit the steering wheel.

“Did I do that?”

The horn sounded again only this time it continued for a long moment. Jack laughed and looked in the rear view mirror. She shifted to look out the window and realized they were blocking Heath. Jack had stopped in the middle of the road, Heath could have driven around half on the road, half on the grass, but instead he decided to make a scene.

“All right, sweetheart, lets get to the house. We’ll finish up there.” He promised as he readjusted the seat.

No. They were not finishing up anything at this rate. Jack knew the moment he saw the Honda Passport in the driveway Layla was there, and that meant two kids were with her. It was one thing to kick his brothers out. They were men and had a home of their own they could go to for the night, but not Layla and the kids.

“Who are all these people?” Bethany asked and he could sense the mood shift from sexual tension to nervous tension. At least Layla would not try to lip wrestle him. He could have died when Mary kissed him. Under ordinary circumstances, it was nice to be kissed by all the girls. But as a married man, those days were over. He looked at her and realized he was actually okay with kissing one woman the rest of his life. No one he had kissed before kissed better than her anyways.

“You are about to meet the goddess. Layla, and her two children. Rafe is nuts about the woman, but she is not so nuts about Rafe. I think at this point she may just think he’s nuts, period.” Jack pulled into the garage and started fastening his pants. His erection had deflated the moment he saw the Honda. Heath pulled in the spot next to him, knowing he hated it when he did. The dogs liked to hang out in the garage at night and two trucks parked inside, gave them little space to play.

“Your brother knows what we were doing.” Bethany blushed as she looked at Heath who was now standing at the front of Jack’s truck.

“Jealous bastard.” Jack said as he got out. Bethany started to open her door to get out. “Hey!”

“What?” She jumped and looked out the windshield.

"I'll open your door, give me a minute." He shook his head with disapproval.

Bethany held up her hands like she surrendered.

"Grab those pie's will ya?" He said as he rounded the front of the truck not so gently nudging his older brother out of the way.

"Pie?" Heath asked.

"Yes. And no, you can't have it. You're like a junk food junkie, man." Jack opened Bethany's door and helped her out of the truck. He looked into her big green eyes and asked, "Why do you want to make me look bad in front of my brother?"

"What? I don't, I didn't." She answered.

"She's not making you look bad, for crying out loud. You can let a woman open her own door these days, it's not a crime. What makes you look bad is the way you stop in the middle of the road to fondle the poor thing. Have some decency Jack, take it behind closed doors." Heath shook his head in disapproval and gave Bethany what could only have been a sorrowful look. Jack was shocked his woman-hating brother was feeling sorry for Bethany, not him.

"I'll have you know..." Bethany cut him off by slapping her hand over his mouth and holding it there. He looked down and her pleading eyes said he would have to put his ego in check. He could not brag to his brother or tell him she was the assailant, and he was trying to get them home.

Heath opened the kitchen door not paying him any attention anyhow. As he disappeared inside Jack removed Bethany's hand. "So I get to take the blame?"

"If you ever want it to happen again you do." She batted her long lashes at him.

"Just checking." He slipped his hand to the small of her back and led her to the door. Inside he could already hear Heath and Rafe laughing, two kids squealing and two dogs making a lot of thumping noise. "Hope you're ready for a long night."

Bethany was ready for a long night, and now she was more primed for loving than not. She did not want to spend a long night with his family. She had not had Jack to herself all week. As they entered the big country kitchen, it was a moot point. Rafe was already grabbing backpacks and attempting to round up the kids.

"Hey there. That's Bethany." Rafe pointed to her and the woman turned the

most dazzling blue eyes Bethany had ever seen her way.

“Hi.” The woman extended a hand. “I’m Layla; these are my two kids, Savanna, and Brice.”

The kids stopped running at the mention of their name and moved around the counter where she could see them. Bethany smiled. Stepped forward to shake Layla’s hand then extended it to the well-trained children.

“I’m Bethany, Jack’s wife.” Bethany offered her hand to the little girl. She had strawberry blonde hair and eyes like her mother’s.

“I’m Savanna. I’m in first grade.” She smiled revealing a space where two front teeth should have been. “I’m going to marry Heath when I grow up.”

“Nice to meet you, Savanna.” Bethany smiled at the child who waved to Heath. The big ogre waved back and winked at the child. Rafe laughed. “And you are?”

“Brice. I’m in kin-er-gar-en.” He said breaking the word into syllables. He had brown hair and eyes but his mother’s lips and nose.

“You must be very smart.” Bethany nodded.

She liked them. She had never been around kids much. It was weird how in the very instant she met them something kicked in her gut. A longing she never knew she had, a fever started inside her. She knew right then that if she had a daughter she would not have to compete for Jack’s attention. She knew she would be a good mother. She looked over to Jack and wondered what his kids would look like. More specifically, what their kids would look like.

“Come here, Cowboy!” Jack shouted and Brice took off. The kid climbed him like a tree and then hung on to his back.

“Me, Jack, my turn. Flip me!” Savanna squealed as Brice was flipped to the floor.

“Come on up, Cowgirl.” He handled Savanna more gently but she climbed his back nonetheless. Once at the top he secured her in his hands and flipped her, squealing all the way, letting her feet land first on the floor. Once she was standing and balanced, he let her go.

“Me, me!” Brice chanted.

“No, no more. Jack, you always get them wound up.” Layla laughed.

“Yeah Jack, they have school tomorrow.” Rafe added with a sheepish grin.

“Bethany, it was great meeting you and I hope to see you again soon. But these guys have school in the morning and someone has already made them late getting home.” Layla cast a glance at Rafe who looked at Heath. “Don’t look at him. You’re in big trouble, mister.”

“How’d I get so lucky?” Rafe winked and Layla let out a sigh of exasperation. Bethany could sense the energy between them, but she knew Layla was holding back. She knew because she had been doing the same thing all week.

“It was great meeting you.” Bethany said as Layla gathered the kids by their hands.

“Rafe, you really don’t have to follow us home.” Layla said. Heath said goodbye to Savanna and snorted at Rafe who made hand gestures behind Layla’s back. He ignored the woman’s comment and grabbed the backpacks escorting the family out the door.

“See you in the morning.” Rafe called as he shut the door behind them.

“Heath, you don’t have to go now.” She watched as the man headed for the hall and the upstairs bedrooms. He had let down his guard around the kids. She wanted to see more of that Heath, get to know Jack’s brother.

“I have to be at work at five a.m., it’s going on eight, I’d like to go to bed if that’s all right with you.” Heath bristled.

“Well I guess so.” She did not let him get to her. The man apparently had a mood swing problem. One minute he was happy and sociable, the next he was crabby and irritable.

“Thanks.” He snorted again.

“Trying to avoid being alone with me?” Jack stepped up behind her and wrapped her in his arms.

At once, the chemistry in the room changed. All thoughts of his brothers and their dilemmas went to the back burner. “No. I just didn’t want to be rude.”

“Come on. Let’s go see what’s in the bedroom.” Jack swatted her on the butt making her yelp.

The short distance between the kitchen and his bedroom had never seemed longer than it did tonight. Bethany followed him. He could feel her eyes warming his back, and then his ass. Why the woman was constantly staring at his backside was beyond him. It sure did not compete with hers.

Now her ass was worth looking at.

Closing the door behind them, he locked it. When he turned around Bethany had already started to undress. But this time he did not just want her sexually. He wanted her emotionally. She started to open up with him, no way would he let her shut down again.

“Leave your clothes on for a bit.” He held out the sweater she had tossed.

“Sorta defeats the purpose, don’t you think?” She frowned at him. She stared at the offered sweater.

“If my purpose was just to get you naked, yes. But I don’t want you naked, yet.” Jack stepped close to her. Close enough to smell her hair and the sweet perfume she was wearing. Light, subtle, barely there and mixing deliciously with her own natural fragrance.

“What do you have in mind?” She asked, and he could sense she was getting nervous. The sweater remained in his hand and she looked at it, not him.

“I thought we’d start slow for a change.” He placed the sweater around her shoulders. Reluctantly she slipped her arms into it. “These things are so soft, like the one you were wearing when we met.”

Her breath hitched as he slid his hands down her shoulders then back up. “Look at me.”

She looked up, a mix of emotions danced across her features. He knew she was not expecting him to want more than sex. But he did want more. A lot more. He wanted everything and he wanted it now.

“Trust me okay?” He whispered against her soft skin before kissing her on the cheek. His lips lingered there as she nodded.

Her hands moved around his back. Gently he swayed them to the song in his mind. If he had a voice he would sing to her, but he did not and he was not about to embarrass himself or make her laugh when all he wanted was to hold her and make

her feel cherished. *Damn song!*

"You know something, Jack. You're not at all what I expected." She sighed and squeezed him tighter.

"No?" He kissed her temple, then her ear. As he made his way to her neck she rolled her hips against his, bringing them closer as they danced. He relished the feel of her body pressed against him. Her curls tickled his chin, the smell of her shampoo pleased his nose, and the beat of her heart against his chest as she squeezed him tighter, soothed his own.

"No." She let her head drop back. Her light green eyes sparkled. She looked beautiful, happy. "I thought all you wanted from me was sex and a three month marriage so you could get your money. It's something I was familiar with, being used for financial gain. But you, you want more."

Jack stopped, like a record needle scratching over the vinyl her words stopped the music in his head and stole his moment. "What are you talking about?"

"You want my soul, Jack Johnson. You're the devil himself. And I signed it over, lock stock and barrel, didn't I?" She was still somewhat lost in the dreamy romantic moment. However, her words were like knives ripping him apart. Who had used her for money? He did not want her soul, well, not for money anyways. He wanted her heart. He wanted a fair chance at the vows they made.

"You didn't sign yourself over to me sweetheart. If you don't want me, you can go. I mean it. Three months, three days, hell, three minutes from now." Releasing her, he stepped back and ran his hands through his hair. Complicated, women were complicated creatures a man like him could not begin to understand.

"You want me to go?" Now she looked hurt. *Shit!*

"No, I don't want you to go at all, but I don't want to hold you against your will." He scrubbed his face with his hands. He was not sure how to tell her what he meant. He did not know himself. Maybe he did want her soul. Did that make him the devil, to want the object of his affection to be his alone?

"You weren't. Now hold me again." She moved close and hugged him. "I was trying to tell you how different you are from the men I have known in my life, not scare you away."

“I’m not scared.” He snorted. No, not scared, he was petrified. If he learned anything from his older brother Heath, it was that letting himself love a woman was a risk. If she left him, his life would go to shit in rapid order.

“Of course not.” She ran her hand down his back, soothing him. To get away from the conversation he decided to speed things back up in a direction they were both more comfortable communicating with.

He slid his right hand over her left breast. The soft material made him want to pull it between his thumb and index finger and play with it. Her nipple pebbled as he teased it through the material. She was clinging to him again in no time. Her hand moved to the back of his neck and pulled him down to kiss her. The same explosion of sensation happened, the feel of her soft lips, the taste of her tongue.

Bethany pulled at his t-shirt but he was not having it. Removing his hand from her breast, he scooped her in his arms and carried her to the bed. Lying down was a lot harder than it seemed when the woman did not want to let go of him. He sat down on the bed, lay back, and then rolled them both so he could be on top. She pulled at his shirt. She wrapped her legs around him. It was like fighting an octopus. “Sweetheart, stop trying to rip me to shreds and let me love on you.”

She stopped, his shirt fisted in her hands half way up his back. Her big green eyes blinked at him. “It’s not time to...”

“No.” He smiled. She had a wicked look in her eye. One letting him know, he may want to cuddle, but Bethany wanted sex. “You haven’t had a lot of experience...”

“I’ve had a few thanks to you.” She stroked his cheek. Damn it! She was luring him in.

“I meant in general. I want you to know how nice it is to be stroked and primed; you don’t always have to get naked right away. A woman needs to be ready...”

“Hmmm.” She made a face of curiosity then did something he least expected.

Jack was taking too long to get this show on the road. Primed, she had been primed since the room emptied. Then he wanted to dance, and then she was afraid he could see right through her. So she called him the devil, of course he got all freaked out. So she could not tell if confessing her feelings, telling him she cared for

him, in her own weird way, scared him, or just scared her. Either way, he started kissing her again. His lips on hers were enough. Instantly she was primed, as he called it.

But taking it slow? She had been taking it slow all her life! She never got what she wanted when she wanted it, and Jack had been the master at giving her everything in rapid order. She was not about to stop so he could take her on a trip down memory lane and relive all the bumping and grinding she might have missed as a teen.

She reached under the band of her skirt, dipped her fingers between her legs, and brought up proof. She was ready whenever he was. "See, all wet."

His eyes closed. When they opened, his jaw began to make a little twitch.

"Taste for yourself." She teased, but as he opened his mouth, she did something she had not planned to do. She stuck her fingers in her own mouth, tasting herself.

He went from sweet sixteen to raging bull in about a heartbeat. She was not even sure how the clothes got off, but he somehow managed to get them both naked in record time. "Jack?"

"Oh you're gonna get it, missy, don't you worry." He said as he parted her sex.

Then he was there, sucking, licking and teasing everywhere but the sweet spot. It was maddening; her body arched, twisted, and ached to be satisfied. "More Jack."

He growled and pushed one finger inside. Easing his way up to a second, he tickled her clit long enough to make her legs jump, and continued on his mission of tormenting her with pleasure. "More please."

"You sure?" He asked, and for a moment she hesitated. He was not moving from where he was. She wanted him inside her, now!

"Yes." She nodded. Her eyes rounded as she felt the pressure. Slight but true. "Jack?"

"Relax."

"Do you know where your finger is?"

"Where my dick will be soon?" He answered as he moved his finger further inside her anus.

She could feel the pressure on the tight little hole. She remembered the way her first time felt in her vagina. Jack was bigger than the average vibrator and she thought they were pretty big. No fucking way was he getting his big dick in there!

"I don't know about this." She gasped as he moved a little farther inside. Despite herself, it started to feel good. "Jack?"

"Relax sweetheart, just breathe deep. That's it. There you go. See." He coached her as if she were playing miniature golf and not being sodomized by his finger. The image made her laugh. "What?"

"Nothing. Oh...mmm." The moment relaxed her enough apparently for him to slide the finger all the way in.

"Do you like it?" Jack asked.

Again, her body betrayed the right answer, clenching around him as a response. She nodded.

"Good." He placed his face back between her legs and began suckling her clit. It was then she realized all that fuss was over a pinky. His other two fingers were still inside her vagina. She wanted to contemplate the size difference some more but as he hit the spot, it really did not matter what he put there. It just felt good.

"Oh Jack!" She cried out as the orgasm spread from her toes to her hairline and racked her body in between mercilessly. Her walls gripped his fingers, her anus gripped his pinky, and her hands fisted his sheets. As the sensations calmed, she lay twitching and exhausted. Every muscle in her body had tightened then released.

"You take a breather, I'll be right back." He patted her on the thigh and disappeared into the bathroom.

Chapter 12

Like a kid on Christmas Jack re-entered the bedroom with a bottle of lube. He practically glowed from head to toe. Limp and lifeless she rolled to her stomach in submission. He had not hurt her yet. Not physically or emotionally so why the hell not? She would be able to say there was not anything she had not done.

“Roll back over.” He said as he slipped into the bed next to her. “I got a condom, and this.”

“I see.” She tried to brazen it out but she could feel the blush creeping over her. Not the warmth from the orgasm, a whole new blush of embarrassment and uncertainty.

“It’s supposed to be easier if you face me.” He nodded with confidence.

“Don’t you know?” She teased, trying to regain some air of confidence. Her finger stroked along his spine, he let out a rumble of approval.

“No. I’ve never done it before.”

Thankfully, he was facing away from her focused on the condom and lube rather than watching her expression of horror. He had no idea what he was about to do to her. It was one thing to think Jack was the sage, the know it all, done it all, stallion. It was quite another to think he had no idea what he was going to do to her. What if he ripped her in half?

“Jack.” Nervously she cleared her throat. “Exactly how do you know what to do here, I mean if you haven’t done it before...”

“I know what I’m doing sweetheart. I’ve looked it up.” He smiled, his chest heaved, and his fingers trembled. How could she deny him something he seemed so excited about doing? “I’ve just never wanted to do it to anyone else before. But this is something we can do together. New ground for both of us.”

“Somehow I think you’re getting the better end of this bargain.” She sat up, watched him roll on the condom. As he lubed the tip of his latex covered penis, she began to feel the renewed energy in her sex. She wondered what it would be like to

watch him jack-off. His hands were so much bigger than hers, rougher.

“Just relax like before. If it hurts, tell me. I’ll stop.” He nuzzled her nose with his, placed a sweet kiss on her lips. She believed him. He would not hurt her.

She nodded slowly and laid back. He did not go right for her ass as she expected. Instead, he started kissing her. In his sweet slow manner which made her melt. Slowly as she began to feel the pull of renewed desire inside, he moved his hand lower and caressed the wet lips of her pussy. How he seemed to know the moment she was ready was a mystery. Maybe because she always moaned, but the man would not let her get air until she did.

His finger moved back to her most sensitive spot. When she began arching into him, rolling her hips, he stopped. Cool lubricant trickled between her butt cheeks, followed by a slight probing finger. It was easier this way, she had to admit. The finger pressed past the tight band and then teased her inside. He continued to kiss her as his erection still pressed into the inside of her thigh. His hands did all the work for now.

“Are you okay?” He asked sincerely.

“Yes.” It was such a strange feeling to be this intimate. To have a man invading her most private, of the private parts.

“Are you ready for more?” He whispered as a second finger pressed in, stretching her.

“I think so.” she gulped. He let her adjust to two large fingers. As she relaxed, enjoyed his rhythm, he kissed her lips, her neck, her breasts. He sucked her nipples and drove her wild. She wanted more. She wanted to let him do this.

His weight shifted and he lifted up off her. Her legs fell over each of his thighs and exposed her completely. His fingers pulled out. And the lubricated head pressed slightly against the opening.

“Whoa. He’s big, Jack.” She did not mean it to be amusing. But he breathed a laugh just the same.

“Thank you.” He smiled and she could not resist smiling, too. The moment was so tense with the seriousness of what he was about to do. It helped her relax. “I’ll push a little bit, but you have to let me in.”

She nodded as the tip of his penis pushed against the opening. She breathed slowly, long exhales, deep inhales. She felt the stretch, the burn. It was not terrible, it was just uncomfortable. She concentrated on relaxing though her body wanted to tense. Jack's face contorted, the veins on his neck stood out, and she could only imagine how badly he must want to plow right inside. But he was not. He was not even past the part, which felt like a little barrier, a circle of muscle seeming determined to keep him out. Jack pushed just a little harder and slipped right in.

She gasped. He groaned. The invasion was so sudden and unexpected. Though she knew full well it was coming.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Did I hurt you?" He began to withdraw as he spoke and looked tortured at the same time.

"Just wait a second. Give me a minute." She breathed. Pain was not what made her gasp. It was the unexpected pleasure racking her body. This was not supposed to feel good. It was supposed to feel wrong, and uncomfortable. Looking at Jack, he sure seemed uncomfortable. Maybe even in a bit of pain. "Okay, you can move now."

And he did. With the same slow motion he used when he realized she was a virgin. His grip on her hips was bruising but his motion was slow and easy. "Do you like the way it feels, Jack?"

He gulped, making his Adam's apple bob. He nodded.

"Then act like it." She used his thighs for leverage, pushed hard against him. They both gasped this time. "Mmm. Jack, you feel so good."

"Shhh. Don't talk to me, I can't hold back if you talk to me."

"God you feel good, Jack. Don't stop. Mmmm. That's it, Jack, fuck me. Fuck me in the ass with your big, thick..."

"Bethany..." And he was gone. Groaning and moaning all the way over the edge and back. She loved to see him come. His body now drenched in sweat glistened. His jaw ticked with each pulse. He looked beautiful. And he was hers.

"Stay there, two seconds more." Unable to resist she slid her hand down and circled her clit. "Just. Stay. Right. Oh, there."

"I can feel it Bethany, you're so tight, and...God you're beautiful when you

come.” He whispered low. The words floated over her body and stroked every nerve already too tight and sensitive from the orgasm ripping through her like nothing she had ever felt before.

Exhausted and weak, she went boneless but for the little aftershocks, they skittered through like loose electrical wires, no rhyme or reason to them. He gently pulled out. Leaned over her, careful not to touch her with his dick, and kissed her on the lips.

“Come on, we need to shower before you pass out on me and I have to clean you up again.” He laughed. “I can’t believe we did that. Are you sore?”

“You didn’t ask if I was sore when you took my virginity.” She shook her head wondering exactly how his brain worked. He seemed revitalized and full of energy, where as she was still unsure if her legs would hold her once she stood.

He stopped mid stride and turned. “Were you sore?”

“No. But still.” As she suspected her legs were shaky and unstable. “Oh my God, this is too much.”

“You’re legs are trembling.”

“You’re the most observant man...”

“Shh...be nice to me.” He lifted her in his arms. “You’ll hurt my feelings.”

The statement was shocking, and revealing. She did not want to hurt his feelings. After sex, especially after such an unexpected and new experience, she felt nervous and vulnerable. “I’m sorry.”

He carried her to the bathroom and stood her in the shower. He turned it on then removed the spent condom and stepped in behind her. The water cascaded over her body and refreshed her muddled senses. He grabbed the soap and lathered her up.

She stood there and let him position her limbs like she were a mannequin. As he soaped up her vagina and reached back to her anus she tensed.

“Sore?” His forehead pressed between her shoulder blades. “Damn we shouldn’t have done it.”

“Jack.” She giggled. “You’re washing my private areas. I mean, I’m entitled to a moment of embarrassment here.”

“You weren’t embarrassed in Vegas.” He lifted his head and stepped closer to her.

“I was asleep.” She leaned against his broad chest as he reached for the showerhead to rinse her off. What she was not expecting was the water pressure. “Jack?”

“Yes sweetheart.” He had no idea what was happening, she could tell. He simply moved the showerhead a little closer.

“Oh Jack!” The damn thing crept up on her. Out of nowhere and without warning. The water hit just right on her over sensitized clit and bam!

“Jesus.” He wrapped an arm around her for support as she reached back and gripped his thighs. “How the hell did that happen?”

“I can’t come anymore. I swear I’m going to faint.” She sagged against him. Her legs shook, she felt dizzy.

“Hell, that makes two of us. How did you do that?” Jack kissed her temple then sprayed off her back, letting the water run between them.

“You did it.” She accused and turned toward him.

“Well then, I guess I’m better than I thought I was.” He winked and hastily washed himself, paying special attention to his penis.

“You are so bad, Jack Johnson.” She leaned against the tile wall.

“And here I thought you wanted me to unleash my sexual prowess and make you pass out every time.” He rinsed in the same haphazard fashion. He placed the shower head back in its holder and opened the doors. He dried in the same way.

“You’re not even dry.” She used her towel to dry his shoulder.

“Am too.” He protested and hung his towel back up. She followed as he walked back into the bedroom and removed the top blanket. He stepped out in the hall. She smiled.

Those were things she liked the most about Jack. He was all man. He made sure she was squeaky-clean from head to toe, and then soaped up and rinsed himself off like he was just a dish in the sink. Stark naked he roamed around as though he were fully clothed. He did not have a modest bone in his body, but with a body like Jack’s modesty probably was not an issue.

He returned with a new quilt and spread it over the bed.

“Come get in the bed, and please don’t put on those pajamas.” Jack got in on his side.

“You don’t like them?” She hated sleeping with wet hair but it was late and she was exhausted.

“Not as much as I like the feel of just you.” He lifted his arm in expectation.

“What?”

“You crawl under my arm every night, put your head on my chest, your arm across me and your leg on my thigh.” He looked at her as if she already knew. But she did not. Generally, she slept like the dead. Only the alarm or sheer coincidence woke her up. She snuggled into him and he was right. She felt very secure and familiar in this spot. He kissed the top of her wet hair and she cringed, not telling what she was going to look like come morning. “Goodnight, sweetheart.”

He stretched and turned off the light.

“Goodnight, Jack.”

Chapter 13

“Bethany. Wake up sweetheart.” Jack kissed her forehead and shook her gently. He was not sneaking out of bed this morning. He wanted her to know where he was going and when he would be back.

“Mmmm.” She stretched like a cat. His hand guided her leg to make sure she did not knee him in the nuts. “What time is it?”

“Five o’clock.” He rolled her to her back as he did every morning. But this morning she was awake and he did not feel like a bastard for wanting to kiss her all over. He never took advantage of her in her sleep but a week of silky pajamas against his dick every morning tested him daily. “I’ve got a lot to do before the sun comes up.”

“It’s five in the morning?” He could imagine her brow all furrowed and cranky by the sound of her voice.

“Yes, sweetheart. I need to let the horses in, mow the lawn around the house, and repair a roof before this afternoon.” He kissed her neck. So warm and welcoming he kissed it again.

“You’ve been getting up and going to work all this time?” She trailed her fingers through his hair. Luring him in a direction he wanted to go, but did not have time for this morning.

“Yes. What else would I be doing?” Against his will, his hand slid to her breast and fondled the budded nipple. She pulled him toward her. Unable to resist he suckled the eager bud.

“Jack.” She gasped.

“Look, you have to stop seducing me woman. I’ve got work to do.” He let go of the nipple and pushed up in the bed. If he remained on top of her he would be inside of her and soon. Her faint laugh told him she had no clue how hard it was to leave her warm, welcoming body every day.

“What can I do to help?” She pushed up and faced him. It was dark in the room.

He could barely make out her silhouette.

“The attorney will be here around two. If you could have lunch ready it would be a big help.” He turned on the light and started getting dressed.

“Do you want me to finish the files upstairs?” Her question shocked him. She was honestly interested in the business aspect of the ranch. No woman in his family had been interested. His grandmother was all about hospitality but she did not get into the books.

“Yeah, if you think you can make some headway. The family will be here at noon. Everyone. If you need help, come get me. I have to take the truck because it’s easier than carrying all the gear down to the cabins. But I’ll have my cell phone. Just call me. All right?” He looked at her, her hair a mess and the curls wound every which way but down. Her cheek was pink from being stuck to his chest all night, and her serious face of concentration let him know she was trying to take it all in. “If you have questions about the bills, the finances, the accounts, anything, just call.”

“Okay.” She still looked to serious.

“You don’t have to get up now sweetheart, I just wanted you to know what was going on today.” He finished getting dressed and sat on the edge of the bed, close to her.

“I have a lot to do.” She nodded, her sleepy eyes blinked. He would love to crawl right back in bed and lay there with her in his arms all day. Next Sunday he would surprise her with a day in bed.

“When Paul, the attorney, leaves, we’ll tell the family about your business plans.” He leaned in and kissed her lips. “Man, I wish I could stay in bed right now.”

“No, no. We need to get up. I have tons to do.” Bethany got out of bed on her side and he all but fell over trying to grab at her. He wanted to kiss her a minute longer. She disappeared into the big closet.

“Sweetheart, you have plenty of time.” He opened the closet door and looked around. It seemed empty. Not at all, like a closet belonging to Bethany, a woman who had fine taste to his way of thinking. “You need to go shopping don’t you?”

“What?” She stopped half in and half out of the skirt she was pulling on.

“There’s nothing in here really. You’re going to need some winter clothes for

sure. Do we need to go pick up your car and stuff in Kentucky?" He had not thought about the rest of her stuff. Surely, she wanted her car and her clothes and whatever else she left behind.

"No. I don't need the car, or the clothes and I don't need to go shopping. Shopping will not make me feel better!" She dressed quickly and put her hands on her hips. "Don't you ever tell me to go shopping, Jack...ever!"

He scratched his head because in all his life he had never heard of a woman who thought it was an insult to run free with a credit card. "Okay, I have plenty of winter clothes you'll look cute in."

Her face tightened and her shoulders sagged. Not good.

"I'm sorry. That wasn't fair. My parents used to just send me shopping or take me shopping. They would give me money or clothes or stuff, any stuff, to avoid spending time with me." She looked at the floor when she said it and he knew it hurt her. What stupid people they were.

"I'll go with you." His head already hurt at the idea. But this was Bethany and she needed to know he was not trying to buy her off or placate her. "As cute as you are in my clothes, it does get cold and winter is not far out. You'll need more than sandals to make it."

"Really?" And as she looked at him, his heart broke. Tears had welled in her eyes and he wondered to what extent the neglect went.

"Yes, sweetheart." His voice lowered and he felt bad, though he did not do anything wrong, he did not like seeing her cry.

She lunged for him and jumped right into his arms. As he lifted her, she wrapped her legs around him. Now this was worth a trip to the mall.

"Can I get a cowboy hat, too?" She beamed.

"Definitely." He smiled.

"I love you, Jack." She kissed him before he could say anything. It took all the strength he had to remain on his feet. It was as if she kicked him right in the chest, knocking the wind right out of him. His heart pounded and his throat tightened. Here she was scaring him spitless again.

When she stopped kissing him, she simply put her hand over his mouth. "Don't

say anything. Don't read too far into it. Just let me have a moment of pure happiness."

"Okay." He mumbled against the palm of her hand. Maybe she did not mean it. Maybe she was just excited he would go shopping. Yes, it all started to make more sense.

"Okay." She smiled, let out a breath. "So let's get to work."

He sat her back on her feet. She practically beamed. Something so simple had brought her such joy. Of course, the thought of being in a mall brought him misery. But her reaction was priceless. Now if he only knew if she meant it.

The smell of steak and eggs brought his thinking around to something more pleasant, breakfast. His woman was awake and though she did not really mean it, she told him she loved him. The lawyer would be there to set things in motion and overall it was looking like a really good day ahead.

"Let's go eat. I'm starving." Bethany tugged at him as he realized he was lost in thought.

Nodding he followed her to the kitchen.

"Shit!" Heath shouted and ran butt naked to the laundry room.

Bethany noted the 'I heart Chance' tattoo on his left butt cheek. Oh, the tattoo explained why he was such a grouch. If she had someone's name on her ass and they left, she would be pissed at the owner of that name as well. "Nice heart Heath!"

"This is going to be the best day of my life." Jack smiled at her and headed to the counter to retrieve his plate.

Rafe tried to stop laughing. "I like you more and more every day B. I haven't seen Heath run like that in, hell, I don't know how long."

"Shut up Dick-head!" Heath shouted from the laundry.

"You want me to fix you a bowl of cereal?" Rafe offered and Jack noticed.

"Why do you think she wants cereal?" Jack's tone changed.

"Because cereal is what she eats." Rafe looked at his brother and crossed his arms. "You got something you want to say to me?"

“How the hell do you know what she eats?” Jack mocked Rafe’s stance.

“Because he’s here when your ass is out avoiding her.” Heath stepped back in the room wearing fresh jeans. He stepped between them. Then he looked at Jack. She could not hear what he said to him. But his face was serious and he meant business. Whatever it was he said, it worked, Jack backed down.

She could feel the tension ease. She wanted steak and eggs for a change but the last thing she wanted was to say anything and draw attention to herself.

“What do you want to eat?” Heath asked and looked directly at her. She could not speak. “I know it’s a nice ass, but really, you’re married to my brother.”

His smart comment snapped her back to reality. “I am not impressed with your ass!”

“So then what do you want to eat before Jack tries to fight me, too?” Heath looked Jack up and down as if daring him. Then he smiled and shook his head at his little brother. “Now you know.”

“Know what?” She asked but he ignored her.

“Exactly. What do you want to eat?” Heath grabbed his plate and headed for the table.

They were all communicating in man. The language of brothers and she was left out. “Jack.”

“Well you’ll need to take him back to the bedroom, honey, because we don’t serve Jack in the kitchen.” Heath took his seat.

He was enough to make a woman want to choke him. How Chance had married his humorless, bull headed, self-centered, egomaniac brother was beyond her.

“What do you want, sweetheart, steak and eggs or cereal?” Jack’s voice seemed quieter.

“Steak and eggs.” She closed the distance between them. Rafe passed her with his plate, a good indication he was not making her breakfast this morning.

Standing in front of Jack, she looked up into those whiskey brown eyes and fell into them. Heart first. He must have sensed it because he bent down to kiss her, in front of everyone.

“I’m going to throw up.” Heath snickered.

“Leave them alone.” Rafe warned.

“Now you’re on his side?” The banter continued between the brothers at the table while Jack continued to kiss her. She fought hard to hold back the moan this time; she did not want his brothers to hear. However, it was useless. She just made it as quiet as possible.

Jack pulled back and smiled. “I’ll make you breakfast.”

“No, you need to get to work. I can cook for myself.” She hugged him and relished the feel of his big warm body. Letting him go, she reached for his breakfast and handed it to him. “Now go eat.”

He took his plate to the table and sat with his brothers. She listened in as she cracked two eggs in the skillet.

“She needs to get her drivers license changed over. She may not have to take a road test, but I gave her a manual just in case. If you won’t let her drive your truck, she can take mine.” Rafe informed Jack. “If you want to keep her here you better pay attention to what she needs. You know how dad screwed up with mom and how the Hulk over here screwed it up with Chance.”

Rafe was talking low but she could still hear. She pretended not to, though she was not sure if he cared or not.

“You got some nerve telling him how to run shit.” Heath vehemently whispered. “Layla’s been giving you a honey-do list the past six months and you haven’t even been laid. That woman is using you and you’re letting her.”

“Bethany’s going to look at the ranch plans.” Jack blurted.

“What the hell does she know about ranching?” Heath slammed his fist on the table. She had had enough. She was not going to continue being talked about without having her say. She may be a woman in the kitchen at this moment in time, but she was not deaf, subservient, or stupid.

“I don’t know anything about ranching to tell the truth. But what I do know about is business. And I know you have been putting money aside when you should be investing it. I know the only thing stopping you from opening this thing is the four of you. Heath what do you do during the day?” Her hand propped on her hip and she pointed the spatula at him.

His face seemed shocked. They really thought she could not hear them. *Men!*

"I work the cattle on another ranch, train the cowboys." He shrugged.

"And you Rafe, I know where you are in the evenings but what do you do when you leave here?"

"I'm the head horse trainer on another ranch." He said with pride.

"See what I mean. You could be offering those services, right here on this ranch. Instead, you're going to them, working your asses off, and establishing reputations for your competition. Now what does Buck and Jan do?" Bethany turned back to the stove and flipped the steak one last time. The eggs were done and she realized the reverse would have been a better plan for cooking.

"Bucks a deputy sheriff and Jan's in college. She does what she can around here, feeds the horses in the evening and on Sundays." Jack leaned back and crossed his arms. "She can't do the hard labor."

"I'm sure she would disagree." She brought her plate and sat next to Jack. "But she can help with the paperwork and the website; you're not using her abilities or her education."

"Website?" Rafe asked.

"Are you going to let her talk to us like this?" Heath drew his brows into a scowl.

"She's talking to all of us, including me. And she's making a point Heath. Everyone will be here this afternoon." Jack looked at her with a seriousness that frightened her. This was it. She had to make good on her bossiness this afternoon. Show them how it could work, not tell them. Silently she prayed he kept good records. "Bethany will show us what she has in mind then. Right sweetheart?"

"Yes. And I'm not trying to take over. Jack saved my life." She put her hand on his thigh under the table and squeezed. It was the truth. He had saved her from a life of hell and brought her to this place of magic and love and hope. "I have a degree in business from one of the top schools in the nation. Please, give me a chance to pay him back, all of you. You have given me so much. To be a Johnson, not a Dodson anymore, it's worth more than all the gold at Fort Knox to me."

Rafe nodded, Jack squeezed her hand under the table, and Heath sniffed, looked toward the stairs, then got up and headed to them.

“I think it went well.” Jack whispered in her ear then kissed it.

“I’ll put in my notice today.” Rafe stood, stretched. “Besides, there’s always the Rodeo if things fall apart.”

The men cleared the room and Bethany insisted on cleaning up. Heath did not act as if he expected any different. He always left his dishes and Rafe usually tried to clean up after him. She wondered what Heath would say, if anything, when he came back down stairs.

They were alone and she was nervous. Unlike Jack, though he was known as the wild one, Heath was dangerous, bigger, and meaner than the others combined. Straightening her back as he entered the room she knew the only way to deal with him was head on, and not to back down.

“What pisses me off is I suggested the same thing a year ago and they wouldn’t listen.” Heath put his hat on and walked out.

Her jaw dropped. Of all the things she expected, that was not it.

Drying her hands on the dishtowel, she opened the door and called for the Danes. The two big dogs were gone. No doubt they left with Jack, but they came back early sometimes and she convinced them to hang around. Resigning to solitude, she headed up to the loft. Hopefully the education her father paid for really would pay off.

Rolling her head back and forth twice before rolling her shoulders a few times, Bethany tried to ease the tension. The computer clock told her it was almost noon. Her stomach was growling. Aside from a few trips to the bathroom and kitchen for more water, she had not left the loft, primarily the computer.

The last sheet printed off. Bethany grabbed the stack of papers, slipped it into a manila folder labeled Jan and stacked it on the other three. Now everyone had a copy. Stretching, she decided to grab something quick to eat.

As Bethany pulled the milk from the refrigerator, she heard the loud motor of something. Then Jack drove past the window. The sight of the man actually doing work, hot, sweaty, and sexy as sin almost made her drop the milk. She put the milk

back in the refrigerator, grabbed a bottle of water, then she headed out to see her man.

The big green thing he was driving made cutting the grass an easy chore. He wore his cowboy hat, a white t-shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots. When he turned and started back toward the house he smiled. Both dimples popped out and Bethany could swear her body temperature jumped up another ten degrees. He drove to the edge of the walk and tipped his hat.

“Hey there, sweetheart.” He winked.

“I brought you water.” She offered him the plastic bottle.

“Thanks.” He took the bottle then took a big drink almost consuming the entire thing.

“You look very sexy driving this tractor around.” She could not believe she was blushing. After all they had done together, she still blushed.

“Thanks, but this isn’t a tractor. It’s a riding lawn mower. Come on.” He patted his thigh. “I’m a little sweaty but I’ll try not to get you dirty.”

“I don’t mind.” She walked over to him, placed one foot next to his. The open toe sandals a stark contrast to his boots. Jack grabbed her arm and helped her balance as she sat sideways on his lap. He was sweaty, and more than a little, but all it did was mix his scent against the fresh cut grass and make her dizzy with lust.

“It’s going to be loud.” He moved one hand around her to the steering wheel and the other to the gearshift. It really was not big enough for the both of them but he managed.

“I’m okay.” She could not fight the urge any longer. She held onto his hat with one hand and grabbed his neck with the other. He seemed surprised until she kissed him, then he just seemed to enjoy himself.

“Mm. Not sure what I did to deserve that.” Jack stole another kiss then started the mower before she could answer.

She paid close attention to what he was doing. This was something she could easily do to help. Just drive a lawn mover around the yard, cutting grass was not any big deal, but it could save time and energy Jack could put into other things requiring a lot of time and energy.

The vibrations rumbled through the seat and Jack's legs, right up through her body. The mower was loud and distracting, nothing fun or sexy about it. But the vibration and the man trying to steer with his arms around her, well there was a lot of fun in sitting on his lap while he manipulated turns. His forearm brushed across her breasts, then her back as he switched hands to steer.

She decided to help and grabbed the wheel. It was not comfortable to drive sideways but as her hands steered the mower, Jack found better things to do with his hands. Like play with her kneecap, and elbow. How in the world did her kneecap become an erotic zone? But it was. Everything he touched turned to fire inside her. She could barely hear him laughing, probably because despite her best efforts the lawn was going to have some zigzags in it.

As they approached the house again, Jack took the wheel, and stopped the mower. The loud sound still rang in her ears.

"That was fun, sweetheart." He said and kissed the back of her neck.

She turned to look him eye to eye. She wanted to say it again but she would not. She absolutely would not keep telling him she loved him over random little things. It made no sense. What woman loved a man because he took her for a ride on a lawnmower? "I need to fix lunch."

"I'm starving. What do you plan to make?" He nuzzled her nose with his turning her into one big pile of mush. How could she react and think with him doing the sweetest little things?

"Sandwiches?" She planned to make finger sandwiches, cheese and crackers, nothing too big and nothing too complicated since it was a business meeting on both accounts.

"Sounds good." He offered his hand to help her down. When she took it, she made note of the calluses, the sweat on his forearm, the crisp hair, and the veins standing out. Unlike any other man she had ever known, Jack worked hard. Physically as well as mentally.

"I'll take the bottle back in. Do you want me to have a bath waiting on you?" She asked.

"Won't have time. I'll have to shower, if I can get done in time." He smiled.

“Looks like your buddies are ready for some bacon though.”

He winked letting her know he knew all along she was giving his dogs the bacon. Sure enough when she turned around, two Great Danes had appeared on the porch, tails wagging, tongues hanging. The mower started up again as Bethany greeted her four legged friends.

“I can’t believe you want me to give you treats after you left me alone all day.” She looked at the two Danes. They both tilted their heads when she said the word treat. If they got any taller she would be looking them eye to eye, but they were really just big puppies.

“Oh all right. Come on. I can’t resist those cute faces.” She opened the door and the Danes went in.

After playing with the dogs for a few minutes, practicing sit and lay down on command, she washed up and started making lunch. They must have a garden somewhere, because ripe tomatoes were always in the kitchen windowsill. Rafe was always taking a bag of vegetables to Layla’s and Heath ate enough tomatoes on his own with nothing but salt that someone would have had to go to the store daily to keep them supplied.

Thankfully, when she made a grocery list, Rafe bought two of everything. She had enough to make a lot of different dishes. They all worked hard, and would no doubt be starving. Her own stomach rumbled. Well if she ate while she prepared, she would not be hungry while presenting her plans.

At two on the dot, Jan and Buck arrived. Buck was in his uniform and she had to admit he was quite impressive. With just the two of them arriving so far, and realizing Buck’s job, she had to ask.

“Did you arrest them when they shot you?”

Buck stopped putting deviled eggs on his plate and blushed. “No ma’am.”

“Why not?”

He looked around. She supposed he was making sure Jan was still in the bathroom before answering. “I was still in training at the time. I’m the youngest

deputy in ages. But I was supposed to be at a training class the night it happened. Problem was, I had already arranged for a big romantic night and needed her brothers' blessing. What I got was two BBs' in the ass and it was not fun to sit for a week."

"So nothing happened, they shot you and got away with it?" She lowered her voice to match his.

Buck shrugged. "I wouldn't say they got away with it exactly. I pull Heath over almost every night I'm working. I never give him a ticket I just make him pull off the road, then say hi. He stops every time because it might not be me. I should probably quit before he really does get pulled over and ignores them."

"Buck." She was surprised at the mischievous young man, he seemed too quiet and calm to be throwing rocks at the bull. "Is he ready to kill you or what?"

"Just about." Buck winked, and then directed his attention to Jan as she entered the room. "Here you go. I made your plate first."

"Thanks sweetie." Jan kissed him and took the plate.

The front door opened and a moment later Heath was standing in the kitchen doorway. He acknowledged his sister then went upstairs.

"Hi Heath, glad to see you again!" She shouted after him.

Buck raised an eyebrow. "Guess I'm not the only one who likes to pull the tiger's tail."

"Do you always do that?" Jan asked biting back a smile.

"No, just when he acts like I don't exist." She shrugged.

"When who acts like you don't exist, sweetheart?" Jack asked as he came through the garage entrance.

"Heath." Everyone said in unison.

"Ah." Jack nodded, walked over to her, and took off his hat before leaning in for a kiss.

"You're soaking wet, Jack." Bethany looked him over. He was sweating from head to toe. He smelled like grass and dog. What had he been doing since mowing the lawn?

"Gave the boys a bath." Jack winked. "Now I need one of my own. Be back in a

few okay?"

Bethany nodded. Jan said please as she fanned the air, and Buck laughed.

"Shut up." Jack pulled Jan's long ponytail as he passed her. She made an ouch sound then tried to elbow him but hit the chair. Buck laughed louder and Jan scolded him.

The garage door opened again and Rafe walked in. He was not in much better condition than Jack had been in.

"What happened to you?" Jan asked.

"New buck over at Marshall's, they called and asked if I would break him in." Rafe looked longingly at the spread of finger food as he dusted his jeans.

"What do you want off of there?" Bethany asked.

"Tomatoes, Heath will eat them all, especially since you doctored them up with cheese and spices." Rafe smiled showing off his dimple. She grabbed a plate for him placing several tomatoes with mozzarella and basil on it.

"I'll keep this over here until you get back." She said.

"Better make Jack one too; less tomatoes, more sandwiches and eggs." Rafe winked and Bethany felt grateful. After the morning's escapade over breakfast, the last thing she wanted was Jack to think she cared more about Rafe than him. "And a glass of tea, he really likes sweet tea."

"Thank you." Bethany blushed from embarrassment this time. These were things she needed to know about her husband and did not.

Rafe disappeared up the stairs as Heath graced everyone with his grumpy presence. As Rafe predicted he almost cleared the tray of tomatoes. "Nice spread."

Was that a compliment from Mister Cranky Pants? "Thank you."

"Can you grab me a soda out of there?" Heath did not look up as he piled sandwiches and eggs on his plate.

"I'll carry it over for you." She followed him to his seat. He was already shoveling the food in his mouth before walking away. He sat across from Buck and Jan. Gave Buck the evil eye before he continued eating.

A moment of sympathy passed through her and she felt like patting him on the back or just giving him a hug. Heath seemed lonely and grumpy too often. But

because he was so manly, she doubted he would appreciate any show of affection. Still she opened the soda can and placed it in front of him.

He gave her a suspicious look and sniffed the finger sandwich before eating it.

"I didn't poison the food. Really Heath, how could I know which ones you would eat?" She laughed and he shifted to keep from smiling. On some level, she knew he enjoyed being teased. It had to be hard being the oldest, and then to have his youngest brother taking charge of things. Hopefully after all her research and planning she would make life more agreeable on all fronts for this family.

"Stop touching him, you're making me ill." Heath said to Jan.

"Not ill, jealous."

"You're my sister. Why would I want you touching me?" Heath said.

"Gross, you want Jan to touch you? She has cooties." Jack said as he entered the room. "Oh man. Heath, you ate all the tomatoes."

"Here." She handed Jack his plate already made.

"For me?" He asked with sheer delight on his face. God was she glad Rafe told her what to put on there.

Bethany nodded.

"Thank you, sweetheart." Jack stepped closer and kissed her sweet, slow and long.

"Now you're making me ill." Heath commented.

"I'm definitely not touching you" Jack looked at Heath and Heath's face began to pink. He was not a happy man.

"I'll touch you." Buck said. "Come on Heath."

Then Buck made a fish-like kissy face. Heath's face, however, could have pushed steam through his ears it was so red. "Why you little..."

"Now, now." Rafe re-entered the room. "Be nice to each other gentlemen we have at least an hour to spend in this room together and I don't want to break up fights or remove BBs from another man's ass again in my lifetime."

"You helped him out?" Heath asked.

"He was about to marry Jan. I couldn't have him hobbling down the aisle." Rafe walked to the stove and picked up his plate with tomatoes on it. He was the only

person besides her, to pick up her cheese and crackers. Good grief, they were a lot alike. No wonder she got along with him so well.

The front door opened as Rafe sat down and shortly after it clicked closed, an old man appeared in the doorway.

“Now your granddad would be thrilled to see this sight right here.” He said. “You must be Jack’s bride.”

“Yes, I’m Bethany, please come in. Would you like some lunch?” She greeted the old man with a handshake. He looked her over and nodded approval.

“Sure you’re not married to Rafe?” He asked and she paused, shook her head, and continued without acknowledging the comment. Jack, however, acknowledged it. He took a deep breath and let it out slow. She watched Heath nudge him on the shoulder as she stepped around to stand behind him. Placing her hands on Jack’s shoulders, she smiled.

“I am definitely married and committed to Jack Johnson.” She squeezed his shoulders and realized how tense he was. His body always seemed tight, but she thought it was because the only time she touched him was during sex. Right now, she realized he could probably use the same hug and attention Heath needed. Gently she let her fingers rub and caress his shoulders as she waited for the old man to take a seat.

“Well, let’s get to it.” He plopped a briefcase that looked about a hundred years older than him on the table. “Here are the forms. You’ll need to sign where I have it highlighted.”

Rafe passed the forms down to Jack who handed them up to her. “Wait a second; this is page, 12, 24, and 36. Where are the rest of the pages?”

Everyone laughed and Jack reached back to pat her hand. “Sweetheart, granddad practically wrote a book with his will. Those are the forms applying to you.”

“Well I’m not signing them until I see the rest.” She patted his hand in the same placating way he had just patted hers. Did they think she was stupid?

“Here.” The old man pulled out a stack of paper. Two inches thick and bound with a plastic spiral cord like a notebook. “A little light reading my dear.”

“That’s his will?” She said in shock.

“See why no one reads it all?” Jack asked.

“No.” She shook her head and made her way for the book. “Are you telling me no one here has read this?”

“I have.” The old man said and seemed to be getting uncomfortable as she stepped nearer. “And he wanted things done a certain way missy.”

“I have no doubt about it. But as you want me to sign a legal document I am sure you understand my need to review all of the information included.” She placed her hand on the will. “Is this the only copy?”

“But you only need to sign and in three months...”

“In three months you return to review our marital status, it doesn’t say here Jack gets his money in three months.” She handed him the documents. Just skimming them, she realized something was definitely wrong with this arrangement.

“Well, now there are conditions which must be met.” The guy grew more nervous and fidgeted with the briefcase.

“I understand, and I am sure those conditions are listed on pages thirteen, or maybe twenty-five.” She hoped she was not coming off as a bitch but really, how could she enter a contract and not know the terms?

“And you’re sure you’re not married to Rafe?” The old man laughed nervously. “He always told me Rafe would marry a smart one, and Jack would be the last to get hitched.”

“I am married to Jack.” Bethany clarified and felt offended on Jack’s behalf. “And after I read this...book of a will, I will sign the documents for Jack’s benefit.”

“No, you won’t.” The old man winked and she felt very uncomfortable. Mumbles broke out about the table. “But you will come see me.”

Paul, the old lawyer stood. “Congratulations, Jack, you got a smart wife here. Hope she sticks around.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” And as she said it, she knew it was true. No matter what the will said, unless getting money hinged on getting divorced, she did not intend to ever leave Jack.

“That’s right, sweetheart.” Jack announced. “And if she wants to read the whole

thing it's fine by me. Hell, someone should have done it long before now."

"Mom should have done it." Heath said and stood.

"You can't leave Heath. I have the plans all set to go over." She pleaded. Then she wanted to kick him as he stretched adjusted himself, and then sat back down.

"I wasn't going anywhere." He smiled in triumph.

"Good Lord, someone grab a camera the man is smiling." Jan gasped in faux shock.

"Stop it, Heath, you're making me ill." Buck teased.

"So where are the plans?" Rafe asked.

Picking up the will, she headed for the living room toward the loft. "Be right back. Jack, don't let them leave, I need everyone here for this."

"They aren't going anywhere, sweetheart." Jack said seriously as he looked at the will she held.

Bethany gulped and ran to the loft. Her first big meeting and she had a lot to cover. It was just like they trained them at school. A board meeting with all the high power executives, only they had no idea how much power they each held. With only a few hours of research coupled with the plans Heath had made a year ago, they could be up and running as soon as they chose to be.

Chapter 14

“You can’t be serious.” Jack knew it was the best decision but it hurt like hell to hear it.

“Yes, I am. I know you’ve been managing the books, and I commend you on the job you’ve done, but Heath’s the oldest and he already has a business license. We can modify it to include all of you, no problem, but he has it now. The ranch is close enough to some ski slopes I think you can open it whenever you please. Summer is almost over so if you do it now, things could be tight to get scheduled, but there’s no reason people can’t be here now unless the cabins aren’t ready and you know some of them are.”

Bethany was amazing in full business mode. All her charts and graphs and visual aids outlining the ranch, what each section could be used for, who should head up what section and how it could happen right away. The woman he married a week ago was telling him how to make his dreams come true and she was leading his entire family down the same path.

“They don’t listen to me. Never have.” Jack watched Heath as he crossed his arms and leaned back. It was probably the best day of his life in all honesty. A woman was not only validating everything he had been telling them the past two years but also she was selling the entire family on the plan. There lay the crux of it all. Heath was right. They were not about to listen to him any longer. He had been a bear all throughout childhood and he was not about to boss them in their adult lives.

“But we are listening to you.” Rafe pointed out and Jack felt like kicking him for stealing his line!

“I agree, sweetheart, you seem to have a good grasp on delegating without, let’s say, being a tyrant.” He winked and she smiled. He knew she had to be nervous about giving the reins over to Heath, and what he would think of the idea, but it made sense. Heath knew more people and had a better reputation than Rafe or himself. Rafe had been known for horses all his life and Jack was known for wild

antics and women. Heath had always been a cowboy, and he was always like a rock. Sturdy and dependable, he had worked on almost every ranch around by the time he was seventeen.

“That’s a lot of pressure for her don’t you think?” Jan spoke up.

“She can handle it.” Buck spoke to his wife. “You’ve been trying for years to be a full fledged part of your brothers plans honey, don’t get scared now.”

“I’m not scared. I thought maybe it was a lot for Bethany. I mean, she’s been here a week. She doesn’t know about ranching, horses, cattle, or anything else going on around here.” Jan was obviously nervous, and rightfully so. Bethany had made big plans to incorporate her on equal turf with them and Jack knew as much as she would not admit it, Jan had become comfortable in the role of baby sister.

“You’re right, Jan. I don’t. But I know about business and I know about profits, and marketing, and staffing. I know about the health codes and technicalities of running a dining facility. I know about insurance and investments. I know the four of you are sitting on a lucrative opportunity. What I don’t know is if you’re all ready to take this opportunity and make it into something.” Bethany still spoke in business tone.

She had her shoulders back and her eyes direct at Jan. Jack had not had trouble keeping himself in check around women until this moment. He could feel his heart pounding and his groin tighten. Something about her called to him on a basic level. There in the kitchen with his entire family sitting around the table, he was getting a boner just watching his wife.

“Chicken?” Heath teased Jan.

“Yeah Jan, are those feathers sprouting over there?” Rafe joined in.

“What about school?” Buck came to his wife’s defense. “How much time is the website and newsletter going to take, this is her last year, she’s worked too hard to just stop.”

“It won’t interfere with school, it’s important she finishes her degree. It will be vital to running the kids camps in the summer to have an educator on board. In the meantime Heath or I can help her if it gets to be too much.” Bethany nodded.

“Heath?” Jan asked.

“Well yes. I mean he has a degree in...”

“Bethany!” Heath smacked the table jarring Jack from his daydreams about Bethany being all business like in the bedroom.

“Don’t yell at my wife.” Jack nudged his older brother and took a good look at him. Heath was blushing, full on red face. “What the hell are you embarrassed about?”

“How did you find out?” Heath asked Bethany as he shifted in his seat looking more uncomfortable than Jack ever remembered seeing him.

“It was on the loan application. You have a bachelor’s degree in business and it shows. You should be proud of it.” Jack watched his big brother squirm even more as his wife complimented him. Too much a man to take much more, Heath got up and walked around the kitchen grumbling under his breath.

“What did I say?” Bethany sounded confused and who would not be?

“Nothing sweetheart. Are we good for today? It’s a lot to digest.” He turned his attention towards her. She looked hurt by Heath’s reaction.

“You did good.” Rafe praised her. Damn Him! He seemed to always be communicating with her. Jack totally understood now how Heath went off the deep end when Chance had come to him with the news of her acceptance into a culinary arts program. They were friends, and she was going to surprise Heath but could not keep the secret bottled up. Now Rafe seemed to have a friendship with Bethany and it grated his nerves.

“Yes, sweetheart, you did very well.” So lame. Even to his own ears, it sounded like he was just trying to reinforce Rafe. “Don’t you all have someplace else to be now?”

“Jack.” Bethany had a surprised look on her face. It was rude and he knew it but he was aggravated with his brothers and Buck surely had to get back to work soon.

“What? You fed them, set out a plan for the ranch, it’s going on six now and I’d like some time with my wife before I hit the sheets.” Shameless he meant every word. He wanted his family out of his house.

“Come on Rafe, you can stay at my place.” Heath offered.

“I’m all set. Savanna has a test in the morning. I can still get there and help her

study.” Rafe got up, grabbed his hat, and headed out. “See ya in the morning.”

Bethany began clearing the table of plates and he wished he could help her but if he stood, the rest of his family would not be pleased with him.

“You’re welcome at our place for dinner.” Buck offered Heath, a monumental statement coming from the kid. One of her most important points was there had to be a truce. If the family could not work together, the whole ranch would fall apart. Jack held his breath waiting for Heath’s reply.

“Come on Heath, I’ll make fried chicken, extra crispy just like you like it. And I won’t kiss Buck while you’re there. Well, I won’t tongue kiss him, or grab his butt, or anything that will make you sick.” Jan teased and Jack hoped Heath still had half a sense of humor. He had become so cold and withdrawn since Chance left. His brother was but a shadow of the man he once was.

“Why not? If I stay here, Jack is sure to make me sick. If go with you at least I get some food out of the deal.” Heath agreed and Jack felt like a weight had lifted off the house.

“Have fun.” Bethany waved as they left. She turned to him. “I think it went well don’t you? I mean I know it’s a lot different than what you had designed but it is a sound plan.”

“Come here.” Finally, with everyone gone he could get up from the table and not care he was sporting a massive boner.

“Let me put these dishes in the sink first.” She grabbed the stack of plates and started to ward the sink. He followed her and as she sat the dishes in the sink, he wrapped his arms around her. “Jack, I need to get this stuff in the dishwasher.”

“I’ll do it later. Turn around here.” Adding the importance of his need he kissed her neck, rocked his hips against her backside.

“You’re like a teenager. All you want from me is sex.” She turned and he could see in her expression that she was teasing him. If anything, she was the insatiable one.

“That’s not all I want from you.” He kissed her candy pink lips and pulled her tight against him.

“No?” She whispered breathlessly.

“No. I also want to spend time with you. Don’t let him fool you sweetheart, he’s excited, but he’s not the boss of me.” Pulling her along with him Jack flipped on the television, sat on the couch, and pulled her down to his lap. “What do you want to watch?”

She blinked at him a few moments then snuggled into his chest without answering. The news was on so he left it there. What he really wanted right now was to do exactly what they were doing. Cuddle up on the couch and act like an old married couple instead of a new married couple who barely knew one another.

“What do you want for dinner?” he asked.

“I’ve been snacking on the leftovers so I’m not really hungry.”

“Okay then, tell me about you.” Pulling her up to face him, he knew she was the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. But how he knew was a mystery. He did not know her favorite color, or what she liked to eat. Much less what her childhood was like, other than she seemed to have been neglected and bought off.

“There’s nothing to tell really.” Bethany shrugged. “My life didn’t start until last week.”

“What was Kentucky like? You don’t have to talk about your parents or childhood but I would like to know what you like, what you hate, I don’t want to step on another landmine like this morning.” Her smile faded. He began to wonder if she thought he was stupid. Yes, Heath had a degree, but he did not know shit about women. Rafe knew horses and kids, but he had been courting Layla for six months and getting nowhere fast. Jack knew women, and he knew the one on his lap was hiding something.

“I don’t know. I mean if someone asked me three weeks ago if I liked dogs, I would have said no. But I love Jessie Boy and Blue Dog. I couldn’t imagine this place without them running around and playing. I always knew I would like horses. I would watch them every derby and just be in awe at their grace and speed. I’ve never roughed it Jack. I’ve had everything handed to me since I was born. What I made today, I learned from my nanny slash housekeeper. She would let me help out in the kitchen when my parents threw parties.” He watched her smile at the

mention of the housekeeper then frown. "They will probably fire her now I'm gone."

"So call her and bring her out to the ranch. You said we would need a housekeeping staff, give her a job, put her in charge, I don't know, but you should never turn you're back on people you love." He knew that much first hand. "What about your friends. You never explained the whole scene back at the hotel."

"What's there to explain? They aren't my friends. They never were. They told my parents my every move and Rosie is having an affair with my father. He probably doesn't even know she's his partner's daughter. The man is oblivious to everyone but dead presidents." Jack knew right away, who had done the most damage in her life.

"I understand. My dad loved us, but he would go out for days on cattle drives, or leave for months with the rodeo. He was an amazing cowboy. It was what drew my mother to him, and then it was what drove them apart. I think we all got here from make up sessions. They argued a lot. My grandpa hated it." He explained.

"That doesn't explain Jan." Bethany smiled again.

"Actually it does. They had been sleeping in separate rooms for years, then all of a sudden things were getting better, then mom thought she was going through the change, when she found out she was pregnant, well it was like a honeymoon phase for a while. Then we found out he had cancer. Then Jan was born. Shortly after, he died. We like to remember the last year when things were good. But momma always told him she loved him, he never said it back much, and he always told us love was woman talk. And if a man loved a woman too much she would rip out his heart and steal his dreams." Jack sighed.

"Do you believe him?" she asked.

"I don't know. The only example I've had is my daddy and Heath. I don't want a marriage like my parents, always fighting. Heath told Chance he loved her and within two months she had destroyed him." He hoped she understood what he was trying to say, or rather what he was not prepared to say. Even if he felt it, his head fought the words on so many levels.

"My dad never told us he loved us unless reporters or other businessmen were around. My mom said it was his actions. As if actions proved, he loved us. Of

course she valued her Mercedes Benz, and her salon appointments, club membership, and exotic vacations, which by the way I never got to go on.”

She waved her hand as she spoke and he smiled. She was opening up to him, letting him in. “I agree, it is the actions that speak louder than words. My dad proved he didn’t love me because he was never there. He was a sixteen-digit credit card number, a portrait on holidays, but he was never there when I was sick. He even paid a non-profit organization not to hire me.”

“That’s illegal.”

“I know. But they needed the money and he agreed to donate two hundred-fifty thousand dollars if they just told me I wasn’t qualified. It’s a good number, one I made sure to remember.” And her eyes held every bit of the hurt and anger she must have felt then, as she was feeling it now. “I couldn’t blame them, and I was grateful the director told me the truth. She didn’t understand why he would do such a thing, but I did.”

“Why, sweetheart?” Jack pushed at the stray curl from her ponytail, tucking it behind her ear.

“He doesn’t think women should work. He thinks they are trophies, like my mother. Her job was to look good, to play hostess and mother, and he kept her well.” Her shoulders sagged and tears formed at the corners of her eyes. “She’s no better. She had me because he needed a child to help sell his lifestyle as a family man, to make his work look better, cleaner. She was happy being a trophy. And after she had me, he stopped looking at her the same. Or so she says.”

“What planet are they from?” He pulled her into a bear hug. He knew it was squeezing too tight, but he wished he could squeeze all the pain away. “You’re the most loveable woman I know.”

“Thanks.” She sighed and he eased his grip.

Her head nuzzled his shoulder and her arms wrapped around him. The silence was not uncomfortable. It was nice, relaxing, and peaceful. The sweet smell of her shampoo and the light fragrance she wore would be forever imprinted on his sense of smell. The softness of her curves, the taste of her mouth, even the sound of her voice, all of it was penetrating his senses, enveloping him.

Bethany lay there on his chest. The sense of safety his body provided was nothing like she had ever known before. Jack's parents were not perfect. It helped her to reveal more. His family obviously had quirks, but they loved each other, and they were all driven by a common goal. They all loved the ranch. So did she. She also loved each of them.

Heath, the quintessential cowboy, Rafe the peacemaker, and Jan the little sister who was trying to come into her own. Then there was Jack, her husband, trying to please her. When it was obvious from the moment she met him, he was very used to women going out of their way to please him.

His chest rose and fell in a slow steady rhythm. A soft snore began. She squeezed him tighter. "I love you, Jack Johnson. You don't have to say it; your actions have already told me you love me, too. You just might not know it yet."

Closing her eyes, she drifted off to sleep in his arms.

"For crying out loud can't you sleep in the bed? You'll both be sorry in the morning." Heath's voice pulled her from a peaceful slumber. Blinking and trying to get herself focused she yawned and stretched.

"What time is it?" Jack's rough hands scrubbed her arms as he spoke.

"Ten. I cleaned up the kitchen." Heath stretched. "I'm heading up to bed. See you in the morning." And as he started away, he turned back. "With my pants on, so you can sleep in, Sugar."

He winked and walked away. See a man's naked ass once, Bethany laughed. It was a nice ass, but branded with Chance's name. What made a man go that far if not love?

"Did he just make a joke?" Jack asked with a kiss to her cheek.

"I think so." She stretched again. "I guess we should go to bed, too."

"Yep." He stretched as he stood. She watched his t-shirt rise and bear a bit of skin.

"Jack?" She tried to wiggle her eyebrows but he apparently thought it was funny

because he laughed.

“Yes sweetheart?”

“I’ll race you to the bedroom.” She took off running but he caught her and turned her in the opposite direction. He continued on his path to the bedroom. She laughed and entered their bedroom. He was already in the bed, fully clothed on top of the blankets arms folded behind his head and barely winded. “You cheated.”

“So.” He smiled shamelessly.

“So. What time do you have to get up in the morning?” She closed the door and locked it. Jack looked entirely too tempting on their bed to just ignore it. Walking up to where his boots hung over the side she pulled them off one at a time.

“Well now, taking my boots off for me, what next?” He asked then bit his lower lip.

“Depends.” She tugged at both socks. Never had a man’s feet looked so sexy, but aside from his arms and face, it was the only bare skin revealed at the moment. She stroked the top of each foot.

“Depends on what?” He asked.

“Jack.” She said and sounded as annoyed as she felt. “You are exasperating. Do you want me to strip you naked and sex you up or not?”

“Are you gonna yell at me if you do?” He wiggled his eyebrows very effectively.

“If you keep it up, yes.” She tried not to laugh but he would not give her a straight answer, and he kept twisting her words around.

“Oh I think I can keep it up.” Like now.

“Okay, be like stubborn. I don’t need sex,” *Liar!* She walked around the foot of the bed and toward the closet. “I lived without it for years.”

“No, no, no. You get back over here and boss me around again.” He said as she grabbed the knob to the closet. She was certain he just told her to get back over there and boss him. Was he kidding?

“Not funny. I’m very serious about getting things started for your family. I don’t appreciate you making fun of me.” Irritation began to sink in.

“Will you stop being serious for a second and look at me?” Now he sounded frustrated. She turned to look at him. He was sitting up in the bed. He held his hand

out and she looked at it like it might bite her if she touched it.

"I'm listening." Folding her arms, she gave him her full attention.

"Now that's more like it." He smiled and lay back on the bed again.

"Jack." She warned.

"Sweetheart, I love when you get in full business mode. I could barely pay attention to what was going on there today because I was so turned on by your...presence. You led the room and captivated everyone. You're smart and sexy and I couldn't get up out of the chair until everyone was gone because my dick was hitting the table top."

Now that she was not expecting. He really wanted her to be all prim and professional. He was turned on by her brain. His words about undid her on the spot.

"So you really want me to tell you what to do?" She asked making certain she understood him correctly.

"Just in the bedroom, and maybe just tonight, but I swear I am ready to get on my hands and knees if you want me to." The look in his whiskey brown eyes was so intense as it passed over her body; she felt it like a lick of fire. Scorching her senses.

She gulped. Then wondered what exactly did she want him to do? Well, she definitely wanted him naked. Oh yes, the plan became very clear in her mind's eye.

"Take your clothes off, Mister Johnson. I need to examine you." Doctor Bethany was in full professional mode right now.

"Okay, sweetheart." Jack was on his feet in a flash stripping.

"That's Doctor, Doctor Bethany and you'll be so kind to remember it, sir." The sharpness of her tone was surprising even to her own ears.

"Well yes ma'am." His voice dropped and as he slowly removed his clothing, her breath hitched. He must have really liked being put in his place tonight.

Standing next to the bed, he held his arms to his sides. His hair had grown over the past week, not a lot but enough to tickle her fingers if she were to touch the nape of his neck. His eyes were heavy with desire and his body flushed. The width of his shoulders called at her to touch them and ease the tension she knew was there. The dark brown hair sprinkling his chest and angled down his abs, drawing

her attention downward to greet an angry erection. His cock bobbed and weaved as if trying to detach and seek her out on its own.

Thick long thighs and calves gave way to two big feet. As she looked at them, his toes moved.

“Come stand here, Mr. Johnson I want to get a good look at you.” Trying not to lose character, she undid her ponytail and quickly pulled the curls back up and into a loose bun. If only she had a pair of glasses right now!

“Here?” He looked around the room a little awkward.

“Yes. Now turn around.” He looked surprised but he did it. Not having his eyes on her, she could fan the heat from her face with her hands. The man had a body to die for. And his tush -- good grief she could probably bounce quarters off his firm ass.

Jack cleared his throat. “How serious is it Doctor?”

“Very.” She traced a finger from the top of his spine to the tip of his tailbone. Jacks butt muscles clenched and hollowed his cheeks. Chills of delight ran over her and she let go of reservations and slipped into character completely. “Turn around, Mr. Johnson.”

Jack turned slowly. His chest rose and fell in quick controlled breaths. His penis still bobbed, as the top glistened. “Now. First thing I need to do is check your reflexes.”

A low growl rumbled as she grabbed the shaft.

“Interesting.” She nodded then let go. His jaw began to make a tick on the left side. “I think you may need to lie down, Mr. Johnson. This is going to be messy.”

“Messy?” He asked as he made his way to the bed.

“Mmm. Yes I need to explore you very thoroughly, with my mouth.” He stubbed his toe and hopped the last two steps cursing a stream of words. “Mr. Johnson, that type of language is not allowed in my office.”

“I...I’m sorry. It just hurt like a blank of a blank.” He sat and held the offended toe.

“I’ll take a look at it.” She tried to grab his hands but he pulled back.

“My feet are worse than my hands, sweetheart. You don’t want to touch them.”

“Mr. Johnson, I asked you to call me doctor. If you can’t follow the rules, I may just have to spank you, and then look at your toe.” His mouth dropped open and then shut. “Do you have something you want to say to me?”

“No ma’am.” He still held the toe. “It’s just, well, my wife. Yes, my wife has very pretty feet. They are soft and well groomed. A man could easily forget they are feet. My feet on the other hand...”

“Mr. Johnson, I don’t know what you do or don’t do with your wife and her feet. But I am going to look at this toe, now let go.” She stomped her foot for emphasis. How sweet of him to be embarrassed by his big manly feet. She could have told him she had no intentions of sucking his toes as he had hers, but that would be too easy. She wanted him to sweat it out. To trust her decisions and relax about what he thought was not pretty. Of course, his feet were not pretty. He was a man, a man who spent a lot of time on his feet and using his hands. The rest of his body made up for callused feet. Now she knew he was self-conscious about them, she could talk him into a pedicure.

Jack slowly let go of the toe and Bethany looked it over. “Ouch” he said as she touched it.

“We’ll put a cold cloth on it.” She nodded and started for the bathroom.

“It’s fine, sweet--Dr. Bethany, I mean.” And he smiled.

“Do you have an imaginary degree in medicine, Mr. Johnson?” It took a lot of restraint to say something so silly straight-faced but she managed.

“No ma’am.” He tried to hold back his laugh.

“Well I do. So lay down. I’ll be right back.” She had to get to the bathroom, where the lubricant was. He had done research on what they did last night, and during a mental break from the business plans, she did a little research herself. The internet could be such a wealth of information.

Bethany tucked the small tube of lubricant between her breasts. Hopefully they would warm it up a little. Wetting a washcloth, she returned to her impatient patient. Jack had his hand around his erection and a smile on his face.

“First things first.” She wrapped the cool washcloth around his toe. “Now. Let me check out these calves.”

Jack groaned. Why had he told her to keep her clothes on the other day? He would gladly give his left arm to have her naked and under him right now. Such sweet torture he had brought upon himself. What he had hoped for was her being a little more dominant, maybe telling him what to do to make her pleasure greater. What he got was Dr. Bethany.

“Tickles.” Jack tried not to squirm as the lovely doctor nipped and licked along his calves then traced circles on his kneecaps before kissing them, too.

“Interesting.” She still sounded all professional and cool as her hands explored his thighs and her lips followed. He hoped she would just put him out of his misery but she avoided his groin completely.

His stomach was not much less ticklish as she barely touched him. “Woo. Um Doctor. Can you maybe use a little more pressure?”

“But then your muscles wouldn’t twitch and jump.” She said as her tongue dipped into his navel.

“Woman, you are killing me here.” He again grabbed his shaft. His dick ached to the point of pain from not being touched by her. Maybe it was what she wanted, for him to just handle his own business in front of her as he had her do in the truck.

“Mr. Johnson, take your hand off your Johnson.” Dr. Bethany scolded and removed his hand.

“I can’t take it anymore. We have to stop playing, I need to be inside you, and I need it like I need my next breath. Bethany, please. Just take off your clothes and let me make love to you.” As he tried to push up, she put her hand on his chest and pushed him back down.

“Now this is very interesting. I think I may need to investigate the source of all your pain.” He wanted to strangle her at this point. Not that he would, but real pain was taking over the pleasure. Not a good thing.

“Please.” He begged and did not care he was begging. Hell he was ready to get on hands and knees again, but this time he was serious.

Bethany settled between his legs as he parted them under her direction. She had not taken a stitch of clothes off and had no intentions of doing so. This was about Jack. Pure, sweet, and simple. As she gripped his hard shaft, he groaned and

lifted his hips off the bed to get a stroke out of the grip.

“Mr. Johnson, you seem very tense here.” The look he gave her was a cross between pleasure and pain and she decided to stop toying with him. As much fun as it was to tease him, it would be more fun to make him come harder than ever in his life.

To do something she was sure no woman had ever done before to Jack Johnson.

“Oh yes, please, yes. Thank you, thank you.” He moaned as she stroked him.

His eyes were heavy and he grabbed the bedding on either side of his thighs. She began slowly licking and Jack went wild. His hips lifted, his thighs closed and opened trying to get her closer. If Heath did not hear him upstairs, it would be a shock. Jack was very vocal and loud as he moaned and praised her.

Using one hand to stroke him, and her tongue to tease the glans, she grabbed the warmed little bottle of lube from between her breasts. Flipping the top and squeezing a little lube onto her fingertips, she hoped the internet was right.

Bethany made a long lick down his shaft and he swore at any minute he would just explode. Then she licked each of his already tight nuts and he groaned. The woman was the best he had ever had, and he had been blown more than a few times. Her finger dipped below his scrotum, teased the perineum. It did feel good. Then she touched lower.

“Whoa!” Jack’s eyes opened wide and he closed his thighs around her holding her still.

“Just trust me.” She held her right hand on his penis and her left index finger on his anus. She did not have nails so she was not worried about scratching him.

“I don’t think so, sweetheart.” Jack closed his left eye as she lowered her head back and licked the head of his cock.

“Jack, you did it to me and I survived. Even enjoyed it. So relax.” Gently she circled his anus and felt him clench his cheeks together so tight her finger was trapped by them. His head shook no. “If you don’t like it we won’t do it again.”

“I know I won’t like it.” He looked pained.

“Did you like doing it to me?” He relaxed just a little as he nodded. “It felt good

to be in there didn't it?"

He nodded again.

"Well if you ever want to get in there again, you'll let me do this once, just once to you." He debated it she could tell. His jaw worked overtime twitching as he thought. To sway him in her direction she began sucking his cock again as if she was not waiting for him to make a very personal decision.

"Once. If you hurt me..."

"I won't hurt you. Just relax, remember. I'll put a little pressure, and you just let me in." He snorted a laugh, all the relaxation she needed to get past his initial barrier. He was not expecting it because he jerked, pushing her finger deeper.

"That's it, Jack. Does it hurt?" She stroked his penis with her tongue and his inner wall with her finger very gently. He shook his head no. Apparently, he was out of words. She hoped he would talk to her after this. But turn about was fair play, he showed her something new and exciting, and she wanted to keep up. "Do you like it?"

He did not respond. She pulled her finger back then pushed a little farther, looking for the spot. It was supposed to make him orgasm like never before in his life. When she reached the prostate, she stroked it gently, once, twice. Jack cried out in pleasure. Encouraged she stroked and asked the important question. "Do you like it?"

"Bethany." Jack came, shooting up like a volcano erupting.

She had never seen anything like it. His sperm shot at least a foot in the air before falling back down to her hand and his penis. His anus muscles gripped her index finger tightly and she could feel each throb and pulse of his orgasm. She wondered if he felt the same when she came, vaginally or otherwise.

As he settled down, she slowly removed her finger and looked up at him. He had not opened his eyes and a light sniff brought her attention to his expression. Good Lord, he was crying. "Jack, did I hurt you? Oh my God, I'm so sorry."

He held up a hand and waved it to silence her. He obviously struggled with the flood of emotions, and her heart began to break. This was supposed to be an adventure, not destroy the precious foundation they were building.

“I’m okay sweetheart.” He finally said and sniffed again before opening his eyes. “That was...intense.”

“Okay.” She swallowed the lump in her throat.

“Shower?” Jack sighed and sat up.

Now she was the silent one. Nodding she followed him to the bathroom.

Once inside, she made sure to take care of him as he had done her after such an invasive sexploration. Washing his back, she took care to massage the tight muscles. Jack leaned his head back and let out low moans of approval. Once she moved her hands over his muscled butt, he tensed.

She put her forehead between his shoulder blades and kissed his back. “I shouldn’t have done it. I just wanted to make you feel something as awesome as you make me feel.”

“Sweetheart, I’m entitled to a moment of embarrassment since your washing my most private parts, remember?” He snickered then turned. “But don’t think you have to make me feel anything, I feel it, every time you come I feel it. Every touch of your hand, I feel it. When you sleep on my chest at night, sweetheart, I feel the awesome power of you.” He swallowed, and then kissed her deeply. A soul-binding kiss, it told her what he might never say with words. And she decided right then she could live with it. As long as Jack showed her he loved her, he never had to say it.

Jack poured his soul into the kiss. The woman had pushed his boundaries and made him feel uncomfortable, then amazing, and she was not turned off by the fact what she did have in fact turned him on. He did not really know what to think of the experience. He had not shed a tear since his father died. The tears he shed in bed were different. It was a release, an unexpected release. He had a new appreciation for his prostate and a new appreciation for the woman in his arms. Here he thought he was through with wild women, Bethany just topped them all, and in the process made him look as wild as a newborn kitten. She ruined his bad reputation, and built one of her own.

Chapter 15

Two Great Danes walked with her to the large tree right outside the dining facility. On the back of the tree was in fact a heart with initials carved in it. Grandpa Johnson had not written a will exactly. He had written a memoir, and the forms were placed there at random until the grandchildren took enough interest to actually read his book. Jack was right, the man was a character.

A month had passed and she still had not signed the documents. There was no need to. Jack had not asked about it, and she kept the treasure hunt to herself. Just in case it was a joke, she did not want to get all their hopes up and let them crash and burn. The brothers all worked on the Johnson Family Ranch now. A few cabins would be open for the winter and a few summer reservations had already been made for next year. Two months remained of the season and one cabin was booked for next month already. It was a slow start, but a start nonetheless.

Squatting down behind the tree Bethany looked for the right root, a big one; it was supposed to rise out of the ground. Finding it, she paced twenty steps. Looking around before digging in she prayed no one found her doing this. They would not be pleased. The Danes helped her dig and she hoped they did not make this a habit or Jack would really kill her.

About ten minutes of digging Blue Dog started barking at the ground and Jessie Boy began to focus on the same spot also. Both dogs barked and jumped and their excitement gave her hope. Either they had found the buried lock box, or an old aluminum can.

“What is it boys?” She asked and they started jumping around. The dogs were enormous and when it came to digging, they made short work of making the hole bigger than she had anticipated. Their hole however turned up results. Getting them to calm down she pulled the treat bag from her pocket and they immediately sat. “Good boys.”

After giving them each a treat, she focused on the hole. Sure enough, an old

rusty box was there. Using her little shovel Bethany dug around it and finally freed the box. Sitting in on the grass next to the hole, she examined the box. It was not a lock box at all. Instead, it was a recipe card box. Rusty, but still functioning, she opened the top. There in sealed plastic bags were four sets of keys. She sighed.

“Well Grandpa Johnson, I don’t know about your grandkids. But I loved your will. And I hope we make you proud.” She stood, looked at the hole, and decided to leave it for now. They may not believe her.

“Come on boys, we need to find your daddy!” She called to the dogs. At the mention of the word daddy, they took off. Bethany watched the two dogs’ race for the stables. She looked at her watch and decided they were right, he was probably there.

“If you think he’s a good buy then get him.” Jack said to Rafe. His brother was debating a horse, actually a pony. He thought it might be fun for the kids, romantic for the couples, since the pony could pull a small wagon, but he could not decide.

“What the hell?” Rafe looked over his shoulder and out toward the stable entrance. Jack turned to see what had caught his attention. He was not expecting it to be his wife.

“Sweetheart, are you okay?” He stepped toward her. She was dirty, sweaty and carrying a little tin box like it was a bar of gold.

“Jack! I found it!” She beamed and handed him the box.

“Where did you find it, what is it?” She seemed entirely too excited about the small box. In the last month, she had been outside more but she always remained clean, even while riding the horses she seemed to keep herself together.

Right now she looked a mess. The amount of dirt on her clothes, not to mention on her forehead and hands told him she had either dug this up by hand or the Danes had buried her somewhere and she finally dug herself out. Her hair was loose from the ponytail and sweat trickled down into her tank top from her neck.

“Open it.” She prompted, pulling him from the stream of ideas including getting just as dirty by carrying her up to the hayloft.

“Open it Jack.” Rafe nudged him. “I will if you don’t.”

“Okay.” Jack opened the tin box and scrutinized the plastic sandwich bags with keys in them. “What the hell is this?”

“They are the keys to the bank boxes. You didn’t have to get married Jack, none of you did. Jan can have her inheritance now, even Rafe and Heath. He buried them by the tree with his and your grandmother’s initials in it.” She explained.

“What tree?” Rafe asked.

“Hang on a second, how did you find this out?” He closed the box.

“I read his will, but it’s actually more like a memoir or autobiography. He hid the keys until someone actually took the time to read it all, to understand how much he loved this ranch, how much it hurt him to watch it fade.” He watched her expression and realized she was definitely in love with the ranch. Now he did not need to be married, and she did not need him anymore either, would she stay?

“We should get the others.” He handed the box to Rafe. “Come on, we need to talk.”

All the way to the house he thought about what to say, which meant he did not say a word as they walked there. In the kitchen, he knew he had unsettled her with the silence. She washed her hands at the sink and patted a cool paper towel over her neck. The past month they had settled into a blissful routine. He had survived the trip to the mall, she had stocked up on summer clothes, and other necessities preparing her for winter, they split the cost fifty/fifty. She refused to let him pay for it all, and she paid her half in cash.

“What’s wrong?” She asked nervously and pulled a bottle of water from the refrigerator. “Would you like one?”

“No.” he said. “How do you know what’s in the bank boxes? It could be just another treasure map.”

“How did you...”

“I read it. When you didn’t go to the lawyer and started going out on your own private explorations I got curious.” He shrugged.

“Jack why didn’t you look for it, or at least help me look for it?” Her hands went to her hips and he knew she was mad at him. She was probably going to be less pleased when this conversation was over.

"I didn't want to find it." He crossed his arms.

"What?" She looked shocked. "But you married me just to get your money."

"Then. But you showed us we could do it on our own steam, and now you found the key and I can get the money, now what? You don't need me anymore. You have your social security card, your drivers' license. You have everything you need to go out and start your new life." He could feel his face tighten.

"You want a divorce?" She asked quietly and his heart hurt.

"Do you?" His teeth would be powder by the time it was over.

She shook her head no and it felt like the world was lifting off his shoulders.

"Are you sure?" He held his breath.

"Are you?" she looked up and tears threatened to slip down her dirty cheeks.

"I could never love another woman the way I love you." And the words were said so easy. She ran into his arms and climbed him like a tree.

"I love you, Jack." She said and kissed him as the tears fell.

"Oh for crying out loud get a room!" Heath growled as he entered the house. Bethany wiped the tears and smudged the dirt worse. Heath took one look and cringed. Jack bit back the laugh. "I take it back, get a shower."

"Yes. I do need a shower." Bethany laughed and hugged him tighter. "I'll go clean up."

"Okay." He sat her back on her feet and watched her leave with a smile. His chest was full and the world was good.

"She's going to destroy you. You are aware of that, right?" Heath said as he opened the refrigerator. "Want some tea?"

"She's not mom, she's not Chance, she loves the ranch, and she loves me. We don't hide from each other." He crossed his arms. "And yes, you big jerk, I would like some tea."

Heath laughed. "So what's all the buzz about?"

"The woman who's out to destroy my life found the keys to the bank boxes." Jack watched Heath spit the drink he just took all over the sink.

"No shit?" Heath started cleaning up his mess.

"No shit." Jack walked over and grabbed the tea jug then a glass from the

cabinet. Heath had asked, but in typical self-centered fashion, it was as far as his big brother took the gesture.

Tears consumed her as she leaned against the shower wall. He said it. He told her he loved her. It was real and perfect, and everything she ever wanted. For the first time in her life she knew what real love felt like. She was a part of this family now. Nothing could tear them apart now. Nothing!

"I know you don't like it but I like doing it so shut up and sit down." Bethany scowled at him. She had done it once before and he had to admit the rubbing was great, but the wax was weird.

"Now give it to me." She demanded. With reluctance, he lifted his foot. "Tell me if it's too hot."

"It's too hot." He said before his foot even touched the wax.

"Jack I swear you are the most difficult man sometimes." She proceeded to push his foot into the paraffin wax.

"Sweetheart, I don't know any other man who would let a woman torture him this way." He lifted his foot and she wrapped something around it. The wax just felt gross, seeping between his toes and around his ankle. "I hate this."

"You do not." She dipped his other foot in. "You know you love it, you don't have to get all macho man on me. I know you're a big strong guy. But I also know you have to take care of these puppies or they will give out when you get older."

"If my brothers ever found out, I would never live this down." He sighed, resigned to the fact his feet were now all waxed up. "I wonder if it would work on my..."

"No. You cannot put your pee-pee in it. You are shameless." She shook her head and moved the wax away. Then she climbed onto his lap and waited for the wax to set.

"I still think it would be cool to make a mold of it." He shrugged.

"No it would not. Then they would call it the Jack, and put your picture on the box and sell you to thousands of women." She said it like it was a bad thing. In the

near future, she was the only woman his real dick would be exploring so why did it matter if a faux Jack Johnson got around?

“You think many women would but it?” He bit her nose before she could make another face again. He loved this time with her. Sitting here, just hanging out. Enjoying each other’s company. Even if it required him to suffer through pink wax on his feet.

“Ouch.” She rubbed her nose and then hugged him tight. “I’d buy one. And I’m sure any other virgin who bought one wouldn’t suffer any embarrassment on her first time, though I don’t know she would be interested in any other penis from that point on.”

“You say the nicest things to me.” He laughed. She pinched him then laughed.

“Okay, time to remove the wax.” Bethany hopped up from his lap and kneeled before him. The position of submission made him horny despite the pink wax encapsulating his feet. “I know you like what comes next.”

“I won’t argue your point there.” Because it was true. Once she got the wax off, she used some fancy lotion to rub his feet. It was sheer bliss. “You know I could do this for you also.”

“You already do enough for my feet thank you.” She winked. Stole his move. He was the winker; he must be rubbing off on her. Maybe she would eventually start calling him sweetheart. He shook his head. Yuk. He did not want a pet name; pet names were cute for women not men.

“Ohhh. It feels nice, sooo nice.” He closed his eyes and let her have her way with his feet. Who was he kidding, he loved it. The wax was the worst part and it did help to remove a lot of rough callused skin. But her hands were just divine.

“Jack?” She continued revitalizing his foot with those magic fingers.

“Mmm?” She wanted something, he was sure.

“Wouldn’t it be great if we found a chef soon?” The ranch, Bethany was always thinking about the ranch, she was as obsessed as he was.

“Yes, sweetheart.” He agreed. But until they got to those bank boxes tomorrow, he did not know if they could afford one.

“Don’t you know any?” He looked down at her. Not sure if she was plotting or

scheming.

“Only one, but I don’t know where she is now.” She nodded. Oh, she was definitely scheming. But not on this topic. “Don’t even think about it.”

“About what?” She asked innocently and switched feet.

“Chance. I can read you like a book, Bethany. You’re thinking how great it would be if Chance came back and cooked. But she left and has been gone almost a year. Heath’s her husband, and I learned well to stay out of their affairs.” Trouble, right then and there he knew she was not listening, and whatever she planned next was going to be nothing but trouble.

“I didn’t say Chance. I just think we should post the position and see what pops up.” She shrugged innocently.

“You’re not fooling me.” He pointed and she shrugged again. “Come here.”

As she stood, he pulled her in close and bent her over his knee. It was a spontaneous gesture, not one he had planned, but she was there now. “Jack!”

And giggling.

“Tell me you are not going to try to interfere with Heath’s love life.” He palmed her left butt cheek letting her know what was coming if she did not agree to stay out of it.

“You’re not the boss of me.” She giggled again.

“Okay. I gave you a chance.” Jack pulled back and swatted her butt. She yelped and he was afraid he smacked it too hard. Then she giggled again.

“Please, I barely felt that.” She challenged.

“Really? Well how about this one?” He swatted the other cheek and she grabbed his calve muscle.

“Mmm. Barely. I think I have on too many clothes don’t you?” She looked over her shoulder at him and he realized she was serious. He was just playing but she actually liked it.

“I don’t want to hurt you sweetheart, I mean if I actually smack this tush of yours it might sting.” He meant every word. He would never raise a hand against a woman and he never wanted to be too rough with her.

“There’s a lot of it back there, Jack, it can take a girly swat like the ones you just

issued.” Oh how she loved to pull the tigers tail. Bethany always pushed him farther than anyone had before. Such a sweet polite woman in her daily life, she became a bit of a ravenous vixen in the bedroom. He finally understood the meaning of “behind closed doors.” She acted like a sailor on shore leave. He, of course, became the willing victim.

She pulled up her skirt then resituated herself over his knees again. “Now, have I been bad?”

“You’re definitely not being good right now.” Shaking his head, he knew she was into whatever role she was playing.

“Don’t spank me, Sire, I swear I was just borrowing the apples.” Bethany feigned an accent and all!

“Um...”

“Jack. You’re supposed to scold me and tell me you must issue the lashings.” She pinched his leg.

“Ouch.” He smacked her behind. She yelped. “Don’t pinch me. And don’t steal my apples.”

The smile on her face was priceless. He decided he could play games with her forever. Maybe they would never tire of each other because they were always pretending to be other people in the bedroom these days.

“No, Sire.” Her deep exhale and soft voice signaled him to land another swat on the other cheek. “Yes.”

“Yes? You plan to steal more apples, girl?” It was difficult to keep a straight face while playing with her but he managed.

“No.” She shook her head, “I just love the way your hands feel, Sire.”

Jack made another swat and then rubbed the area. Her bottom was pink around the underwear and probably below the blue cotton panties as well. “It’s starting to feel warm to the touch.”

“And it tingles, Sire.” She was all but limp over his knees. What she got out of this he had no clue. It was not doing a thing for him, other than pleasing her.

“One last swat young lady and you will then pay for the apples.” Jack had better ideas of how to make her pay for stealing fruit.

“Oh yes, Sire.” Bethany agreed too eagerly and he laughed. She frowned at him and he secured his lips together and tried to form a scowl.

“Jack, you always laugh at my fantasies.” She started to get up.

He swatted her one more time and she gasped in surprise. He got her good that time, his hand even stung a little. “No, sweetheart. I don’t think your fantasies are funny. But sometimes your reaction is cute and it makes me laugh. I shouldn’t have to be a serious man all the time. But since it’s what you want...Get on your knees, girl.”

“What?” Her eyes rounded. He always let her lead them through these games but they were always silly and centered around her except the doctor venture the first time.

“You heard me. You ate those apples you stole, now...” He pulled the boxers she had bought him to wear, rather than walk around nude during her salon days, over his hips. “Now, you will repay your debt.”

“But I wanted to...”

“You want to repay your debt.” He tunneled his hands through her curly brown hair, luxuriating in the silky strands. He began to understand why she liked to lead these games. It was empowering, almost intoxicating. His dick had leapt to attention the moment she seated herself on her knees before him. Pulling her closer to him, he noticed her pouting lip; she wanted to make all the decisions like always. “Not this time, sweetheart. You wanted a master, now be a good slave and open up.”

Her lips parted in shock more than obedience but they parted nonetheless.

“Now be a good girl and repay me.” Holding her hair back Jack watched his wife, the woman who had made him play many subservient roles, to include bath boy, finally submit to him. Her pouting lips parted and bubblegum pink tongue licked him from root to tip. It had been weeks since he received this treatment, but he had generously given it to her almost daily. “Deeper.”

She obeyed and his blood pulsed in tandem throughout every vein in his body. His muscles clenched his chest heaved, Bethany used both hands and her lips to drive him right to the brink in a hurry. “Stop!”

“What?” She jumped and looked toward the bedroom door. “Did you hear

someone?"

"Get up here. Sit on me quick." He pulled at her shoulders. He was ready to explode and he wanted to be inside her when it happened.

"But..." She slowly stood.

"Bethany, please!" He tugged the panties down her legs and lifted the skirt. She still wore skirts more than anything else. A benefit at a time like this.

"But I haven't come yet." She pouted as she climbed on top of him.

"Have I ever let you down?" He shook his head. Selfish little witch. She normally had three before he got one, obviously, he was spoiling her.

"No." She sighed as she sank down onto his erection. It took little more to get her moving in a sweet rhythm. He debated letting her wait it out until the last minute. He knew exactly how to touch her to get her off quick, but she knew the same little tricks about him, and she was testing his word right now.

"You little..." Jack reached between them and stroked her clit just right, she slowed down and worked for her own orgasm now, not his. "See. Be nice."

"Yes. Nice, ohhh so nice." Bethany gripped his back harder her head fell to his shoulder and she began to moan and kiss his neck. "Mmm, Jack soo nice. Right there, oh right there, don't stop...Oh God don't stop, yes!"

Her inner walls gripped him and fought each lift of her hips dragging her back down onto his shaft. When the pulsations began milking him he relaxed and let his own orgasm go. At least she did not demand he fuck her this time. The change was so startling sometimes he wondered if she had a split personality. Bedroom Bethany versus Bethany Johnson, business minded woman with manners and charm to spare.

She relaxed completely, her nose nuzzling his neck. "One more?"

"You're an addict." He squeezed his little sex kitten.

"No I'm not." She said around a yawn. "It helps me sleep, breaks tension, and relieves stress."

He chuckled. "So I'm nothing more than a sleep aid?"

"Jack." She sounded sleepy already. "You're amazing, how can a girl get enough when you can always pull out more?"

“Well, I’m not pulling out more tonight sweetheart. I’m spent.” He gently patted her butt. “Now let’s get a shower and get to bed.”

“When I lead I at least get three.” She pouted as she dismounted and started into the bathroom.

“And when you lead I am left tortured for at least an hour before I get any.” Spoiled brat.

“You spoil me.” She admitted it. Ha! He felt validated. He had spoiled her. “And no one has ever spoiled me before. You give me everything I’ve ever wanted, in the bedroom and out. Forgive me for taking so much.”

In his mind a stream of curses flashed by. Guilt hit him like a box of rocks. He never wanted to let her down and she did deserve to be spoiled. He just wanted a little of the same. Hell, before Bethany he was the one getting all the attention. Now she was the center of his world. As the shower started, he remembered the showerhead. Reaching up to remove it, he pulled her in tight against him. He had no idea how this worked, it was a fluke the first time, and maybe he would get lucky again, if not, he would just have to do it the old-fashioned way.

“Tell me when it gets there.”

Jack directed the spray at her, circled each of her nipples with the water spray then trailed it down her abdomen. When the water hit her clit in rapid pulsing fashion, she leaned back onto his supporting body and moaned. “There.”

“Mmm. Look at you sweetheart, already knocking on that door.” Jack wrapped an arm around her for support. So maybe she was an addict. Maybe she needed a little release now and then, or daily, what difference did it make? She was making up for lost time. And he was always willing to play games with her.

She had not realized it was such torture for him to hold back. She thought of him more like superman than an average man. He could do anything, leap buildings in a single bound, and give multiple orgasms in a single session. What more could a girl ask for? Nothing, she decided as the pulsing wave crashed over her body. “Mmmm.”

“That’s it. I love the face you make.” He cooed in her ear adding to the sensation. She pushed the water away and slumped against him. He replaced the

showerhead and hugged her tightly.

“Thanks.” The warmth and security of his arms was undeniable. She would crawl under his skin and live there if it were possible to be that close to him.

“Let’s wash up and get to bed, sweetheart.” He placed a kiss on her temple and released her. Instantly she felt the loss of his warmth along her back and craved it again. The sooner they got out of the shower, the sooner she could crawl onto his chest and listen to his heart as she drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 16

"I understand you have the keys, but you will still need Paul's signature to get into the boxes." Angela Triplett is what the woman's name badge said. They all stood there like one big family in the bank manager's office. "I'm sorry but as you can see here the form says so."

"Hogwash!" Bethany accepted the form and looked it over; unfortunately, it was a notarized document, legal and binding. The paper simply said--No one can open the boxes until Paul signs the papers Angie.

Grandpa Johnson did not plan to make things easy on them.

"Well?" Jack asked.

"I'm sorry, honey, she's telling the truth." Bethany watched as their faces all dropped. This was her fault, and what she had feared. She should have brought the keys herself and found this out.

"She just called him honey." Rafe whispered to Heath but not low enough.

"Come on, sweetheart, let's go get Paul." Jack rolled his eyes at his brothers and held out a hand towards her. "Wait here, we'll be right back."

Heath made himself imposingly comfortable by sitting on the leather couch in the bank manager's office. Jan took a seat on Bucks lap after he sat in one large chair; Rafe took the seat next to them.

"Got anything to drink?" She heard Heath ask as they left.

"Your brother is a real piece of work, you know?" she asked Jack as they walked down the sidewalk towards the lawyer's office.

"Heath's always been a little...self centered I guess." Jack smiled down at her. His fingers squeezed hers slightly and it was as if he hugged her entire body with a simple touch. She felt herself sigh.

"I'm glad you're not like them. Heath drives me nuts with his big male presence. Rafe is like having a real girlfriend around to talk to, but if you ever tell him I will kill you." He laughed and she smiled, "But you, Jack Johnson, are perfect. You're a

little too macho, but you like to listen and let me do silly things like give you a pedicure.”

“Shh. Someone could hear you.” He said and looked around as if at any moment someone would appear. At ten a.m., the town seemed more like a ghost town than anything else. Everyone was at work, only a few people were milling about the streets, and Bethany had no doubts they were going to or coming from work themselves.

“This is his office?” She looked at the old building and the weathered sign hanging on the door. It did not even say his name, just the word attorney.

“Yep.” Jack pushed open the door. “Mr. Reuben’s?” Jack called and she heard what sounded like a cabinet door close in another room.

The office was an old house actually. The living room they were standing in had a desk and a big leather chair behind it. Bookshelves lined the walls with tons of books. A few file cabinets set off to one side and two office chairs sat in front of the desk. Jack continued through the living room/office and into what she now realized was a kitchen. The house was shotgun style; the next room had to be the bedroom. Good grief! Did he live here?

“Hey there, just making some coffee.” Paul stirred in his sweetener. “You need me to sign something I presume?”

“Yes sir.” Jack nodded. He did not seem the least offended this old man had kept them running in circles for the last five years.

“Why didn’t you just tell them?” Bethany did not feel the same. The whole reason Jack had married her was for money, and he could have had it all along. She was torn between the reliefs he did not know, and now she was there with him, and the fact someone had pulled one over on the man she now loved and his family causing them years of struggle.

“In these parts a man makes a promise to a friend, he keeps it.” Paul shrugged took a long swig of the coffee and sat the cup in the sink. “You ready to get your money now?”

“No.” Jack shocked them both. “I’m ready to see what my grandfather left in the boxes, it cannot just be money. We do not really need it so much anymore. We

have all read the will now, Mr. Reuben. We understand why you did not say anything. You should not have had to. He was our grandfather, he was there after our dad died, and we learned to love the ranch from him, but we were strong, stubborn little children and we had to do it our way. Now we know our way was not the family way, and until it became the family way, the ranch would not succeed.”

“Yes Jack, you are finally ready to get the gifts he left you.” Paul smiled and his eyes watered. He started toward the door and they followed him. “Your grandpa was one of my best friends, when I needed a job I worked on the ranch, when I got my license, I offered him my services as payment for keeping me alive all those years. I had a wife and two kids to support, your grandparents always had a place at the table for us. My wife worked alongside your granny in the kitchen, the blueberry pie she made, its Gloria’s recipe. I’d give anything for a slice of blueberry pie now.”

“Mr. Reuben what was the ranch like in its hay day?” Jack asked and Bethany realized whatever the old man said next would influence their marketing strategy in a major way.

“A family place, a place for anyone and everyone. Most of the people who worked there needed to be there, it gave them a place to live, food to eat, and a paycheck. Half this town came up from the ranches, the guests; well they were more like family, too. They were taught not only how to ride a horse or be led down a trail; they learned how to saddle them, how to clean them. They did almost as much work as we did but it’s what they were there for. To live like cowboys, me n’ your daddy would take the men off for two day trail rides, camp out under the stars, give them back their manhood and fellowship, where the corporate world was stripping it away.”

Jack opened the door to the bank allowing Paul and her to pass through ahead of him. She could see the wheels turning in his mind and knew there would be a family meeting tonight if he could arrange it. They entered the office where everyone still waited. The woman looked relieved and Bethany looked over to Heath who had a drink, a doughnut, and a napkin and knew why. He had been aggravating her since they left. Jan was practically sleeping in Buck’s lap. It seemed

odd for some reason. Rafe was reading a magazine. Angie, smiled and stood, she looked at Heath, shook her head and then focused on Paul.

“Paul, I hope you are here to sign papers. I swear I’m ready to give Heath his box just to get him out of here.” She looked at Heath and frowned.

“What did I do?” He asked innocently.

“I owe Travis breakfast now I borrowed his doughnuts.” She placed her hands on her generous hips and shook her head.

“What?” Heath asked. “She could have said she did not have anything to eat here.”

“She did.” Rafe nodded without looking away from the article.

“Paul.” The woman prompted, “Please, sign here.”

Paul laughed and stepped up to the big mahogany desk. He signed the papers as the woman headed toward the door. “Come on kids.”

“Kids?” Heath made a harrumph as he got up.

They followed her into a room behind a locked door. It looked like they walked into the part of the post office with all the boxes in it, but they were bank boxes instead. “You got your keys?”

“Yes ma’am.” They all answered.

“Well look at the number on the tag and have at it.” She stepped back next to Paul Reuben and waited.

Bethany stood next to Jack and held her breath. Everyone was waiting for him to do something; no one had made a move. “Shouldn’t Heath go first?”

“No little brother, Bethany found it, you go first.” Heath sounded serious and affectionate, unlike he had ever sounded before.

“Go on, honey.” She prompted. Jack looked down at her, smiled, and then pulled the key out of his pocket. His boots echoed on the tile floor as he approached the box. It was as though time had slowed down and held them all suspended. Each little bump on the key could be heard as it slid into box 459. The clean air and sterile conditions of the room made it seem almost surreal.

Jack opened the bank box door and removed a wooden box. “It’s another box.”

“Open it.” Jan said with the curiosity they all felt.

Jack lifted the lid and smiled. "There's a letter, some papers, his harmonica. I searched for two months trying to find this thing."

"My turn!" Jan was full of energy now, like a kid at Christmas, she put her key in box 460. "I got a box, too!"

"That's grandma's jewelry box." Heath nodded. "I thought mom had it."

"Oh my." Jan exclaimed as she opened it. "It's all of it, and a letter and some papers, but it's all of her jewelry."

"Not all of it." Heath sighed, and Bethany wondered what piece he was referring. "Rafe."

"Don't mind if I do." Rafe patted Heath on the shoulder once then went to his box, 458, "Here goes everything."

"Well?" Jan prompted.

"Box, like Jack's." Rafe opened the lid. "Sweet."

"What?" Jan asked.

"Spurs. And more of the same paperwork." He shrugged but his eyes gave him away, those spurs meant a lot to him.

"Heath." Bethany looked sidelong at the mountain of a man who seemed more nervous than the rest.

"I shouldn't have much, he already gave me an heirloom, and I lost it." His footsteps thundered as he walked to the box. Again she wondered what he meant by it. But this was no time to ask. Jack squeezed her in tight against him and they all waited.

Heath opened box 457 and removed another wood box just like Jack and Rafe had. Opening it, he stood silent...then closed it and marched out of the room without comment.

"Heath?" Jan called but he was in a hurry to get out of there.

"Let him go, Jan." Paul nodded. "The paperwork you all refer to is what you need to get your money out. You can go to the tellers and let poor Angie have a rest."

"Just like that?" Rafe asked.

"Just like that." Paul nodded.

“Well, why don’t we discuss it later then come back.” Jan stroked the top of the jewelry box.

“Sounds good.” Rafe nodded. “We should all be together anyways.”

“Come on, beautiful, I’ll buy you some lunch before I head into work.” Buck kissed Jan on the forehead and led her out the door.

“I’m gonna go see Layla.” Rafe smiled and headed out behind them.

“Mr. Rueben.” Jack spoke as the man started to leave.

“Yes?”

“We’ll be having a big barbeque for the opening weekend of the ranch, would you like to come?” Bethany felt the pride in her heart for this kind man. How Jack had evaded so many women was a mystery, any woman would be proud to stand by his side.

“I’d like to.” Paul Reuben smiled and all the lines on his old face appeared, but his eyes twinkled.

“You too, Ms. Angie.” Jack nodded.

“Well, thank you, Jack.” The woman smiled and opened the door for them.

“I wonder what Heath got.” Bethany said as she held Jack’s box in her lap.

“Something special, like all of us. He just couldn’t admit it.” Jack smiled at her.

“You know, I am really proud to be your wife, Jack Johnson.” She smiled at him and wondered if they would always be like this.

“Thank you, sweetheart.” He blushed.

“Jack, do you like me?” She asked seriously.

“Little bit.” He joked.

“I’m serious.” She traced the soft wood box with her finger. “I know I’m a little different sometimes.”

“Is this where you tell me you’re really an alien from outer space?” He teased.

“Jack.” She sighed. “I mean I know we have great sex, really amazing sex, but do you like who I am in the light of day? When I’m just plain ole Bethany Johnson?”

“Sweetheart, I prefer plain ole Bethany Johnson both in and out of the bedroom. I don’t mind playing games or swatting your tush now and then if that’s what it takes

to keep you happy, but I wouldn't mind making love to plain old Bethany Johnson now and again."

She gulped. Here she had been trying to be wild for him, trying to live up to what she thought a man like Jack would want, or expect in the bedroom and all along he just wanted her. "So no games tonight."

"Promise?" He bit his lower lip and wiggled his eyebrows.

"You are so bad." She giggled.

"I get to be the man again, Hooray!" he teased.

"Jack, it wasn't bad."

"I wonder if my sweetheart will have the same sailor mouth as my other lovers."

"What other lovers?" She snapped to attention.

"Dr. Bethany, Servant Bethany, Mistress Bethany." He could go on but he stopped there.

"I like talking dirty sometimes." She shrugged. "So I shouldn't say what? Fuck, cock, pussy."

"You're making me blush woman." He laughed. "You say whatever you want, just as long as you don't say small, little, or stop."

He winked. She felt better about herself every day she was with Jack. The healing power of love had helped her become the woman she knew deep down she always was. The woman she wanted to be. Moreover, Jack accepted her, just like she was and even when she acted out. Something no one else had done before.

"Well now what do we have here?" Jack asked as he came through the kitchen door. He put his boots in the mudroom since they were muddy. The rain had started on the way back from town and had not let up any. It was a good thing, they needed the rain.

"Dinner." Bethany acted as though it was no big deal but she had put together quite a feast. The dining room table was set with candlelight and all. He got the feeling she was trying to seduce him. And he had to admit, he was easy pickings.

"So the candlelight is just in case the power goes out then?" He smiled and stepped around the counter to get his hands on her. Every moment away from her

felt like an eternity.

“Behave. I made all this food so we could enjoy a nice quiet dinner alone.” She leaned into him as she protested and he squeezed her tight. Inhaling deeply he smelled the baked chicken, the stuffing, and Bethany.

“Dance with me.” He did not know what had come over him but he really felt like dancing with her.

“Jack.” She giggled but let him spin her around to face him and put her arms around his neck as he pulled her in tight.

He began humming the song that now hung in the corner of his mind. Must Be Doin’ Something Right by Billy Currington. Not only had he memorized it from the first night; he bought the damned CD and listened to it whenever he was alone in his truck.

Bethany sighed, placed her head against his shoulder. “You’re definitely doing something right, Jack.”

The fact she was happy meant more to him than breathing. Never in his life had he felt about another person the way he felt about this woman in his arms. Her happiness was at the forefront of his mind all day. Every decision he made was based on furthering her happiness. “I love you, Bethany Johnson. I don’t want to go another day without saying it, or hearing it from you.”

“Oh Jack.” She squeezed him so tight he almost lost his air. When did she get so strong? “I love you, too. You’ve made me the happiest woman in the world.”

“Yeah, well you’ve made me the hungriest man. I keep smelling chicken and stuffing and can’t wait to eat.” He looked down into her eyes and saw the love he felt reflected there. A vague memory popped into his mind, his grandpa holding his grandma like this. His dad, after Jan was born holding his mom. “I feel sorry for my brothers.”

“Why?” She tiptoed up to kiss him. Such a sweet mouth she had. No wonder he was intoxicated by her.

“They don’t have this. What we have.” One more kiss and he resigned to letting her go so they could eat the meal she obviously worked hard to prepare.

“They’ll find it.” And she seemed so sure of her words he hoped she was right,

she had not been wrong about anything so far.

After she sat the plates on the table, he flipped out the light. “Huh, power must have gone out.”

“Well, good thing it only went out in the dining room because there’s a pie in the oven.” She shook her head obviously amused at his attempt to make it more romantic.

He ignored her and sat at the head of the table so he could be closer to her. She had placed his food directly across from her. “This smells delicious.”

“Thank you.” She smiled. The candlelight played with her features, especially her eyes. They ate in relative silence, only the sounds of silverware and occasional sighs. The silence was a peaceful thing. Not awkward or forced, just natural as they enjoyed the meal.

The timer went off on the oven and Bethany started to get up. “I’ll take care of it, sweetheart, you sit tight.” She started to get up again and he put both hands on her shoulders and held her in place. “I don’t mind, really.”

“Okay, if you insist.” She shrugged.

“I do.” He removed the hot apple pie and set it on the counter to cool. “You’ve really outdone yourself, sweetheart.”

“I’m trying to be a good housewife.” She admitted.

“What?” He frowned. She was more than just a housewife and he knew it was important to her to be a businesswoman.

“I’ve been thinking I can just help Heath out with the ranch details and otherwise just be here.” It was the awkwardness of the sentence letting him know she was getting restless. They had done so much work on the ranch so quickly because of her help, things had begun to run smooth and she was needed to do less and less. Apparently, she had delegated herself right into boredom.

“You know what I think?” He asked as he began cleaning up the table, again she tried to get up, but he was not having it. “I think you should start your own consulting service. I mean look how fast you got this place up and running. There are plenty of other businesses in town and other ranches around could use your business eye.”

"I don't want to work with other ranches. I want to work here." She said definitively.

"So why don't you take on the dining facility? You've been talking about getting it up and going, you can cook until we get a chef, or just do it yourself from now on, whatever you want sweetheart, just do it." He placed the dishes in the sink and she moved beside him to open the dishwasher. They worked as a quick efficient team clearing the plates and storing the leftovers.

"You know what I want?" She spoke quietly.

"What's that, sweetheart?" He passed her the last plate.

"Kids." Thank God, she had grabbed the plate before he let go of it. It would have smashed into the floor otherwise.

"Babies?" The air was sucked from his lungs and he sounded like a bullfrog asking the question. She took it as a bad sign because her face fell into a slow frown.

"I don't know." She said quietly then looked away. He was paralyzed. He tried to reach for her but his arms would not move. Father, good lord, he had only grown up himself in the past month. "I can see you're not ready for kids so just forget it."

She shut the dishwasher door and started it. He remained frozen, unable to move or speak. She looked at him, and then walked out of the room. Long moments passed before he could breathe again. Shaking out of the stupor he was in he went to find her.

She was already asleep in the bed. The closer he got the easier he could see she had been crying. It broke his heart to make her cry. She was obviously upset, she had on her silky nightgown, and they never wore clothes to bed. Letting out a long breath he resigned to the fact it was going to happen eventually anyways. Yes, he would like to spend more time with just the two of them, but she was a thirty year-old woman, his momma had three kids by the time she was thirty.

Jack undressed and slid into bed next to her.

"Sweetheart. Sweetheart, wake up." He kissed her temple, her cheek, each eyelid.

"Let me sleep, Jack." She sounded so sad it hurt him to hear it.

“Wake up, sweetheart, we have work to do.” He kissed her pouting lip and did not quit until she began kissing him back.

“Jack, I don’t feel like it.” She said as her arms snaked around his back and held him close.

“You don’t feel like making a baby?” He kissed her neck and then her ear. “Stop taking the pill, sweetheart.”

“I uh...I ran out...last week?” She tensed in his arms as if she just realized something. Good grief was she already pregnant?

“Are you...”

“No, I’m not; I mean I can’t be right, how long has it been? I just...wanted to see how you felt. You obviously aren’t ready, don’t worry about it.” She shrugged.

“Don’t tell me what I am or am not ready for, now spread em’.” He nipped her top lip. “How long does it take for birth control to wear off?”

“I don’t know. At least a month right...probably more right?” She ran her fingers through his hair and down his neck leaving goose bumps in their wake. If he did not know any better, it was as if she were asking him.

“Well, we have a lot of practice to do now don’t we?” He nipped her neck gently.

“I just want to crawl right under your skin and be a part of you so badly sometimes. You know?” She traced her fingers over his lips. Her body began to heat and though she was wearing the nightgown, she was not wearing panties, the scent of her arousal perfumed the air, and without any foreplay, she was already wet and ready.

“I know.” He slid between her legs, the tip of his prick already seeking entry. The moist mouth of her vagina opened to allow him in. With one smooth thrust, he was there, deep within her walls. It was like a homecoming every time. “I love you, sweetheart. I want you to have as many babies as you want.”

“What do you want?” She asked then gripped his back as he slowly rocked into her over and over again.

“I’ve got everything I want right here, right now. As long as you’re happy, I’m happy.” He kissed her deeply not letting her answer. He had at least a month to get used to the idea of being a dad. Good Lord, he would be someone’s father. What if

they had girls? What if they wanted to date a guy like him? The thought was terrifying. Boys, yes they needed to have boys. “We need to have sons though, okay?”

“Um...sure.” Was all she said. Letting go of the thoughts of babies he focused in earnest on the process of making them.

How could he even talk? Bethany wondered as Jack continued to make slow sweet thrusts inside her. His lips came down on hers and she kissed him, he must have stolen a bite of apple pie along the way because he tasted like it. She hated how she stupidly wore the silky nightgown now. It kept her skin from being next to his. She tried to count the days in her head, what the hell had she done with those pills? How could she forget them? Well, she always forgot to take them. But before it was just to regulate her cycle, not actually prevent pregnancy. She had taken them since being there right? Her mind reeled. Then he hit the sweet spot and all thoughts evaporated. The only thing existing in the moment was Jack.

“Oh, right there. Yes, right, there.” The head of his cock rubbed some glorious spot deep inside her and the tension began to build throughout her body. “Just a second more.”

“Mmm, sweetheart, I can feel you.” He mumbled against her ear sending vibrations all over her body as a response. He had not even broken a sweat yet, it could only mean one thing. She was in for one hell of a night.

“Oh God, Jack! Don’t stop, don’t stop.” Her back arched and her toes curled as the sweet sensation pulled her under into wave after wave of pulsation.

“God you feel good.” He growled. Then he picked up the pace.

One moment she was being treasured in a slow sweet manner, the next, the beast was ravaging her. Her legs were repositioned from around his waist to straight up over his shoulders where her feet locked behind his head.

“It’s not enough.” He said as he drove himself deeper into her flesh. If it was not enough, she had no idea how he was going to get more. He hit the back of her wall with each stroke causing a twinge of pain with the pleasure.

“Do you want me to turn over?” Maybe he just needed to get a different angle.

“Maybe, I don’t know.” He said between labored breaths.

“Let me roll over.” She unhooked her ankles and removed the gown as she sat up. He looked wild, like an untamed beast in their bed. But she was not going to talk dirty to him, nope; dirty talk was not going to happen no matter how badly she wanted to.

Jack growled as he gripped her waist and plunged into her from behind. “Oh yes.”

She wanted to ask if he liked it but she was trying to remain a lady in bed.

“Bethany. Mmm Fuck!” He chased what seemed to be out of reach for him. His efforts had however, created another wave inside of her.

“Mmm, Oh...yeah, good, Jack.” She bit the pillow to keep from yelling out a stream of obscenities as she came again.

“Fuck!” He shouted. “Bethany, sweetheart, please.”

“What, Jack, what do you want?” She could barely lift from the pillow and her legs shook with the effort to remain on her knees.

“Tell me, tell me something, anything. I need to hear it. I want you to tell me what you want, please.” He punctuated the please by smacking her butt.

So now he wanted her to talk dirty, after making fun in the truck he wanted the potty mouth in the bedroom after all. Maybe she could still say it and not be so...rough about it.

“Let me turn over.” She needed to lie down. He pulled out and she rolled to her back. Opening both her arms and her legs she pulled him back into the tender embrace they started with. “Go slow, make love to me.”

“Okay.” He held her tight, his sweat soaked body against hers. The scent of their lovemaking filled the room. She kissed his neck and tasted the salty sweat there.

In a soft whisper, she commanded. “Now fuck me, Jack, give it to me. Give me every inch of your big...thick...cock.”

And he came with a loud, shuddering moan. His seed poured into her in long bursts. At the end, he simply collapsed on top of her. His lips pressed against her neck once, twice. Then slowly he drifted off into sleep.

“Jack, honey, you’re crushing me.” She gasped for air as he rolled to his side pulling her with him. “I guess you like it when I talk dirty after all.”

“Don’t be smug. Miss Know-it-all.” He nipped at her nose then rolled to his back, again pulling her with him.

“Don’t you want to shower?” She yawned.

He grunted.

Readjusting to her nook Bethany smiled. A baby of her own. A little boy just like Jack, or a little girl she could love the way she was never loved as a child. Life was definitely paying her back for all the hurt she had felt as a child. Overwhelming her with the love she was receiving from this man. Nothing could tear this away from her now.

Chapter 17

Standing in the kitchen, she thought she was seeing things as she looked out the window and watched the red BMW pull down the drive. Every year she got a new red BMW for her birthday. The one heading toward the house looked exactly like the one she got three months ago for her thirtieth. What made matters worse was the Black Dodge Ram following it.

Her heart pounded like a jackrabbit. She snuck out to the garage to hear the exchange now taking place between Heath and her ex-fiancé! Douglas stood there in a blue polo shirt and khaki pants at the front of her car. Heath made his way around the front of his truck in the attire she was now accustomed to seeing men wear, jeans, and a t-shirt.

“How may I help you?” Heath asked as he approached.

“I’m here for Bethany Dodson.” Douglas said. Her heart almost jumped out of her chest and ran back in the house to hide. The biggest secret of her life was standing in the driveway and the meanest brother was there to greet him. Thank God, it was not Jack. Rafe would have been ideal; actually, no one would have been ideal. Why had he come here?

“There is no one by that name here.” Heath put his hands on his hips and eyed Douglas. Bethany gripped the back of Jack’s truck as if it was a lifeline and prayed they would not see her eavesdropping.

“You must be Jack. Look I’m sure you think you got yourself a catch there but what you got is my fiancé instead.” Douglas looked at his watch, then back at Heath. “We’re getting married in a few weeks and now she’s sewn some wild oats I’m sure she’s ready to come home.”

“You’re obviously mistaken, or an idiot. She’s my wife, and she aint goin’ anywhere, understand?” Shocked by his readiness to stand in for Jack, Bethany almost felt sick, would Heath tell Jack later? This was getting worse by the minute.

“I don’t think you understand, sir. I have a business to run, and Bethany is part of the merger. It’s been planned for a year now, and this little tantrum she’s decided to throw has just put you in the middle of it. I apologize and I will reward you for keeping her safe and out of trouble, just name your price.”

Bethany slid down the truck and sat next to the tire. The sobs began to shake her body. This could not be happening. Heath must have heard her because he looked over his shoulder, directly at her. Then stepped once to the left where she could not see Douglas at all.

“She’s not for sale.” He said. A stream of spit escaped his lips as he turned his head to the side. Like one of those lawn ornaments it shot out perfectly then landed in the grass. Cracking his neck to one side then the next, he faced Douglas again. Heath defined the television cowboy in that moment, all he needed was two pistols on his hips.

“This is ridiculous. If you will let me talk to her, we can straighten this out. I’m sure she is ready to come home; it’s why I brought her favorite car. You know she owns six. And the house she lived in, the guesthouse makes this little home you have here look like a shack. You won’t be able to support her, or her shopping sprees.” Douglas laughed, the arrogant bastard. “You have to realize a girl like Bethany is accustomed to a certain lifestyle, she’s not going to trade it in for cowboy boots and farmland.”

“Are you finished?” Heath asked simply.

“No. I want Bethany out here and I want her out here now.” Douglas was finished playing around by the tone in his voice.

“I told you. She’s my wife and the only way she’s leaving here with you is over my dead body.” Heath took a step forward.

Unfortunately, the kitchen door to the garage opened. Bethany looked up to see Jack.

“Sweetheart, what’s wrong?” He came to her side instantly and both men outside took notice.

“Shit.” Heath said.

“Bethany.” Douglas scolded. “Get off the ground for Christ’s sake.”

Jack looked at her then looked out towards Douglas. Unlike Heath, his temper was not leashed.

“Who the hell are you talking to, Mister?” Jack started out of the garage.

“My fiancé!” Douglas shouted.

“You mean my wife.” Jack took three steps forward.

“So now’s she’s your wife. Ha! I bet you’ve been passing her around out here on the farm, huh?” Douglas laughed. “Doesn’t surprise me a bit. Bethany get out here and let’s go!”

“Why you son of a bitch!” Jack launched for him but Heath held him back.

“Get out of here asshole before I call the law.” Heath warned.

“Fine, I’ll be back tomorrow. And she’ll be leaving with me.” Douglas laughed and got in the car. “Pack your shit, Bethany. Play time’s over.” He yelled then squalled tires as he backed out of the driveway.

“Why did you stop me, dammit?” Jack turned to Heath.

“We can’t afford a scandal right now. We open in two weeks.” He let go of Jack and took two steps away from him. Probably thinking the same thing she was, he would swing on Heath instead.

“Jack.” Bethany said and pulled herself from the ground. How she had the strength, she had no idea; her world was spinning out of control.

“Is it true?” He looked wounded.

“I can explain.” She held her hands to her chest pleading with him. His face looked like a thundercloud, mean and angry, lined with hurt and betrayal. She had done that to him. She broke his heart.

“Just tell me if it’s true, were you engaged when we got married? Did I take another man’s wife?”

“No.” She felt herself look away as she said it. “I was engaged but...”

“Jack.” Heath called as he marched past both of them got in the truck and started it up.

He didn’t speak; he just laid on the horn until they moved. Then much like Douglas, he hauled ass out of the garage then down the road.

“Shit. Shit. Shit!” Heath threw down his hat. “You didn’t tell him?”

“No.” She sobbed. Holding herself up with her own arms, she looked at the mountain staring back at her. “I didn’t want to marry him, I ran to Vegas, I thought I cut all ties, it didn’t matter.”

“It does matter. Now he thinks you cared about some asshole.” Heath let another stream of curses go. Picked up his hat then put an arm around her. “Come on. Nothing we can do now but wait and see how this plays out.”

But as they walked inside, she realized why Jack had snuck in the front door in the first place. He had been around the back and picked a vase full of flowers for her. They sat on the counter. Like a slap in the face, the sight of them rocked her to the core. She should have told him. She should have told him everything. “I hate this. I hate myself for this!”

She ran to the bedroom. Heath cursed again as she slammed the door behind her.

Jack drove for about two hours then finally found himself in town. The Saloon was open and very inviting for his taste right now. Maybe a beer and a few country songs would take the edge off and he could decide what to do tonight. How could she not tell him she was engaged? How in the world had his sweet little thing manipulated him so easily?

Then he thought of all the games she played in bed and wondered if she was not acting all along. Maybe all those little tears were just another performance. Madder than a wet hornet he got out of the truck and headed into the bar.

“Well hey there stranger. Haven’t seen you in a while.” Dolly smiled bright and then frowned as she took in his appearance. “Beer or whiskey, sugar you look like you just walked through hell and back.”

“Beer.” He nodded and rest his head back against the booth. It was still relatively early so one beer, a few songs and he would get up and go to Heath or Rafe’s for the night. He could not face her, not now. Not when he wanted to choke her as much as he wanted to kiss her. God, had Heath been feeling like this for almost a year now? How he managed to get out of bed was amazing.

“Here ya go, Cowboy.” Dolly placed the long neck in front of him. Suddenly he lost the urge to drink. He nursed it for about twenty minutes; the sounds from the jukebox soothed his soul.

Just as he thought things were finally cooling off inside of him, the door opened and in walked the jerk who claimed to be his wife’s fiancé with a couple other guys, no doubt he had not planned to come back alone, but with thugs. How could she possibly have agreed to marry a pretty boy? He looked down at himself. He had spent all morning in the garden, and then walked all over the damn place picking different flowers for her. What a fucking schmuck he had been. His dirty jeans and t-shirt, his hands rough and callused, where the hell did he get off thinking he could hold a girl like Bethany forever?

She belonged with the pretty boy. Hell she would not have to fight with a guy like him to get his feet in wax. He probably sat next to her at the salon! Son of a Bitch!

“Hey.” Shit. He noticed him. Shaking his head Jack tried to remember what Heath had said about a scandal before the season opened. People needed to feel safe on a ranch, not worried the owners would attack them. “You’re the guy claiming to be Bethany’s husband right?”

But they were not on the ranch now were they?

“I am her husband. And I’m in no mood for the likes of you, so turn around and head out.” He watched Dolly move to behind the bar. She had worked there long enough to smell trouble and he had been in a scuffle right here, a time or two in his youth.

“Look pal, I know she’s really played a number on you. She did the same to me. But I need to take her back home; too much money is riding on it.” The man seemed to try to reason with him.

“Do you love her?” Jack heard the words and had no idea how they jumped out of his mouth but they had.

“Love?” The man looked at him, seemed to think about it, and then answered. “Sure why not? I mean I love what she brings to the table for sure.”

“What the hell do you mean you love what she brings to the table? You either love her or you don’t.” He pulled at the label on the bottle. Felt glad he had not made it through the first beer much less beyond it. His temper was on a short fuse and one wrong word would set it off.

“She hasn’t told you either, huh? Good lord, no wonder she married you. She could hold out then take her money, probably yours too, and really run. Tricky little cunt.”

And that was all it took. The man had just used the C word against his wife. Jack did not process getting up or getting across the floor, but he felt a great deal of pleasure when his fist connected with the man’s jaw. Of course, he felt a great deal of pain as one of his flunkies’ fist connected with his right eye. He struck out at the other man and another one jumped on his back, punching him in the rib cage. He spun a few steps then heard a loud smash.

The man slid off his back.

Jack turned to see Dolly holding the neck on a beer bottle. She yelled look out and he turned in time to block an oncoming punch from the first man. He barely noticed the warm trickle of blood from above his eye as the bar erupted into chaos.

Time seemed to move in fast forward as the police barged in, halting everyone mid swing.

“They started it, Buck!” Dolly shouted. “Came right in and ripped the place apart, damned city boys!”

“Get a statement from Dolly, Pat.” Roy, Buck’s older brother and the town’s sheriff stepped in behind Buck. “Damn Buck, looks like you’re trying to get a family reunion going on tonight.”

Jack looked at Roy and wondered what the hell had happened to make him say that. When he told Buck to cuff him, he tried to think of what Heath or Rafe would have done to get thrown in jail. Then he thought of Bethany.

“Buck, it’s not Bethany is it?” He asked as his brother in law shook his head and cuffed him.

“Jesus, Jack, what the hell provoked you into this?” Buck started him out the door. “No don’t tell me because you have the right to remain silent and until we get in the car, I suggest you do just that.”

“No special treatment Buck.” Roy winked at them.

“I know my job, Roy.” Buck said as they headed out.

Once he had him in the back of his patrol car, he called in the arrest then turned to look at him through the metal gate between them. “Off the record, what the hell is going on?”

Jack explained the whole thing to Buck on the way to the station. Once there, he went back to being a sheriff’s deputy and processed him as if they were not brothers in law. Sheila call Bethany, tell her to come get Jack.

“No, call Heath.” Jack pleaded.

“Heath’s already on his way.” She smiled and shook her head. “Boy ole boy, these are the days of our lives, and the reason I like the night shift.”

“What the hell...is Rafe back there?” Jack asked as Buck took him to the holding cells.

No sooner than he got in front of the first cell did he see what Heath was coming after. “Ho-ly Shit!”

“Nice to see you too, Jack.” Chance looked at him with her big brown eyes and fire red hair.

“Since you’re family and we have more prisoners coming in I hope you don’t mind sharing the cell.” Buck let Jack in then unlocked his cuffs.

“Buck you called my sister right?” Chance asked wearily as she looked at him. They had not seen each other since her wedding day.

“You betcha’, sweet thing.” Buck winked and gave her the finger gun gesture. “Now you two play nice till I come back okay?”

“Can you call Rafe instead, please?” He hated begging but he did not want Bethany to pick him up in jail.

Buck gave the same finger pistol, wink, and laughed. Jack could have sworn he said something about being shot in the ass as he left.

“So what the hell happened to you?” Chance asked.

“Fight.” He answered and took a seat on a bench across from her. The cell was cold, but she would not know that since she was wrapped up in Heath’s leather jacket, boy was he going to be pissed! “Where have you been?”

“Culinary arts school, where else?” Chance shrugged. He noticed she was not wearing her wedding rings, his grandmother’s wedding rings; the one Heath had given her when they were engaged, and then the band on their wedding day.

“So they lock up chefs for what...brandishing a paring knife?” Women...he knew now why Heath was bitter because he felt it, too.

“Driving without a license.” She spoke low and off to the side, avoiding eye contact.

“You have a driver’s license liar.” He let his head thunk against the cold concrete cell wall.

“Yes, but not a motorcycle license.” She quipped then sunk lower into Heath’s jacket. “I can’t fucking believe this. I come every month to see Star and I get caught tonight of all fucking nights.”

“What’s so special about tonight?” Jack snorted. Just like a woman to think only of herself at a time like this. He was not surprised she was caught on a motorcycle; Chance was wild, wilder than he ever was. Her childhood was messed up and it was a miracle she and her sister were as normal as they were. She settled down when she started dating Heath, but then ran off on the night of their wedding.

“One year to the date.” She said and buried her head in her knees. The long red locks fell around her and he felt a moment of sympathy for the girl she once was. Then it was gone. If he had not met Bethany and been crushed himself, he may have sided with her, again. But no more. He knew now women were just treacherous. Women like his grandmother and mother were no longer in existence. He prayed his sister did not do the same to the gentle giant she married.

Jack closed his eyes and began to feel the onset of the burn and sting over his eye. The headache began pounding and his ribs started to hurt. The more the adrenaline wore off the more he ached.

“What the hell is going on?” Rafe asked as he entered the kitchen.

“All hell has broken loose.” Jan answered. “Look, I have to find Heath, he needs to get down to the jail and pick up Chance. You need to take Bethany to pick up Jack’s truck in town then show her where the jail is so she can get Jack.”

Bethany watched Rafe’s mouth open, close, and then repeat the process again.

“I know!” Jan said and laughed. “It must be a full moon I swear. Look here, don’t you get arrested because I can’t take another call from Buck tonight.”

“I’ll try not to.” He smiled. “Come on B. You can tell me what happened on the way.”

“Okay kid, follow me. And don’t worry, he’ll get over it.” Rafe hugged her tight then let her go. Bethany started up the truck with the spare keys from the house and followed Rafe to the sheriff’s office. Her heart pounded as he honked twice then pulled off. He really was not staying with her. He was really leaving her to handle Jack herself.

She sat in the truck for a long while, mustering the courage to go in and face him. He looked so angry, so hurt. Was he drunk now? Shit!

“Get out of the damned truck and go get him, Bethany.” She told herself aloud. With one more deep breath, she put herself in motion. The night breeze was clean and crisp. Sure enough, it was a clear sky overhead with a big fat full moon shining down on her. The steps to the old Sheriff’s office were concrete, and though there were only four of them it seemed like an eternity to climb to the top.

Her feet felt heavy, her heart hammered in her ears. The door seemed to weigh a ton as she pulled it open. The fluorescent lighting made everything a little green in her opinion. It made her feel like she was in a scary movie and at any minute a monster would jump out. Douglas did.

“Bethany! You little bitch. Look what your husband did to my face! I’ll sue you and him and take every damn thing he owns!” Douglas shouted and a man who looked a lot like Buck sat him back down on the bench with a little more force than was probably necessary.

“Shut up!” He pointed at Douglas then turned to her. “Sorry. Cells are full.”

“No. Don’t be.” Bethany thought about it, had been thinking about it all day long really. Douglas was there for one thing and one thing only, her shares of her father’s business, and the merger. “Can I talk to him?”

“Why?” Buck asked as he stepped into the room.

“He wants my shares, the shares my father gave me as a means of evading taxes on them. He wasn’t counting on me actually reading the conditions and keeping them, but I did. Douglas’ family is trying to merge the businesses. They can’t do it without me.” She sighed. Damn it all to hell. She should have signed it all over before she left, but how was she to know she would meet a man like Jack and she would not need her cash cushion much less her fall back plan?

“I’ll stand right here.” Buck eyed her wearily.

“Thank you.” Bethany nodded then turned to Douglas. “You want the shares, not me. I’ll make you a deal. I’ll have my lawyer here tomorrow and I will sign over the controlling stock of my shares, if you sign a document stating you will take no action, public, legal, or otherwise against Jack, his family, or any extension thereof.”

“You should have been a lawyer.” Douglas sank down in his seat.

“Look, I don’t want it. Any of it. I want Jack, and you may have ruined any chance I have of keeping him, but I won’t let you ruin his life, too.” She straightened her shoulders and nodded. “Take or leave it. But be warned, if you try to ruin him, I will destroy you and your company. I’ll sell my shares to your biggest competitor and tell them every little secret my father thought he covered up.”

“You’re an evil little bitch you know?” Douglas smiled. “Why didn’t you ever show me this side before? It’s kinda hot.”

“Douglas?” She wanted to punch him in his already swollen lip.

“Fine. I’ll apparently be right here till tomorrow.” He rolled his eyes.

“Fine.” She turned to Buck. “Okay. I’m ready for round two.”

“I’m not drunk I can drive.” He had not said a word, though it took all her might not to jump on him and cry when she saw his face, the blood, and the bruising. He could not possibly feel like driving.

“You’re eye is almost swollen shut, Jack. Come on, be reasonable.” She sighed.

“Whatever.” He climbed in the passenger side and buckled in. He did not look at her or say one word the entire ride home. Her gut clenched and she could feel a loss washing over her. Her heart ached, and she wondered if he felt the same or if she would need her cash fund to start over after all.

The truck had barely stopped when he hopped out and headed into the house. She got out, fed the dogs, patted them on their heads, and promised them he was okay, though she doubted anyone believed her at the moment. Not even herself.

When she opened the door, he was downing shots of Patron. Why he did not just tip the bottle was a mystery.

“Don’t you think you should...?”

“Oh no. You don’t tell me what I should think about anything, anymore. My head hurts, my eye is busted, my ribs feel like they are caving in and I want to sleep tonight. This will take care of me. You, on the other hand, just steer clear of me for a while. Understand?” His eyes looked sorrowful even as he threatened her. His brows drew down and his frown intensified.

“Fine.” Bethany nodded. Like a scolded dog, she walked out of the room and up the stairs to the loft. Maybe once he settled in he would be more approachable.

Hours passed and at two in the morning her eyes burned from the computer glare. Finally, she walked into the bedroom. Jack laid in the center of the bed, still dressed, boots and all. He was dirty, and she knew why. He had been working and then picked those flowers, which were thrown in the trash she noticed as she grabbed him a bag of ice for his eye and a glass of water and some Tylenol for his head in the morning. Setting the glass and medicine next to the lamp on his nightstand, she surveyed the big man. Tears stung her eyes at the sight of him. He had been fighting over her.

She walked to the end of the bed and pulled his boots off, then his socks. Jack normally woke easy but he was snoring loud and did not seem to notice as she pulled his t-shirt up and struggled to get it off him. His big arms weighed a ton as dead weight but she managed. She wet a warm washcloth and tended the cut on

his eye. He did flinch a little. She avoided a blind swat as he attempted to get whatever was touching his eye away from it in his sleep. She smiled. The antiseptic must have stung.

After putting a small bandage in place, she kissed his forehead. Unable to resist, she placed a feather light kiss on his lips. She felt the sobs coming and did not want to wake him so she left the room. Climbing the stairs to what would have been their children's rooms if everything had not gone to hell in a hand basket, she wondered if she was the only one feeling the deepest regrets of her life.

Crawling into the bed, she hugged the pillow and let it go. Eventually she cried herself to sleep.

Opening his eyes Jack realized a couple of things right away. It was still dark out, he was not wearing his shirt and boots anymore, and his eye felt a little better. He felt around and realized she was not in bed with him. He sat up, winced as his ribs protested the motion, flipped on the light, and saw a glass of water and some pills. Damn he felt like shit.

He went to the bathroom, relieved himself, stripped out of the jeans though his ribs really protested against the motion, took the pills then searched the house for Bethany. When he found her in Rafe's old room asleep his heart hurt more than all his body aches combined. The pillow she clung to was soaked through with what must have been her tears. He wanted to pull her up and hold her, he wanted to shake her and tell her how mad he was about her lying. But the more he thought about the man, who had come to claim her, the more he understood why she ran. No one had really ever loved her before.

He knew her parents did not care. His mother had called him several times over the past month checking in and checking things out. She was coming in for the barbecue and to meet his new wife. God, what a mess things were going to be now! He pulled a curl away from her face and looked at her with just the hall light illuminating her features. "Why didn't you just tell me? Were you so afraid I wanted money more than you did? How badly did I fail to earn your trust?"

Jack sighed and touched the bandage on his eye. "Do you really love me?"

He touched her cheek and felt the dampness from her tears still there. "Sweet Bethany, God help me, I still love you."

Jack turned and walked out. Tomorrow, they could talk about it in the morning. There were enough tears and blood shed for one night.

Chapter 18

Again, his head was pounding but not as bad as before. This time when he woke up the sun was out. He noticed the front door was open as he stepped to the hall. He heard her crying on the front porch and crept closer to hear what she was saying and hopefully see who she was talking to.

His heart almost exploded as he saw her sitting on the swing, the two dogs listening with interest to her every word.

“I’m sorry guys.” She sniffed. “I really might have blown it this time.”

Blue Dog put his paw up for a shake. She sniffed and laughed. “Thank you.”

She cried out again with heavy sobs. He almost burst out the door then but she started talking and he wanted to hear it all. She would not lie to the Danes, she had no reason to.

“I never wanted to marry Douglas. I only agreed to get away from my family. I knew I could get the girls to go wild with a bachelorette party. I tried to get them to do it in Rome, or Paris, or Australia, even Hawaii, I wanted out of the U.S. I wanted to go far, but they chose Las Vegas. Then I met your dad and all I wanted was one night with a real man, but then we got married and I came here.” She sniffed and wiped her nose on her shirtsleeve. Jessie Boy put his head in her lap and she rubbed his ears. “But don’t worry. I took care of everything. I gave Douglas the majority of the shares to my dad’s business so he would leave your dad and me alone. He doesn’t know it but I gave Paul the rest of them to do something with. I don’t want the money. I wouldn’t care if we lived in his truck, just the four of us. I just want your dad. But I think I’ve lost him.”

Jesus. Could she rip his heart out a little more so it could really bleed? Making noise as he walked he stepped out on the porch. The dogs looked at him then back to her. Blue Dog actually whined.

“Come here boy.” He slowly walked toward him and nuzzled his hand. “Sorry about last night, boys.”

Jessie Boy came over next and they took turns looking up at him and back at Bethany. If those dogs could talk, they would tell him not to let her go. "It's going to be okay, fellas. Go on down to the barn and see Jan. I bet she's got a treat for you."

At the word treat, they both perked up. "Go get Jan, she's got a treat."

They headed off towards the barn. He only hoped Jan would be there but he could not take the pressure of all three of them looking at him with big sad eyes. He stepped over to her and sat next to her on the swing. She still sniffed and wiped her nose again on the shirtsleeve.

"You look like hell," he said and let out a short laugh.

"Thanks." She pulled her feet up onto the swing and hugged her legs, resting her chin on her knees.

"You patch up my eye last night?" He breathed a heavy breath.

"Yes." She sniffed.

"Why didn't you just tell me the truth?" He asked and hoped she would be as honest with him as she was with the dogs.

"By the time I realized I could, I didn't think it mattered. I didn't think he would come looking for me. I guess he really wanted the money." She said into her knees. "I would have signed it all back over to my father, or mother, or even him. I swear I don't want anything to do with them. I have two hundred fifty thousand dollars in my closet. Minus the clothes and stuff we bought. I was already planning to get a car and then put the rest in with the family funds for the ranch."

"Change your mind?" He stroked his hand down her back. The small connection was as essential as oxygen since his lungs felt ready to collapse.

"You hate me." Her tears started anew, as if she had not cried all night and all morning.

"I don't hate you." He hated the situation. He hated the thought of her not trusting him, and really hated being blindsided by another man. But he did not hate her.

"Yes you do. I can see it in your eyes, Jack. You looked at me like I just stole your truck, your dogs and ran over your horse." She remembered his three major rules. None of which she had broken. It made him smile despite the situation.

“But you love my dogs, and my horse, and, you look good in my truck.” He pulled at her shoulder a bit and slowly she leaned into him. “You know you have a month and half before you can even think about leaving me.”

“What?” She sniffed.

“We agreed to three months remember?” He tried not to wince as she leaned against him. His ribs still hurt like hell.

“You don’t need me, Jack.” She sniffed and wiped her nose again.

“No. That’s where your wrong sweetheart. I do need you. Who else is going to chase after my kids? Sneak bacon to my dogs and carrots to my horse when I’m not looking?” He twisted a curl on his finger. “I love you, Bethany Johnson. You broke my heart. Don’t do it again.”

“Oh Jack!” She squeezed him and he winced aloud for real. “Oh no, look at your ribs Jack. I can’t believe you were in a fight.”

“He called you a very ugly word.” He pushed her back and looked at her blotched face. Her eyes were swollen and red. Her nose could lead a team of reindeer on Christmas Eve. Even her lips were swollen. She sniffed again. Blinked back more tears and he noticed the droplets on her lashes.

“You know,” he wiped her nose with her shirt and then pulled it over her head leaving her in just her bra and panties. She had not put on anything other than his old raggedy shirt. The thing was basically a snot rag by now anyways. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you look more beautiful than you do right now.”

Her lower lip trembled.

“Good Lord woman, you gonna cry all day?” he smiled. She really was a bundle of raw emotion this morning.

“I love you, Jack. I swear I never meant to hurt you. I promise I won’t ever keep anything big from you again.” She bit her lower lip. “So I guess I should tell you I might be pregnant.”

“Real funny sweetheart but you just stopped taking the pill.” He smiled at her. But she did not smile back and she sure did not look away. “Bethany?”

“I forgot them, in Vegas, and I haven’t had a period since I’ve been here. I should have started two days ago.” She grabbed him. “Don’t be mad Jack. Please.”

He looked at her and realized he should be mad, but he was not. Instead, he was a little bit nervous, and excited. “Why didn’t you tell me you forgot them?”

“So much was happening around here I never really thought about it, and then I told you I wanted kids and realized I couldn’t remember the last time I took a pill. I swear I hadn’t even thought about any of it, and then you left. I was scared to death I had lost you. I realized I might be pregnant, so I checked my calendar. I’m late.”

She never once looked away. “Anything else you want to tell me while were at it here?”

“I flattened the tires on your truck last night so you couldn’t leave without seeing me this morning.” She sobbed again. He laughed. Now she had really done it. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

“I do.” Jack wiped her nose again. “You’re desperate.”

“Maybe.” She shrugged.

“No, sweetheart, you are. Just as desperate as I was. Lost and confused, thinking crazy thoughts. Come on, let’s go lie down a while. My head is killing me and I’m sure yours is, too.” He helped her to her feet and led them back into the house.

“What were your desperate thoughts?” She asked and he laughed.

“I thought about locking you in your closet until you learned to trust me.” He laughed again and held his ribs because it hurt.

“I don’t think locking me in a closet would have made me trust you.” She sniffed and let a little laugh out.

“Hey I was desperate, flattening my tires wouldn’t stop me from leaving, I got rows of transportation in the stables sweetheart, I’m a cowboy. I’d just ride off into the sunset.” He closed the bedroom door behind them, crawled back into his bed, and pulled back the sheets on her side. “Come on, come lay with me.”

Bethany snuggled in and gently laid her head on his chest. “I love you, Jack.”

“I love you too, sweetheart. Now rest up. I’ll need to re-consummate this relationship in a few hours.” He kissed her forehead and relaxed. Too much to process, he just needed sleep.

Bethany traced his lips with her fingertips. It was well into the afternoon and time for them to wake up. Her heart was full again, mended. Jack still loved her and he was not mad about the possible baby, or the tires. Well, he might be mad about the tires, but he seemed okay about the baby. She kissed his lips softly and he stirred. His arms moved around her and hugged her tight, then let go as he winced.

“Ouch.” He grumbled then rubbed the bruises on his ribs. He looked like a prizefighter all beat up.

“Jack?” She continued to kiss him, down his throat, over his collarbone and each bruised rib.

“Mmm.” His hand found her head and stroked her hair. “I didn’t like sleeping without you last night.”

“Me either.” She smiled and rubbed his belly button with her nose before dipping her tongue into it.

“Tickles.” He squirmed a second.

“You smell good Jack. You know, on the first night, when we danced, I was more intoxicated by your scent than the tequila.” She nuzzled his hipbones one at a time. Kissed them and made her journey to the juncture between his legs and the angry looking erection staring back at her. “He always looks so...angry.”

“Well you’d be angry too if you spent your life trapped in a denim prison.” He laughed then groaned as she cuddled his balls in her hand.

“Jack?” she inhaled his spicy scent and tasted the salty drop of fluid already dripping from the head.

“Yes sweetheart.”

“I think I should be on top this time.” She licked the shaft and he readily agreed. Bethany did not intend to have sex this afternoon. She had every intention of giving him pleasure, of tasting and teasing and pleasing her personal hero. The man who had fought for her honor, and loved her through it all. She could be so lucky to bear his children. And if they were going to be anything like Jack, a couple kids, two dogs, and a dude ranch with horses, cats, and family to spare was enough of a job for any woman!