



Loose Id

I Shagged
The Sheriff

— ∞ —
NANCY LINDQUIST

I SHAGGED THE SHERIFF

Nancy Lindquist

Loose Id.[®]
www.loose-id.com

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id® e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

* * * * *

This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable.

I Shagged the Sheriff

Nancy Lindquist

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Published by
Loose Id LLC
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-2924
Carson City NV 89701-1215
www.loose-id.com

Copyright © June 2007 by Nancy Lindquist

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared in any form, including, but not limited to printing, photocopying, faxing, or emailing without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC.

ISBN 978-1-59632-488-6

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Jana J. Hanson
Cover Artist: Croco Designs

Dedication

To Opal, thanks for the wake-up call.

To Patsy. Glad it's you taking care of Fred. I lack your patience and social aplomb. May you have joy. You are loved.

To Kelly. May you always get the perfect suite to share with Mike.

To Esther. I love pills. They enhance the enjoyment of life.

Chapter One

Daisy Mae Partridge pulled her truck into the driveway and breathed a sigh of relief. Home at last. Ten hours of her butt parked behind the wheel had her fanny aching and her eyesight blurry. Stretching, she smiled. At least this was the last time she'd be making the trip. A graduate, she'd not have to pick up another test as long as she lived -- unless she wanted to. She was free! *No more pencils, no more books.*

Closed up for the season, the small two-bedroom cabin she shared with her foster mother looked lonely. Away at an art show, Tree wouldn't be back for almost a week. Not having her around sure made for a letdown of a homecoming. Daisy wished Tree could have attended her graduation, but spring in Florida meant art show season. *It's not so bad. At least you don't have to haul Tree's sculptures around and set them up.*

Pulling a box off the front seat of the pickup, she hauled it to the front door. She balanced it on one knee as she turned the lock on the cottage. It would be a tight squeeze for two adult women to share over the summer, but worth it. She looked forward to spending this time with Tree. She'd enter the real world of a full-time job and caring for herself in the fall. September would see Daisy in Tampa, working as a birth control educator.

Looking around, bright color on one side of the living room caught her eye. She smiled at the impressionist style painting of a blonde woman in a cap and gown reaching for a star. Tree's ode to her graduation. Daisy missed the only mom she'd ever known. Tossed from foster home to foster home, she'd been a rebellious fireball when Tree took her in. The love the older woman had shown Daisy changed her life for the better. Suddenly, the move to Tampa seemed like a terrible idea. She'd missed home while she was away at school.

Without Tree, the cottage sitting on twenty-five acres in Florida's panhandle felt lonely. Her foster mom's cussing and swearing as she wrestled steel into sculpture or painted huge, brightly colored abstracts had been a comforting part of Daisy's life since she was twelve.

Sunlight bounced off metal, flashing inside the house for a moment. Daisy glanced out the window and frowned. With Tree gone, she didn't expect company. A sheriff's car pulled up next to her pick-up. The door opened and a familiar dark head poked out. Tom. With a laugh, she stepped onto the porch and waved.

Tom Williams, her best buddy, high school crush and Boxer County's golden boy, stepped out of the car with a heart-grabbing grin. He sure looked hot in his uniform. Since when had he become the local law? Not always Daisy's favorite group of people. A woman who chained herself to bulldozers didn't usually win popularity contests with cops.

"I got a call that there was a burglar at the Winter's place. Since you live here, I guess there won't be any arrests; not today, anyway."

Daisy ran off the porch and launched herself into Tom's arms. For a moment, he pulled her tight and she melted against him, smelling the woodsy cologne and sexy scent that was all Tom. Too quickly, he let her go.

Sliding to the ground, Daisy tried to hide her disappointment with a smile. *What? Did you expect to be elevated to girlfriend status? Just because you're older doesn't mean a damn thing.*

She walked to the patrol car and leaned in the open window. The switch that turned on the siren caught her eye. With a wicked laugh, she reached for the switch, about to flip it on, when strong arms grabbed her by the waist and pulled her back.

“Nice try. I know the way your mind works, Partridge. Do I have to frisk you?”

Daisy hid the sensual shiver that coursed her body with a wry grin. Better to change the subject than go down *that* road. It would only lead to a broken heart. Hers. “So, how’d your daddy talk you into all this?” Daisy waved her hand over the patrol car like a game show model. “I thought you were out to change the world, somewhere far, far away. This looks like the quite turnaround since we talked at Christmas.”

The slow, lazy smile started at one corner of his mouth, then lit his eyes with mischief. “Still am. This is just a summer gig. I’m headed to Tampa in the fall. I got a position in the police department. I’ll be on the force full time. In September, a beat cop; in a couple years, detective.”

“Wow, Tom, you got it. Good for you.” Daisy wanted to hug him, kiss him, jump him. He looked down at her with those incredible brown eyes and the smile dropped from his face. His Adam’s apple bobbed and he leaned towards her.

Scared, Daisy ducked under him and turned to her truck. Hauling open the tailgate of her truck, she grabbed out a box and headed to her front porch. “Well, don’t just stand there. Help me move my junk.” Turning to see his reaction, she caught clear confusion on his face. Then, he grinned back at her and hefted a pile of clothes.

“Got any bras in here, or did you burn them all at college?”

Daisy rolled her eyes. “I never owned any. Thank you very much.”

Catching up to her, he waited while she opened the door. Leering in the direction of her boobs, he wagged his brows. Daisy wiped the dust from her sneakers on his shoes with an evil grin.

“Hey, I just polished those.”

“Looks like you’re going to be at it again tonight, aren’t you?”

“I swear, I’m going to cuff you to something.”

The thought of Tom handcuffing her to anything shook her to her core. She pushed the thought from her brain. The man had no idea about the exotic reading material that hotted up her sexual fantasies and she was not about to tell him. Just quietly have some choice fantasies starring Tom Williams and his handcuffs, with some whips and chains tossed in for good measure.

She nodded her head toward her bedroom door. “You can put those down on the bed, in there.”

He walked into her bedroom, then whistled. “Oh boy, you’ve got a big bed now. Wanna test out the springs?”

Breath shaking, Daisy followed Tom into the bedroom and stared at him, mouth open. Was he serious? He couldn’t be. She closed her mouth so hard her teeth clicked together. They’d always been friends, nothing more. *His choice. Wasn’t it?* Oh sure, the man starred in her steamy fantasies, but he came from one of the most respected and conservative families in the county. She wasn’t exactly dating material for a guy like him. Not that there was anything wrong with her, but she was a foster kid. The locals reminded her of her status all the time in subtle ways. Okay, some not so subtle. She’d heard Tree verbally patted on the back almost every time they went to the grocery store. “So nice of you to take in someone like, Daisy.” It did get to her sometimes. Still, she wasn’t exactly a pariah either, but Tom Williams? He was way out of her league. She’d spent her entire high school career watching him date one popular girl after another. All cute, all perky and all the socially acceptable daughters of the county’s elite.

She’d been mostly fine with it. They didn’t talk about their dating lives, not that Daisy had one. Instead, they bounced ideas off one another. Underneath Tom’s conservative

exterior lay the heart of a rebel. Daisy liked to remind him of that on a regular basis. So, where was this joke about the bed coming from?

“Very funny, Tom. Make yourself useful and come help me get the rest of this stuff out of the truck.” She turned to head back outside, but a hand on her shoulder stopped her. Arms wrapped around her waist and she found herself hauled against Tom’s stomach. His breath tickled in her ear. Surprised, Daisy melted against him.

“I wasn’t kidding.” Soft, the whisper sent her into a half panic. What should she do?

His lips grazed her neck and she trembled in pleasure. No reason she couldn’t enjoy his teasing, for just a moment.

“I missed you around here, Daisy.”

She laughed and pulled away, then faced him. “Cut the crap, Williams. You shouldn’t tease a woman like that. I’m too independent for you and you know it.”

His face grew serious. “That’s not true and *you* know it.”

Shrugging, she headed to the truck. She could hear him behind her, almost stalking. This was not how she envisioned her homecoming, and she felt confused and lost. Fingers threaded through hers. Looking down, she tried to make sense of the wires he crossed in her brain. She wasn’t used to Tom like this. Commanding, strong. Sure, he’d been more than a match for her, but not so...so demanding. Her stomach did flip-flops. It was almost like he’d read the dreams in her heart and acted on them.

“I mean it, Daisy. I like you. I have for a long time. Can we try a relationship and see how it works?”

She shook her head. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea, Tom. Your dad would freak. He’s not exactly a fan of mine.”

“How long has it been since that incident? Nine years? He didn’t arrest you.”

Daisy winced at the memory of Tom's dad laying into her in front of most of the town for trying to free the baby cows the Fitzgerald's were raising for veal. She'd been both empowered and humiliated that day.

Running a hand through her corkscrew curls, she shook her head. "I don't think so, Tom."

He leaned in. "My dad doesn't want you, Daisy. I do. In ways you can't imagine. Tell me you aren't just a little bit tempted."

Shuddering, she turned back to the truck. Her eyes felt huge. She was stunned. *Slippery ground. You can't. Why not?* Biting her lip, she cast around in her head for the reason she felt slipping away. "We're both moving on soon. It just seems like a nowhere plan."

A hand brushed her shoulder and tangled in her hair. "Oh, so little miss flower-child is scared? I'm moving to Tampa too. Tree told me you'd accepted a job there. We could even live near one another, together. A strange city, no one knows us..."

Her brain was mush. She'd spent most of her high school years dreaming of a time when Tom Williams would see her as something more than a half-baked troublemaker and best pal. Now, she felt like the ground had flown out from under her feet.

"It's a nice thought, Tom, but I'm going to be busy with my new job. Probably too busy for a boyfriend." His face fell. Was he for real? She reached up and touched his face. The beard growth there was rough against her fingers. What if he meant what he said? Part of her did a dance of joy. "I'll think about it."

He grinned, transforming his face from sorrow to joy in less than a second. "A maybe's better than a no. I'll take it. Wanna go to Tallahassee for pizza Friday night?" He grabbed a box from the pick-up bed.

"Sure, I'd --"

Another patrol car screeched into her driveway, kicking up gravel behind the tires. It skidded to a stop behind Daisy's truck. Rick Hoskins, the deputy sheriff, jumped out. "Tom, hurry. You're dad's been in an accident."

Daisy looked up at Tom. Under his tan, his skin was white. Dropping the box of books he held, he sprinted towards his car and jumped in. Daisy watched him pull away, a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Chapter Two

“Damnit, Daisy, I’m tired of being the county matriarch, upholder of approved morals for the over sixty set. A sex toy party is exactly what I need right now. Stop hedging, and put the party on your schedule.”

Daisy drew curlicues in her date book and tucked her lower lip firmly between her teeth. She loved selling sex toys and lingerie for *A Liberated Woman*, but this wasn’t just a routine party Eva Williams asked her to put together. This was a party for the bluebloods of Boxer County, Florida, where even owning a sex toy was enough to get your butt tossed in jail. She had no problem booking parties for other people, but these ladies were stuffy and uptight, and that was a compliment. And not one of them was a day under sixty.

She sighed. The real reason she didn’t want to do this party was Tom Williams, Eva’s son. She had no desire to deal with his bullshit. There were at least eighteen ways to step into it so deep she’d never see daylight again. Still... Didn’t everyone, even Eva Williams and her churchgoing friends, have a right to an earth-shattering orgasm? Besides, this would be a fun way to poke Tom’s nose in it. Conservative ass. He’d changed so much, Daisy barely recognized him now. Since she’d moved home a year ago, he’d avoided her like the plague.

With a wicked smile, Daisy opened the date book to the upcoming week. “Okay, Eva. I’ll do it.”

“Now that’s the Daisy Mae I know and love. When?”

They wrangled out a date for the following Friday night and ended the conversation.

Daisy’s dog, a Heinz 57 mutt, wandered into the kitchen and stuck his wet nose into her hand. “Oh crap, Elmer. What did I just do?”

Placing his cold nose on her knee, he thumped his tail and looked up at her with adoring eyes. She smiled and flopped his ears back and forth. “You know, one of these days we’re going to figure out what kind of dog you are, sweetie.” She scratched behind his ears, then held them at their tips. He looked like Dumbo. Seeing the dog look so happy to be turned into a flying elephant look-alike always made her laugh. This time was no exception.

He lay down on the tile, curled up in a ball and licked his privates. Elmer was who he was and putting a name on it wouldn’t make him any more of a good friend, but it mattered something dreadful to Daisy.

Since Tree’s death from cancer a year earlier, Elmer had become her only family. She’d briefly thought about finding her birth mom, but she’d figured out pretty quick she’d just been trying to replace Tree. Instead, she left her job as a birth control educator, moved back home to Boxer County and into Tree’s old house, started her business, and pulled her life together. She’d missed home the last five years. Tampa wasn’t the sandy, live oak country she loved so much. It was good to be back.

“Well, old boy, seems I have a job for next Friday night. With the crème de la crème of Boxer County society, no less. I think I need a drink.”

She headed to the fridge and pulled out the box of cheap white wine. Pushing the tab in, she emptied the contents into an old jelly jar. No sense in using fancy glasses for cheap wine. Her friends in Tampa always laughed at her Kool-Aid taste in wines, but Daisy liked it. There was something earthy and homey about it that took away the seriousness of life.

Stuffing the box back into its place, she examined the remaining contents of the refrigerator with dinner in mind. *Dismal*. One of these days, she'd have to find time to cook. She stuck a piece of cold pizza on a napkin, grabbed her glass, and headed into the living room. Elmer, as always, was hot on her heels, sniffing an opportunity for pizza crust. She sank into her worn sofa and eyed the dog. "You're not getting any. I only have enough for me. So there." She stuck her tongue out at him. His nose sniffed the air, then he dropped to the floor, head on paws, eyes trained to hers. Daisy had to hand it to him. For a well-fed dog, he managed to look hungry, pitiful, and dismissive. Darn dog. She had no resistance when it came to his looks. He didn't even bother begging anymore.

With a sigh, Daisy grabbed her date book and a stack of invitations for the party. *A Liberated Woman* preached to always give the invitations to the hostesses and not fill them out yourself. The company line read that it empowered women to make positive sexual changes in their lives. A nice idea, in a perfect world, but not well thought out, in Daisy's opinion. She'd always had a better turn out when she handled this end of things herself.

Arranging the invitations in her lap, she glanced at the week ahead and cringed. She loved her self-imposed role as the town liberator of women. Loved by some and despised by many. At times, she felt like a cape-flapping hero, or a moustache-twirling villain. The very embodiment of moral bankruptcy in her small community. Her life seemed exhilarating and free. She snorted. Okay, maybe not either of those. Not from the inside. Here she was, on a Friday night, filling out invitations to a sex toy party, instead of out on a date.

Daisy wanted equality and fair wages for women, but she also wanted something more in life. Some of her fellow *Liberated Woman* reps were convinced this made Daisy a traitor to her sex and everything they worked for. Maybe she was, but that didn't stop the longing in her heart.

"Ha, let's see the human race go on without men and women together, Elmer. We're getting pretty far in science, but not that far." She took a bite of the cold pizza. *Yuck*. The nasty taste of congealed fat glued itself to the roof of her mouth. She grabbed her jelly jar,

took a healthy sip of her pseudo-wine, and tossed the rest of the pizza to the dog, who caught it out of the air and gulped it down in one bite. Pizza wasn't her first choice in doggy treats, but Elmer seemed happy enough. He thumped his tail once and dropped over onto his side, snoring.

Daisy laughed and began to fill out the stack of invitations with the party specifics. She'd add names as soon as Eva sent her the list. Yep, this was some hot Friday night. All she needed was bad TV to make the evening complete. She grabbed the remote and flipped to a notoriously sleazy reality show.

"Cheap wine, bad pizza, horrible TV and a friend to share it with. What more could a girl want, Elmer?"

A squeaking *poof*, followed by a nasty whiff of doggy gas filled the air. *Oh yeah, this was some amazing night.*

Chapter Three

“Mom, what the hell have you done?”

Tom Williams pushed the screen door closed with his foot. It slammed hard. Good. He was not in a happy-go-lucky mood. The bang of the door would alert his mom to that fact. He eyeballed the slight-framed, silver-haired pain in his hind end who had borne him with irritation.

“Is that anyway to greet your mother? Whatever happened to ‘Hi, Mom, I love you. How have you been?’” She didn’t say a thing about the door. Good, he wouldn’t have to mess around getting to the point. She knew what was up.

Tom ran a hand over his face in agitation. Why did he bother to come over in the first place? She’d never listened to common sense before; what made him think his mother would start now?

“Come off it, Mom. You can’t do this!”

Flipping a pea pod open with her thumbnail, she plopped the peas out with an expert eye. “Do what?”

He blinked. So much for getting to the point. She looked up at him with innocent eyes, not a hint that she’d just made his life ten times more difficult. He threw his hands in the air.

“I give up. You’re going to sit there and actually pretend you have no idea what I’m talking about, aren’t you? You’re going to make me say it. Fine, I’ll say it then. You cannot, *will* not, have a sex toy party here in this house. I absolutely *forbid* it.”

He put his hand on his gun in an attempt to look intimidating. It worked on the rougher element of Boxer County, but her narrowed eyes and furrowed brow told him he’d made a huge blunder. He dropped his hand to his side and lowered his head in an attempt to look sheepish.

Looking down, she plucked another bright green pod out of the pile in front of her. “That got around fast.” She muttered almost under her breath. Tom could just barely make out the words.

“Mom?”

When she looked at him this time, irritation shone on her face. She stabbed the air with the pea pod she held. “Thomas Michael Williams, I cannot *believe* you just told me what to do. I’d think you’d know better than that. I am as fully capable of putting your butt over my knee now as I was twenty-five years ago. I’d not push this, if I were you, mister.” She turned away from him with a huff and resumed shelling her peas.

Tom gulped. She’d used the middle name. Every southern boy in America knew the meaning of that. She was done but good. He felt screwed to the wall in a no-win situation. If he couldn’t make her see reason...nobody wanted to arrest their own mother. Especially not him. She’d make his life a living hell for years to come.

Better backpedal fast. That, or try another approach.

He sucked in a breath and tried to remain calm. “Look, Mom, I’m sorry. I don’t want to come down on you like this, but as the duly elected sheriff, I can’t allow my own mother to break the county decency laws. You have to cancel this party and you have to cancel it today.”

He shouldn't have to plead with her. His deputy would have a field day if he heard about this.

Turning away from the table, she opened the cookie jar, pulled out two large, delicious looking cookies and dropped them on a plate. Snickerdoodles, his favorite. Mom made the best cookies in town and this particular batch looked like fine art to his hungry gaze. She placed them on the table in front of him. Tom knew what this meant. He was supposed to sit down and eat cookies while she explained life to him. Twisting his wrist, he glanced at his watch. He'd planned for this to be a short visit. The look on her face told him otherwise.

Shit, he was in for it now.

Sliding into his seat at the table, he watched her pour two cups of coffee, then place one steaming mug in front of him and the other at her end of the table. She put her butt in the chair with abbreviated, slow movements. Lately, she moved a touch more gingerly than in the past. He reached for his mug and took a sip of the scalding brew. She'd take her time getting her thoughts out. All he could do was sit and wait. Anything he offered at this point would only get her dander up. Best to wait in dignity for the tongue-lashing he knew he was about to receive. He grabbed a cookie and took a bite to keep from saying something. *Delicious*. She sure knew how to shut a boy up.

"You're father's been gone for, what, four years now, this April? At first, I decided to never re-marry because I loved him so much the thought of it felt like a betrayal. Time passed and I went on a few dates, just to test the waters. You know what most of the men my age are like down here? Old and stuck in their ways. All of the ones I dated want a wife to sit home, make them food, and clean their crap. I'm worth more than that, Tommy. I loved your father. I miss him every day. We had something special. Sure, I cleaned for him and took care of the two of you. Because I wanted to, not because it was expected of me. Your father never boxed me into a role because of my gender. I can't change gears and marry some man who expects me to be a good little wife at home in an apron."

"Mom, I get it."

She held up her hand. “No, you don’t. Not really. You’re a man, son. You’re also someone I hope I raised up to treat women as equals.” Turning her head, she stared out the window and played with the handle on her coffee cup. “Your job’s made you a bit of an ass, but I still have hope that you’ll come around and be a good husband and father someday.”

He leaned forward and touched her arm. He wanted to comfort her, but the words stuck in his throat. He’d never been good at expressing his feelings and now... What could he say?

Her hand patted his, then covered it. Tom looked down. A roadmap of veins covered the back. When did that happen?

“I’m sixty-two years old, son, and I miss sex.” She laughed. “I know it’s not exactly the most comfortable conversation we’ve ever had, but you’re an adult now and I can really talk to you. I miss it and I’m probably never going to have it again. At least not with a man. I want to try out one of those vibrators Daisy sells.”

He felt heat climb up his face and rolled his eyes. “Dammit, Mom, can we not talk about this?”

“Sorry, kiddo. You gave up your right to think of me as a sexless cookie factory when you marched in here and demanded I do or not do something. You’re going to sit there and listen to every word I have to say. Got it?”

He nodded. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Good. Now where was I? Oh yes, the party. The Partridge girl does a nice, tasteful party for ladies. I’m getting the girls together and we’re going to have a demonstration and I don’t want to hear one more word about it.”

Tom put both elbows on the table and dropped his head into his hands, rubbing his eyes, hard. “Look, I appreciate what you’re saying, I really do, but this county has a decency law. No sex toys and no sales of sex toys. You’re asking your friends to come over to break the law.”

"It's a stupid law. Who the hell's business is it if I own a vibrator? Not yours. I never turned you in for the stack of Playboys you had under your bed when you were a teenager."

He felt the color drain from his face. She knew about the magazines. For years, he'd thought he was so clever. *Shit*. "I don't want to talk about that."

"Tough. You really don't have a choice in the matter, do you?"

"Well, I don't have them anymore. I got rid of those years ago."

"You probably did. Right before you ran for sheriff. You got a stick up your butt that day and it's only wedged itself tighter over the years. I'm having my party, Tommy, and that's that. There's nothing you can do about it."

He stood. The conversation had taken on an ugly tone, and he was through. Time to assert his authority, once and for all. "Sorry, Mom, I can't let you do that. You're on official notice. If you have that party, there will be arrests made. I don't want to do it and I'm sure if you think about it, you don't want me to either. Just cancel it."

She stood as well, hands on hips. He never could figure out how she managed to stare him down when she stood a whole head shorter than he was, but she did it and did it well. "No, it's not okay. I'm having the party. Go ahead and arrest me. Toss your poor mother in jail. It's not like I didn't struggle for fifteen hours to push your ass out, no painkillers, either. I'll probably have a heart attack and die. Then see where you are. At least I'll be with your father again, God rest his soul."

He bent down, and kissed her cheek. "I love you, but you can't guilt me into turning the other cheek here. You don't want any trouble. Just cancel it. What time's dinner tomorrow?"

Eva huffed. "I've decided it's not in my best interest to invite a total ass into my home to break bread with me. You can eat somewhere else until you're deprogrammed."

Taken aback, Tom touched her shoulder. "You don't mean that. We always have Sunday dinner together."

“Not this Sunday, Thomas. You can go back to your Big Brother agenda now. I’m going to look through the *A Liberated Woman* catalog and decide which model to buy. Jumbo or extra huge.”

“You’re not serious here.” *Oh give up, it’s no use.* She had that look on her face. The same one she’d worn when he told her he’d TP’d Eddy Foster’s house the Halloween he’d turned ten. She had been furious with him then and she looked ready to spit nails now. *Shit and shit again.* This was not how he’d envisioned this meeting turning out. So much for crispy fried chicken, fluffy mashed potatoes and creamy milk gravy. Looked like he’d be spending Sunday suppertime in the diner. Dammit anyway, there was not one way in hell he’d let her yank his chain like this. If she thought she could hold a meal over his head to get a free pass to break the law, she had another thing coming. She’d come around. She always did the right thing. If his mom was an artist at anything, it was keeping up appearances. She’d cancel the party. She only needed time to think about the ramifications, and spending a Sunday alone might just be the impetus she needed.

“Fine, Mom. I don’t want to eat alone, but you’ve given me no choice.”

“Good. Now, don’t let the door hit ya where the good Lord split ya, son.”

Tom turned his head and looked back as he headed for the door. Where the heck was his mom coming up with this language? She was beginning to sound a lot like a sailor. Shaking his head, he walked out the back door to his squad car. She’d do the right thing. She always did the right thing. Wouldn’t she? Tom could never be sure about Daisy Partridge. He’d never had a handle on her and now...now he was going to ask a favor of a woman he’d avoided like the plague for years. He exhaled in a rush. *Gee, this oughta be good.*

Chapter Four

“Cora, I swear you make the second best pecan pie in the state after my mom. This is fabulous.”

The waitress, cook and owner of the Nickel-Back Diner leaned over the countertop. Large breasts spilled over the top of her uniform as she smiled seductively. “Thanks, Tom. I’m so glad you came in today. I just love having your company. You normally eat at your ma’s on Sunday’s, don’t ya?”

Tom smiled politely, but inside his mind a warning bell clanged wildly. He should have made his compliments less flowery. Cora Withers had been trying to get into Tom’s good graces since they were tossed together in the fifth grade. The curse of the alphabetical seating chart. Just out of her third marriage in six years, she’d made it no secret that she had an eye on Tom for the position of husband number four. Cora was nice and all, real pretty too, but she lost herself completely in her relationships. A lot of men loved that about her, at first, but he’d watched them fall for her and then leave her for someone with at least a little backbone. Tom suppressed a shudder. He liked women who stood up for themselves, without apology, women like...*Daisy Partridge*. Naw, she showed a little too much independence. Not a good choice for someone in his position.

“So, Tom. I’m closing in about an hour. You wanna go to the movies tonight? It’s on me. Whatever show you want to see.”

The bell over the door jingled, giving him precious seconds to formulate an answer that wouldn’t offend her. “Cora, I --”

“Well, well, well. Lookie who’s here. Miss High-and-Mighty. I wish she’d never moved back.” Tom looked up to see who’d gotten the normally malleable woman in such a tizzy. The petite blonde standing in the doorway to the diner sucked the breath from his body in an audible rush.

Daisy looked around the room with the full awareness of a hunted animal. Tom didn’t blame her. If Daisy felt one tenth of the venom Cora’d launched at her, she’d head back out that door as fast as possible. Instead, she pulled her chin up and headed toward a nearby booth.

He glanced back at Cora. She positively seethed. The dislike on her face transformed her normally pretty features into an unattractive mask. Tom almost shuddered, but stopped himself at the last moment. He didn’t need Cora for an enemy. The diner was the only game in town and with his mom on the warpath, it was this or frozen pizza.

“She thinks she’s so perfect.”

Tom eyed Daisy, who seated herself gracefully in a booth. Perfect? Well, maybe not perfect, but as close as you could get to it and still be human, he figured. If you took all of Daisy’s features apart, she wasn’t much. Eyes too big, mouth a bit wider than what he normally liked, hair a roller-coaster of bright blonde curls that seemed to spring out of her head in a myriad of directions before twirling midway down her back. She was not a classic beauty, but when it all came together... He ate back a grin. There was something undeniably almost perfect about the mix. It wove itself into a bundle of energy and life that he definitely felt attracted to. Too bad she was such a damned pain in his ass.

Daisy turned her head to the door, the late afternoon sunshine creating a halo with her face and hair. *She looks like an angel.* Her breasts, large and fully outlined in the warmth of the light, called to his cock. *Down, boy.* This was no time to be thinking about Daisy naked. The stunning bundle of energy needed a firm talking to and maybe a spanking. *Well, that did it.* He shifted on his chair to adjust his fully erect penis.

“You gonna go over there and talk to her about how she’s rubbing your nose in the law, or can I do it for ya?”

The challenge in Cora’s voice took her from mildly unattractive to just plain ugly. His cock shrank. He took a casual sip of his coffee. “I’ll get to it. It’s sheriff’s business, Cora. I can’t really discuss it with you.”

Cora furrowed her brow. “You’re not thinking of ignoring this, are ya now? After all, she’s got your own ma going to one of those porn shows of hers. Typical, for a foster kid. No real parents to teach her right and wrong. The whole thing’s filthy. No decent, upstanding citizen would be interested in her crap.”

Irritated, Tom grinned ruefully. “Cept my mom, you mean.”

Cora colored, giving her the look of a sunburned kid caught in the act of stealing candy. “I didn’t mean... Shoot, I’m sorry, Tom.”

“It’s okay. My mom’s been insulted before. She’s lived through it.” He grabbed his hat, jammed it on his head, and turned toward Daisy. *Better get this over with.*

Daisy still appeared to be looking for someone, but she’d been through the entire diner with her gaze and was starting back up again. He almost chuckled out loud. She tried to avoid his eyes. He’d just bet on it. He watched her for another moment. She turned her head, accidentally caught his eye, then looked quickly towards the front window. Yep, he’d been right. At least she was as uncomfortable with the conversation they were about to have as he was. He set his mouth in a grim line and headed over to her.

“Daisy Mae Partridge, as I live and breath. Can I buy you a cup of coffee?” He gestured to the empty seat across from her.

“Um, I’m sort of waiting for someone. Can we do it another time?”

The hopeful look on her pretty face was almost too enchanting to resist. *Almost*. “Sorry, Daisy, we should talk now. I won’t take up much of your time.”

Her shoulders dropped. “Okay, fine.”

“Cora, two coffees please.”

The other woman had been leaning over the counter, blatantly listening. With a non-committal snort, she headed over to the coffee maker.

“May I sit down, please?” Again, he gestured to the booth. She looked up at him and with a nervous flutter of her hands gestured to the seat.

“Am I making you uncomfortable? I’m sorry.”

She looked up at him, confusion clearly written on her face, then shook her head. “It’s not you, it’s Cora. She doesn’t think much of me, but Tara...”

He narrowed his eyes. “Tara Jones?” You’re talking to her in an official capacity or personal?”

Daisy leveled her startling blue-eyed gaze at him and he felt sucker-punched. Damn, she was a handful, but there was something about this woman. If they didn’t have to talk about her breach of the law, he’d... What? Ask her out on a date? Take her home and have his wild way with her? An image of her lush body laid out on his bed, hands cuffed to the headboard, dangled like a juicy carrot in the forefront of his mind. He hid the wicked grin that threatened to sneak out and make it look like he’d lost his mind. His chance with Daisy had evaporated the day his father died. He was the law in this town and it was time the blonde liberal figured that out.

“I don’t see as that’s any of your business, *sheriff*.”

Ouch. He winced. She wanted to play it formal? Fine with him. “Normally it wouldn’t be, but when you con my mother into having a sex toy party, *an illegal sex toy party*, I get real interested real fast. So, I’ll ask you again. Why are you meeting our local newspaper editor slash reporter?”

Cora set one coffee mug down in front of him with gentle care, then bonked the other one on the table. Coffee sloshed over the top and down onto Daisy’s leg. Tom looked up at the diner owner, unable to hide the irritation he felt.

“Cora, can I ask you a question?”

She turned to him, a shit-eating grin on her face. “What’s up, handsome?” Her hand came to rest on his shoulder and toyed with the patch on his uniform.

“Does Miss Partridge pay for her coffee when she comes in?”

Cora looked confused. Her head swiveled first from him to Daisy, her hand dropping back to her side. “Yeah, I guess, why?”

“And you’ve never told her you aren’t going to serve her, have you?”

Cora definitely looked uncomfortable now. “No.”

“Then I’m going to suggest you treat her with a little more respect. You’re allowed to serve her or tell her to get out, but if she’s your paying customer then you have to treat her just like anyone else. Got it?”

“Fine.” She turned and huffed off in the direction of the kitchen.

He glanced back at Daisy, expecting a sweet thank you, not the murder he saw painted in her eyes.

She leaned in. “Why the hell did you say that to her?” The words came out in a whisper, but he heard them plenty clear.

“Cause I didn’t like the way she treated you. What’s wrong with what I said?”

“I can pick my own battles, Tom. I don’t need some overbearing ass trying to interfere in my life.”

“Hey, I did you a favor.”

“Yeah? Then keep your favors to yourself from now on. I don’t need Cora Withers spitting in my food. Now, what do you want to talk to me about?”

That’s gratitude for you. Shit, he only tried to help the woman. Now she was so riled up he’d have a hard time talking her out of the party. *Might as well just come out with it and take your chances.* “You need to cancel that thing at my mom’s house.”

She sat back in her seat, arms folded over her chest. “I assume you mean the party scheduled next Friday evening?”

Reaching up, he adjusted his collar. “Yep, that’s the one. You need to cancel it.”

One eyebrow arched. “Is that an order or a request?”

“‘Bout as close to giving an order as I’ve ever come. You’re going to get my mom into trouble, you’re going to get into trouble, and your friend Tara will be doing a story about you sitting ass-down in the county lockup.”

Daisy leaned forward, her arms pressed her breasts upward. He felt his gaze slip south. He stopped the slow slide, just in time and looked up at her eyes.

“Gee, Sheriff Williams, that sounds an awful lot like a threat.”

The woman sure knew how to paint his ass into a corner. “Not a threat, a promise. You can’t sell that stuff in this county. I’ve turned my back for long enough. Got it?”

In response, she glared at him, her blue-eyed gaze seemed to laser into his soul, and he fought the urge to squirm in his seat.

“I don’t have to take this from you, Williams. You’re sheriff, not God.”

Drawing in a deep breath, he counted to five before he answered. “I’m not kidding here, Daisy. Push me, and I’ll arrest you. Don’t test me on this.” He rose. Better to walk out now and let it sink into her thick skull. He had no desire to start Daisy in on one of her infamous women’s lib rants. “Take it anyway you want, *Miss* Partridge. I’d look on it more as a warning, or better yet, a promise.” He looked at the counter and the now pouting Cora, any

place but the thunder-clapped expression on Daisy's face. The bell over the door rang, drawing everyone's attention. Tara Jones, editor and only reporter for the *Boxer Eagle*, walked through the door with a sunny smile on her face. He'd stated his point. It was a good time to leave.

"Coffee's on me." He nodded. "Tara. Nice seein' you." He winked in Tara's direction and got a smile in return. Heading to the counter, he dropped a few bills into Cora's hand, and walked out the door. Daisy'd listen to reason. After all, he was a well-respected member of the community. He'd garnered eighty-three percent of the vote last election. Everyone loved Sheriff Tom. He ignored the tickle in the back of his mind that told him he'd met his match in the sex toy saleswoman.

Chapter Five

Tara tossed a purse, laptop bag, pile of assorted books and manila envelopes, and a sweater into the booth seat Tom just vacated. “Well, do my eyes deceive me or were you and our sexy sheriff meeting in secret?”

“Bite me, Tara.”

Her butt followed her pile of junk. “Oh, my, juicy. Inquiring minds want to know.”

Daisy crossed her arms. She seemed to be doing that a lot lately, and she didn’t like it. She’d changed from someone with armadillo-thick skin into a pansy since she’d moved home. Progressive women did not feel intimidation from a goon of a county sheriff. Then again, progressive women didn’t get all hot and bothered by said county sheriff either. “Gee, you’re original. Is that the best you can come up with? You’re a reporter, for cripes’ sake.”

Tara grinned. “Oooh, snarky. Having a black girl for your best friend has taught you, grasshopper. I’m glad I’ve been such a good influence. Glad Daddy suggested it.”

Daisy laughed. “He just bought you the newspaper. Where else could you run it from?”

Tara didn’t look the least bit apologetic, wearing a shit-eating grin and batting her brown eyes. She reveled in the pampered princess routine. “Daddy can’t spend all his money on the new wife. Besides, I love rubbing the old guard’s noses in it. They all have a

subscription, and every one of them hates having to rely on me for the local news. I have all kinds of fun with it.”

Daisy turned serious. “Serves those bigots right. I’m proud of you, Tara. You’ve turned the paper around and done a heck of a job with it. You hungry? I’m starving.”

Tara grabbed a menu and opened it with perfectly manicured hands. The ritual perusal was something Nickel-Back patrons delved into with great interest. Daisy never understood why. The diner served the same food it always did. The menu had not changed in over twenty years. Everyone in town had the grease-stained menus memorized.

“What do you want?”

Cora’s gruff greeting rattled what was left of Daisy’s inner peace. She fought back a scowl and the snappy remark that popped into her mind. She was not interested in an all-out war. The little bit of verbal sniper fire Cora leveled at her now was bad enough. “Um, I’m not sure. You go first, Tara.”

“Hot turkey sandwich, mashed potatoes, and a big bowl of whatever soup you’ve got on today. It sure smells good.”

Daisy watched Tara smile at the sulky woman. Her friend’s sweet approach worked; Cora’s face lifted in a return smile. It was a miracle. Daisy fought back another overwhelming urge to make a crack. Which made her feel even worse. She didn’t want this war with Cora. She never did understand what started it in the first place. *You know damn well, what started this. Fifth grade lunch, the day Tom Williams carried your tray.* The whole reason for Cora’s animosity towards Daisy had just taken his sexy ass out the door about six minutes ago.

“And you?” Cora looked at the top of Daisy’s head, refusing to meet her eyes.

“I’ll have the same, please.”

Tara dropped her menu back into the holder as Cora headed off to get their soup. “I’ll never understand how anyone can hate you like that. Or should I say, until today, I didn’t

understand how someone could hate you like that. I'd never seen you and our tall, dark, and handsome sheriff exchange verbal blows before. Everyone in town knows Cora's hung up on him, but girl, there's a lot of chemistry going with the two of you. Spill it."

Daisy rolled her eyes. "There's nothing to tell, Tara. Yes, he's adorable, smart, and sexy. He's also an asshole. He expects me to cancel a party just 'cause his mom's throwing it."

Tara shook her head. "Can't blame him, honey. He doesn't make the law, just enforces it, and dildos are against the law in this county, right along with no buying booze on Sundays. His is not to comment, merely make sure the good citizens of Boxer County, Florida, fairest patch of land in the panhandle, follow the law to the letter."

"Cripes, you're starting to sound like him."

"Quit yer bellyaching. He's not bothered you about it before when you've waved those penis replacements around. It's all gonna blow over, you'll see. Even if he is planning on tossing your feminist butt in the pokey if you throw that shin-dig."

Daisy dropped her head into her hands. "His mom was never involved before. It's all personal now. On one hand, it's a stupid law. Throwing that party could be my way of protesting it. On the other, there's Elmer to think about. Who's going to take care of him if I'm in jail?"

Tara snapped her fingers in front of Daisy's face. "Hello? Earth to Daisy Mae. Remember me? I'd be happy to take care of that mutt of yours." She grinned. "I just love him to death."

"Thanks, Tara. You're a gem."

Tara flopped her wrist. "Don't mention it, honey. So, you gonna go to jail for the right of all women to vibrate themselves into hot and heavy orgasm? Can I have an exclusive?"

The harrumph Cora shot out came complete with a plate banging on the table. Soup spattered on Daisy's shirt. She placed the other in front of Tara without a word and turned her back quickly on the pair.

Daisy dabbed at what looked like minestrone. "Great. Goes well with the coffee she covered me with earlier, don't you think?"

Tara's sides shook silently. "I'd be mad at her, but you have to admit she's colorful."

Daisy looked down with a smile. "So am I."

Tara leaned in. "Look, honey. Either you can try to keep on the good side of people like Cora here, or you throw one hell of a sex party and go to jail. Take a stand. I'll bail you out."

"Whatever happened to an impartial press?"

"Right now, I'm not speaking as the owner, editor and head reporter of the *Boxer Eagle*. I'm speaking as your friend. I'm still going to get the most horrible photo I can of you being hauled off by our hot-to-trot sheriff and post in on the front page, but I'll be right behind you to get you out of there."

"Fine. Just as long as Elmer's fed, I can live with a bad photo and some time in the joint."

Tara clapped her hands together in glee. She looked all of about ten when she did that, and Daisy smiled. That was Tara's chief complaint in life -- that she looked and acted young. It had its benefits. People confided in her naturally. She looked harmless and childlike. Daisy laughed. She knew better.

Tara danced in her chair with glee. "Daisy's going to jail, and I'm helping. I feel so empowered all of a sudden. Maybe I should buy one of those rocket-powered toys you sell."

Daisy looked her up and down. "Sorry, Tara. I love you, but you can't handle one of those. Let's start you off with a tamer model. You can work your way up to the Man-Rocket Three Thousand."

Tara shook her head. "No way. If there's any chance I'll go to jail for owning a pleasure device, it's going to be a real top-end job." She raised her water glass. "To jail. May the food not kill you, and may someone named Bonnie Biscuits not have her way with you."

Daisy raised her glass to Tara's. "Skol." They clinked the glasses together. Out of the corner of her eye, Daisy saw Cora shoot them a dirty look. *Oh, well, at least now Cora won't have to worry about Tom being attracted to me. Cops and jailbirds rarely mix.*

Chapter Six

“I’d like to thank all of you for coming this evening and spending time with *A Liberated Woman* and myself. Unless there are any questions, I will head into the den to meet with each of you, one by one, to talk about your orders. Before I go, I’d like to thank Eva Williams again for the kind invitation. As a hostess for *A Liberated Woman* home party, Eva is entitled to fifteen percent off her order, valuable prizes, and some really exciting gifts. If her sales reach a thousand dollars, not only will she receive all those wonderful benefits, but she gets to pick out a hundred dollars worth of merchandise absolutely free. If you’d like to get a great discount and prizes too, ask me about hosting *A Liberated Woman* party in your home.”

Daisy looked around. Aside from a few booze-induced giggles, the ladies of Boxer County looked decidedly uncomfortable as they squirmed in their chairs. All of them but Eva, bless her heart. She’d played along with Daisy’s jokes and scenarios, and asked good questions. She’d gone out of her way to turn on every buzzing toy Daisy had in her arsenal. Still, Eva alone would not earn Daisy a decent commission. Why had she ever agreed to this?

“Okay, ladies, who’s first?”

As expected, Eva stood with a smirk, catalog in hand. Daisy ushered her into the wood-paneled den and plunked down into the seat across from hers, order pad in hand.

“How do you think it went?”

Eva’s face wore the expression of a little girl hoping her first sleepover was a success. Squelching the uncharitable description of the dead boring event that popped into her mind, Daisy pasted on a smile and cast around her mind for a compliment. “It was an interesting group.”

Eva laughed. The sunny sound relaxed Daisy. “Oh, horsefeathers. The whole thing must have been like peeing in the men’s room for you. I never saw such a bunch of pinched-up faces in my life.”

Daisy leaned forward and dropped her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “They did look a bit uncomfortable. What do you think they’re talking about out there?”

“What they’re bringing to the church social next week. They spend ages trying to outdo one another.” The older woman patted Daisy on the knee. “Don’t you worry ’bout it none, honey. Those old bats look stuck up, but I bet you’ll make more sales than you think you will. Look on the bright side.”

“What bright side?”

“My son hasn’t busted down the door and hauled us all off to jail. He’s probably still afraid of me. Which is exactly how I like it.”

Daisy tried to hide her smile, but one corner of her mouth twitched upwards. She coughed to cover it, but the older lady cocked an eyebrow and winked in her direction. How could Tom Williams have turned into such a stuck-up, know-it-all prude with Eva for a mom? Daisy shook her head and bent to take Eva’s order.

Five hundred dollars of lingerie, vibrators, and lotions later, she put her pen down and ushered Eva out. Daisy had to admit, the older woman’s questions and product knowledge

were impressive. *Very* impressive. She smiled. It was obvious that the doyenne read the company brochures.

Daisy began to pack up the samples she'd placed on the den's coffee table and put the unused order forms in a neat stack.

"Pardon me?"

The tentative voice was almost lost in the giggles that floated in from the living room.

"Mrs. Miller, come in. What can I do for you?"

Swallowing her surprise, Daisy ushered the minister's wife into the seat across from hers. Plastering a calm but professional look on her face, she sat down and prepared to take her order. At least she hoped it was calm but professional.

"Well, dear, I was thinking about those lubricants you were talking about, and maybe those pleasure cuffs... Can you tell me how they work?"

Picking her jaw up off the floor, Daisy grabbed a bottle of Space Lube and started her spiel.

* * * * *

What a night. Daisy said her goodbyes, grabbed her bags, and headed out into the warm April air with a smile on her face. The party could not have gone better. She'd flip on the computer and pop the orders into the online database as soon as she got home. Four thousand five hundred dollars in sales. A record breaker. She'd made enough tonight to be the top salesperson in her territory. Grinning, she piled samples in her truck, climbed in, and turned the key in the ignition.

She'd not driven ten feet when a bright blue flashing light appeared behind her, as if out of nowhere, followed by a siren loud enough to wake the dead. "Damn."

Pulling over to the side of the road, she pounded the steering wheel. Everything had gone so well. She pulled over and rolled down her window. Tall, broad-shouldered, and a

pain in her damn ass, the local law leaned down, his face impassive but for the muscle that worked in his jaw.

“Good evening, ma’am. Can I see your license and registration?”

“Hello, Tom. How are you? Me? I’m fine. Nice night, huh? Sure do love it when the frogs are croaking and the night air’s all warm like this. Hopefully it’ll be a light love bug season.” She handed the paperwork over with a frown.

“Do you know why I stopped you?”

“Gee, I don’t know. Could it be that I just came from a sex toy party?”

“Suspicion of the possession and intent to sell contraband goods. Step out of the vehicle.”

Daisy narrowed her gaze. “What happens if I say no?” This was fun. The more she talked back, the harder that jaw muscle worked. She wondered if she could piss him off so much the whole side of his face caved in?

“I think you know what happens then.” He looked her dead in the eyes and frowned. A shiver rolled down her body and settled between her thighs. Something about Tom managed to heat her body into a river of sexual awareness, always had, always would. “Come on, Daisy. Don’t make this any harder than it has to be. Just get out of the truck. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner you can make your phone call.”

Pulling the door handle with a grumble, she stepped from the beat-up pickup and stood by the box. Tom leaned into the driver’s side and began to rifle through her boxes and bags.

“Don’t you want to cuff me first? You just left me standing here. I’m a dangerous criminal element. Wouldn’t want me to attack you from behind.”

He straightened, the look on his face darn serious. Daisy gulped and took a step backwards, bumping into the sidewalls of the truck.

“Daisy Mae, any other officer would take what you said as a threat. In fact...” He pulled the handcuffs from his belt. “I think it might strike you as more serious if I did. Daisy

Mae Partridge, you're under arrest for suspicion of carrying an illegal substance, contributing to the delinquency of adults, and resisting arrest. You have the right to remain silent..."

He rattled off her rights while he spun her around to face her truck, grabbed both her hands, and handcuffed them behind her back. She could feel the restrained strength as he held her against her truck, pushing her legs apart with his foot, but it didn't make her feel any better to think he was being gentle. She seethed. The man was an ass. He leaned in close to her body, and she shivered. His breath caressed her ear.

"Do you understand these rights, as I have read them to you?"

Part of her wanted to peel off a pissy "No," but she had the feeling he'd just recite the act over and over again, 'til she said she did. "Yes."

"Good. Now I'm going to pat you down."

The way he said it, mouth near her ear, hands on her shoulders, brought images of his hands on her naked body. *Good lord*. She shook her head. Now was not the time to be thinking about sex, and this was *definitely* not the man to be thinking about having sex with. *He probably thinks lube is something you do to a car*. She giggled.

"Miss Partridge."

"Ms."

"Pardon me?"

"It's Ms. Partridge. Not Miss. Better yet, Daisy. Come off it, Tom. It's me. You've known me since I was ten. You're deliberately being a dick."

She could almost feel the eye roll she suspected he gave, but she wasn't going to dignify her suspicions by turning around to look. Let him twist in the wind. "Okay, fine, *Ms.* Partridge, if that's the way you want to play it."

"Oh, for cripes' sake, Williams. Did it hurt much?"

His brow knit. "Did what hurt?"

"When the bug crawled up your ass."

Strong arms lifted her by the shoulders, and she found herself turned to face him, or rather, the center of his chest. Daisy leaned back as far as her off-balance body allowed, and looked up into his arresting brown eyes. She blinked. Dang, he looked hot when he was mad. She suppressed another giggle and tried to scowl.

“There’s nothing funny about this situation. You’re under arrest. You get that, right?” He leaned in and sniffed her breath. “Have you been drinking?”

“Oh, are you going to stab my arm with a big ol’ needle and draw blood to find out?” Bending at the waist, Daisy stuck out her arm as far behind her as possible, for dramatic effect and waved it around. Head up, to watch his reaction, she was sure she looked like a trapped bug. Too bad, she didn’t want to miss the look on his face. For all the trouble he caused her, the least she could do was piss him off.

His eyes narrowed. He looked incredibly dangerous like that. Dangerous and sexy. “I don’t have to.” It came out in a mutter, and he turned back to her truck, opening boxes and peering inside with a little huff as he uncovered a new toy. He pulled out a particularly large vibrating dildo and switched it on. The head twirled, and a small plastic animal at its base vibrated wildly. “What the *hell* is this?”

This was it. He’d gone too far and she was about at her limit of tolerance. “It’s a Hedgehog. What do you mean you don’t have to test me for alcohol? Poke me with a needle and drain the blood out, Dracula. I demand it. I don’t ever want there to be any questions about whether I’d been drinking and driving. Go ahead, I dare you.”

She saw the eye roll this time, exaggerated and damn insulting. The check she held her temper with was about to sheer clean away, and then...

Then, you’ll really make a fool of yourself.

His lips broke into a Cheshire cat grin. “I don’t have to test you for alcohol because you were at my mother’s. I’ll just call and ask her.”

“Oh ,no, you leave my clients out of this, you lunk.”

His hand, which had been reaching toward the vibe, stopped mid-motion. “You mean hostess, right? Not client.”

Now it was her turn to roll her eyes. “Hostess, client, what’s the difference? They’re all the same.”

“No, they’re not.” He took a step towards her, Hedgehog in his hand at full throttle. He pointed it in her face. “A *hostess* is someone who throws a party. A *client* is someone who buys something. Did my mother purchase anything from you tonight?” He shook the vibrator to emphasize his point.

She fought back another giggle, but it escaped, anyway. The dichotomy of the uniformed sheriff wielding the vibrator was just too much.

He scowled. “You think this is a joke?”

Helpless laughter overcame her, and she shook with it.

“Damnit, Daisy this is not funny. I just arrested you. Maybe you have been drinking.”

She rubbed her cheek against her shirt to wipe away the tears that had leaked out. “Oh, get over yourself, Tom. You’re waving a buzzing dildo in my face while you berate me. It’s damn funny, and you know it.”

His lips twitched once, then again. Placing a hand to his face, he brushed his cheek a couple of times and turned back to rummage around her car, depositing the Hedgehog on the front seat.

Well, score one for the vibrator lady. Uh-oh. Her smile dropped as he pulled the stack of orders from her bag. Crap. All the town's bluebloods needed was their secret handcuff and whip fetishes to be dragged out into the cold light of day by the local law. She had to do something. Privacy was something Daisy really believed in.

“Tom.”

He turned, his gaze bored into hers.

Why hadn't she noticed how velvety his eyes looked before? *Keep your wits about you. This man is the enemy.*

"What?"

"It's just..." She bit her lip in indecision about what to say next. A paper fluttered out of the truck and hit the ground at her feet. She looked down. An order. Someone's private fantasy lay on the ground like trash. The time for joking was over. "Those orders all represent the most private dreams and fantasies of some of the town's leading women. If those orders got out to the general population..."

Part of her chafed at having to almost beg this man for anything, and part of her... She didn't want to think about what hovered in the back of her mind. Handcuffed, under his control. She shivered. This was not a sign of female emancipation. Why was she so strong in all areas of her life, but wanted to be controlled in the bedroom? Dr. Ruth would have a field day with this one.

He looked down at the stack and back up into her eyes, understanding seemed to dawn, then he blew out a breath. "I'm supposed to turn all this in as evidence." He shook his head. "You're right, though. I don't think I really want to know what my mom ordered, much less the rest of her friends. Don't worry. I'll take care of it, Daisy."

The sound of her name on his lips sent an involuntary shiver up her spine. He was plenty mad at her and seemed to have a stick up his ass where the law was concerned, but Daisy trusted Tom. They might not see eye to eye, but his word was good. She nodded and turned her head so he wouldn't see the desire that sprang up for him in her eyes. Lightning snaked its way across the horizon. It sucked her thoughts about Tom away as surely as a vacuum sucked up dirt. She shuddered in distaste. She hated storms.

"Looks like we're in for a blow. I'm gonna get this processed and get us out of here, before the rain hits."

He finished his paperwork, locked her truck up, and ducked her into the back seat of his brown-and-white.

Sliding his well-muscled body into the front seat, she noticed the large patrol car suddenly felt a whole lot smaller. He adjusted his rearview mirror so their gazes met. "You okay back there? Your arms all right?"

"Fine." She turned her head and looked out the window, anywhere but into those brown eyes. Yes, she was acting like a brat, but how were you supposed to act? Poor Elmer. She hoped he wouldn't pee on the rug. Leaning her head back against the cheap vinyl seat, she closed her eyes and pretended she was in Tahiti.

Chapter Seven

“Here, you can wipe your fingers off with this.” Tom handed a wet paper towel through the bars and watched her towel the dark ink off.

“I thought you guys used a new system that didn’t require ink anymore.”

He looked at her suspiciously. “We don’t have it here yet. How come you know about it?”

“Oh, I suspect you’ll find out soon enough, when you upload the prints to the FBI’s database.”

“Shit. Is there something I should know?” This was turning into one long-assed night. He had to make an example of her. The most annoying, obstinate, pain in the...

He rubbed the back of his head, right in the spot she’d brained him with a lunch tray in fifth grade for trying to carry her food for her. He learned his lesson that day. The tirade she’d leveled on him about being just as strong as he was and how she could carry ten trays, fully loaded, had the whole school laughing at him. Pig-tailed or mop of curls, the woman was too empowered for her own good. *And for you, Williams. Even if you do want her.*

She shrugged her shoulders. “I’m not dangerous, but there may be some questionable activity in my past.”

“Is someone looking for you? The federal government, perhaps?”

She grinned. “Not anymore.”

Tom ran a hand through his hair. Pulling back, he stared down at his fingers, registering some mild surprise that his hair didn’t appear to be falling out. “Do I need an aspirin before I take a look at your records?”

“Oh, relax. Just an arrest for a peaceful protest. Nothing too major.”

He felt his eyes narrow. “If it was so peaceful, how come you got arrested?”

“Just a bit of a misunderstanding involving the rights of the small and innocent.”

“Small, maybe, but I suspect not innocent, not when you were involved. Why couldn’t you just move to a big city and join the ranks of the liberated there? You’d fit in better.”

She plunked her pert ass down on the cot in the corner of her cell and crossed her arms. “Because I’m here to free my hometown sisters from a lifetime of male servitude and bondage.”

The laugh rose unbidden. “Bondage? I thought you sold bondage toys?”

Her arms swept out in gestures that overwhelmed her small frame. “That’s a different kind of bondage. I’m talking about women giving their lives for their families, never learning, never seeing beyond the...”

He held up his hands. “I get it. Freedom for womankind, blah, blah, blah.”

Her eyes glittered an alarming shade of deep blue they only seemed to take on when she was good and worked up. They looked almost turquoise in the fluorescent lights of the sheriff’s office cum county lockup. Tom swallowed. Daisy Partridge was in his lockup, at his mercy. The thought hardened his cock.

“It’s about more than freedom. It’s about education, but if you’re too pigheaded to --”

Tom tossed his hands in the air. “What about the women who like the life they chose, Daisy? Not everyone is a slave to *the man*.”

Blonde head shaking, she rose and approached the bars. "If they freely choose that life, then it's not true bondage. If a woman wants to stay home and take care of her family, that's great. I fully support her right to that decision."

The woman made some sense. That or he was in over his head and lost in her damn arguing. He glanced at his desk. "I'll be sure and let the ladies of Boxer County know you're not out to change all their lives, just some of them. Do you need anything? I have to finish processing the evidence."

She smiled at him. Tom felt like the air was sucked from the room. Pretty all the time, Daisy turned stunning when she smiled. "Um, a blanket might be nice, and I missed dinner. Got anything to eat in this mausoleum?"

"I think I can dig up some crackers and spray cheese. Will that do?"

"Ugh, I hate that stuff. I lived on it when I was in Tampa."

"Just think of it as a way to bring back warm, fuzzy memories. I'll grab you a blanket and a Coke when I get the crackers and cheese. If you have to use the restroom, just let me know."

She eyed the back of the cell, under the window. "I thought I had to pee in a cup in the corner?"

"Very funny. We're small, but not disgusting."

"Small? This looks like an ode to Mayberry. You ever gonna give it an update? Some new carpet and a paint job, perhaps?"

"That's fine southern history you're disparaging, ma'am. What this town and its citizens are all about. You should take those ideals with more gravity. If you get my drift. Some things are worth preserving, whether you think so or not."

"Very funny. Just bring the spray cheese and stick a file in the can, would you?"

With a snort, he headed to his desk and typed in his password. Normally, he didn't talk much to prisoners. Not that he had much of an opportunity to. Most of the folks through the

county lock-up were booked on drunk and disorderly. By the time he stuck them in a jail cell, they passed out. He'd carted more than one dead-to-the-world prisoner into the cell in his career. "That's why they pay me the big bucks." He tapped on the keyboard and peered at the screen. "Hello, what's this?" Picking up a pen, he took down the information, grabbed the cheese and crackers out of his desk drawer, and kicked the Coke machine in its sweet spot. Classic rolled down to the dispensing area. Nope, little Miss Arrest Record probably only drank diet. He kicked it again, a little to the right. The familiar silver-and-red can rolled out. Whistling tunelessly, he stepped up to the cage.

"Disturbing the peace, creating a public nuisance and staging a protest without a permit. Oh, and the most interesting part of all. You were," he looked down at his notes for effect, "dressed as a clubbed baby seal?"

She grinned and stuck her hands through the bars, with her wrists together. "Ya got me. Care to cuff me again? I told you I'm a dangerous element."

He looked at the slim wrists, curving arms, stunning chest, and pretty face with a gulp. Oh, yeah, Daisy Mae Partridge was a dangerous element, all right. Best tied down and taught a lesson. Too bad the judge probably wouldn't hand her over to his care to punish. Shame.

She wiggled her hands. "Barring a reenactment of my arrest, can I have the food?"

He looked down at his hands dumbly. "Oh, oh yeah, of course. Classic or Diet?"

She grabbed the Diet and opened it with a pop.

Called that one right, Williams.

"When do I get my phone call?"

"That depends. Who do you want to call?"

She bent her head back and sprayed cheese into her mouth, then licked her lips with a sigh. He turned his head to avoid staring at her tongue as it flicked over the corners of her mouth.

"None of your business. I thought a phone call was a basic right."

Leaning against the bars, he folded his arms and crossed his leg to hide the telltale bulge in his pants. "I have four hours 'til I have to grant it. Who's it to? Boyfriend?"

"Don't be an ass. It's Tara."

"Uh, huh, a reporter. You're going to make a spectacle of this arrest and have it splashed all over the paper? Why don't you just call your lawyer, like everyone else?"

"Because, Elmer's going to need to pee, and Tara's the one who's going to take care of him while I'm in the joint."

"You set up a dog sitter? So you planned to be arrested?"

"Let's just say I wasn't going to back down, so I didn't expect you to. Want a cracker with cheese before I eat them all?"

He shook his head. She knew him better than he thought. It made him feel uncomfortable and incredibly aroused at the same time.

Shrugging, Daisy sprayed the remaining contents on a cracker, piling it high with the bright orange fake cheese and popped it into her mouth.

"You got some on your finger." He pointed to her hand and reached into his pocket for a handkerchief. Nothing. He cast his gaze around the office. Crud. Without his mom doing his laundry, he was lucky to be wearing clean socks. The thought made him wince. *Momma's boy.*

"I seem to have forgotten the napkins and my mom isn't speaking to me. She stopped doing my laundry, too."

"You're kidding?"

"No, she sai --"

Daisy held up her hand. "No, what I meant was, you still have your mom do your laundry?"

Her gaze bored into his, and he turned away. "Yeah, I need to learn how to do my own damn laundry."

“Ya think? You’re an adult, Sheriff Tom. Time to act like one.”

“Says the woman I just arrested for carrying concealed sex toys.”

She laughed. “You mean a loaded dildo.”

Watching Daisy lick the cheese from her fingers had to be illegal in at least four counties. Her pink tongue shot out, moved with sensual grace over the digit, and disappeared back behind her bee-stung lips. He almost groaned aloud at the erotic nature of it all. Instead, he shook his head. “I’ll call Tara for you. You just want her to take care of Elmer? Or do you want her to dig you up a lawyer?”

Her gaze grazed her watch, and she shook her head. “It’s after eleven. I think I’ll call my lawyer in the morning. Tell Tara to be sure and give Elmer a treat for waiting for so long.”

“Done. Anything else?”

She looked sheepish, her gaze dropped, and she toed the floor with a sandaled foot. “Um, I could use a trip to the ladies room.”

“Of course. I should have known.” Grabbing the keys off his belt, he opened the cell door. “It’s over there.” He motioned to the ladies’ room door.

Her eyes narrowed as she looked from the opening, to him. “You’re going to let me go all by myself? What if I try to break out of the hoosegow?”

“You’re not going to do that, now, are you?”

The challenge in her eyes tempted him in all kinds of naughty ways. Then, she replaced the flirtatious look with a sweet smile. “Nope, I’m not gonna to try to make a break for it.”

With a toss of her hair, she walked by him in a sweet-smelling cloud that muddled his brain and made his pants tight for the tenth or eleventh time since he’d arrested her. He’d lost count about an hour ago.

“When I walk out of here, it’s going to be because I’m a free woman.” She pumped her fist in the air.

He smiled and watched her pert hind end disappear behind the ladies’ room door. Christ, she was a handful. He ran both hands through his hair in agitation. She sure did something to him, for him. Maybe he just liked the challenge. Daisy had always been an enigma to him. He’d spin into her orbit, then she’d knock him for a loop, and he’d spin away. Just when he got his life on track, she’d spin back and wobble him again. It should make him mad as hell. Instead, he liked her wild, full-of-life energy. He’d never felt so alive as when he was talking to Daisy, thinking about Daisy, fantasizing...

She confused the hell out of him. Irritated, he walked to his desk and hit the speed-dial button to Tara’s cell phone.

“So you arrested my best friend?”

“Hello, Tara, how is your evening?”

“What’s Tara saying?” Daisy yelled from the bathroom.

Was nothing private? He put his hand over the receiver. “She’s making a smart comment about your arrest.”

“Life was just fine, ‘til your mom called me about Daisy. When can she have visitors?”

“She’s processed; anytime, but she’d like you to take care of Elmer.”

A head popped out around the bathroom door. “You’re telling her to feed Elmer, right?”

He waved his arm a couple of times, and she disappeared back inside.

“Tell her I’m already at her house, and I’m coming there as soon as I’m done feeding him.”

“Is she coming to visit me?”

Once again, he covered the receiver. “Can you hold your damned horses? I can’t hear.”

"Sorry." She sang it out in a way that let Tom know she was not one bit repentant. He smiled in spite of himself. The woman was nothing if not colorful.

"Why can't she talk to me herself? Did you drug her?"

He sighed. "This isn't a kidnapping, Tara. She's in the bathroom." A loud boom rumbled through the office. The lights flickered, and the phone crackled. "Sounds like that storm's finally here. I've fed her and given her a blanket. She's probably going to sleep for a while. You're welcome now, but why don't you wait to grill her 'til morning?"

"You promise she's okay?" Outside, the sky lit in the unforgiving brightness of a lightning burst that made the hair on Tom's neck stand up. The thunder that followed sounded like it was right over the old cinder block building.

"Look, I'm gonna hang up now. The storm --"

A crackling sound on the line drowned out Tara's answer. He hung up the phone and turned to the bathroom. "You got quiet, all of a sudden." Another shaft of light pierced the sky, followed by a boom, and then the office plunged into darkness.

"Shit. Power's out." Reaching into his drawer, he grabbed the extra flashlight as a blood-curdling scream sounded from the ladies' room.

Turning toward the sound, he bumped his knee into the open desk drawer and slammed it shut with a curse. Another scream.

"Daisy, are you alright?"

No answer. Damn. He stumbled toward the bathroom door, knocked into his chair on the way, and almost tripped over the water cooler. Remembering the flashlight in his hand, he switched it on. The beam of light illuminated the way. Tom pushed the door open. It hit soft resistance at the halfway point and stopped. Daisy. He stepped through and shone the light behind the door.

Nothing. He aimed it down. There she was. Curled in a ball, arms around her knees, she sat on the ground, behind the door. "What the hell?"

She looked up at him, her eyes huge in her small face.

He held out a hand to her. "Are you okay?"

Lightning burst outside once more, followed even more closely by a crackle of thunder. The storm was almost overhead. The ceiling above them creaked. She seemed to grow smaller, huddled back against the wall. She shook her head.

"I have issues with storms." It came out forced and shaking.

Another crack and she buried her head in her knees.

He fought back a smile. "Issues? You're a shrink's dream."

One eye peeked up at him. "You're so not funny."

A blast of light tore through the small bathroom from the window high on the wall. He turned his head in time to see a shower of sparks fall toward them. Daisy squeaked.

"Damn, I think it hit the live oak out back. That tree's over eighty years old." He turned back to the shuddering woman huddled behind the bathroom door. He didn't remember her being afraid of storms as a kid, but they closed the schools if a hurricane was expected, so he wasn't really surprised he didn't know about this aspect of her personality.

"We better get out of here. If that tree drops further, there's a good chance it'll go through the window." He stuffed the flashlight under his arm and held out his hand.

With a rattled sigh, she placed her hand in his. Pulling, he hauled her up and against his body. Lush curves pressed into him, bringing his cock to full attention. Her gaze shot to his, confusion filled her eyes. Damn, she'd felt his cock through his pants. With reluctance, he pulled away slightly and pulled the door open to usher her out.

Thunder boomed through the building, while driving rain hammered at the windows. Stepping into the main room, she turned so fast he almost tripped over her.

"Don't make me go back in there. Please, Tom. I can't. After the storm's over. Okay?"

A primitive feeling washed over him. He had an almost overwhelming urge to pull her into his arms, scoop her up, and carry her off somewhere safe and quiet. *Me man, you*

woman. His lips twitched. Good thing it was dark. He didn't want to have to explain this particular urge to the town feminist.

"Please..."

The needy sound in her voice hit him right in the solar plexus. "It's okay, Daisy." Placing his hand on the small of her back, he shone the light ahead of them and walked her to the worn couch he kept in the building for nights he worked doubles and catnapped between calls.

A small hand touched his chest. The heat seared through his uniform shirt, right to the bare skin beneath.

"Thank you."

Vulnerable. He'd never seen her like this. The need in her eyes compelled him in a way the firebrand didn't. Her hand pressed against him, her mouth close. He leaned in, so close. What the hell was he doing? He cleared his throat and plastered on a big ol' fake grin. "I never thought I'd see the day when Daisy Mae Partridge, defender of the weak, would kowtow to a little storm.

With a huff, she turned, stalked to the couch, and plopped down with a mutter.

"What was that? I couldn't quite hear you?"

"I said, 'Fuck off.' Is that clear enough?"

"Plenty." Whew, he'd dodged a bullet there. Kissing the prisoners was a definite no-no. Shining the light into the cell, he grabbed the blanket off the bench and turned back to the couch. She was in a ball again. Curled up tight. The pissy temper seemed to have drained out of her, leaving only trembling behind. *Damn*. He stepped to the couch and wrapped the blanket around her. She looked up with what he hoped was a grateful smile. Taking her expression as a hopeful sign, he sat next to her.

"It's heading off now. When I was a kid, I used to play that game where you count the seconds between the lightning and the thunder. Wanna try?"

A hand moved over his lips. "Stop now."

He pulled her hand down, gently. "It's just a game."

"Just a game, my ass. I saw the movie *Poltergeist*. I know what happens when you count during storms."

"You're kidding, right?"

Her blonde curls flew in the negative. "No, I'm not. I don't eat chicken legs, and I don't count during storms. End of story."

"Okay, I'm trying to be a reasonable man here. You're saying you're afraid of storms and you won't eat a specific food because of a movie?"

"We all have our issues. That's mine."

"Glad I don't have anything like that in my closet."

Her head came up. Even in the near-dark, he could see the smug look on her face. "Oh yeah, you seen *Snakes on a Plane* yet?"

"Oh, come on. That was one time, in sixth grade, and it dropped out of a tree onto my head."

"Okay, I'll give you that one, but have you seen the movie?"

"The sheriff of Boxer County does not have time to go see movies."

The laughter eased the tension in the room. "Gotcha. Whether you admit it or not." Thunder sounded, and she jumped, landing against his thigh.

He reached out and massaged her shoulder, pulling her body close to his. "You really are scared, aren't you?"

"Yes. I hate storms. I feel like a moron."

The smell of her hair filled his nostrils, distracting his thoughts. He wanted to bury his nose in it, feel the crisp curls against his cheek. He leaned in.

"I'm not comfortable when I'm out of control."

“Do you have to be in control all the time? What about letting someone else take the lead.”

He felt the rise and fall of her shoulders against his arm, the soft brush of her body against his. “I just don’t trust anyone that much.”

He smiled against her hair. “Well, if you can’t trust the law, who can you trust?”

“I trust you.”

Words, a bare brush of air on his cheek. Her head turned, bringing her mouth close to his. He sucked a breath in at the softly whispered words. Lightning flashed, further away, but still bright enough to illuminate her face. His gaze roamed over her features, vulnerable, soft, trusting. Her head tilted to his. The inner voice started its mantra about duty, honor, and dating suitable women; he shut it off, leaned in, and placed his lips against hers.

Soft, yielding, and delicious, kissing Daisy was everything he’d ever fantasized about. His arms wrapped around her waist, and he drew her body against his, until she straddled his lap. Her body melted into his, her mouth opening seductively. Tom felt the last of his inhibitions slip down the drain of his need. Groaning, he licked her lips, expecting to invade her mouth with his. Instead, a tentative tongue flicked out, then slipped into his mouth. Erotic shocks slammed through his body.

Her hands roamed over his shoulders and back, turning his need into an uncontrollable inferno. Soft breasts pressed against his chest. She seemed both hesitant and eager, touching him, then pulling back. She always held such a line of control. This side of Daisy both confused him and drove him wild. He moved his hands lower and cupped the globes of her ass, pulling her tight against him. Her small hands tangled in his short hair, pulling him closer to her.

She pressed against him in the most sensual way. “Oh, God.” It came out as a half-groan, as she rubbed her pussy against him.

Reaching up, he placed a hand over her breast, then stroked down her T-shirt to lift the fabric. Christ, no bra. He thought his cock was as hard as possible, but the hard nipple against his thumb made a liar out of him.

With a sigh, she leaned back and pressed harder against his hand. Pinching the nipple between his thumb and forefinger, he kissed over her neck. She melted into him in a way that made him feel sexy, strong, and very male.

He knotted a hand in her hair and pulled gently. Gasping, her body followed the lead of his hand, bringing her breast close to his mouth. The pink tip, vulnerable to his wishes, was too tempting to resist. Licking over it once, he bit down experimentally. Daisy gasped and pushed her jean-clad pussy against him, rubbing wildly.

Tom groaned. He'd have to back off, or he'd end up taking her right here on the couch.

"Daisy, we've got to stop."

For a moment, she stilled in his arms, then her hand moved up and over her breast. He watched entranced as she flicked her bare nipple with her thumb, then pinched the skin cruelly between her thumb and forefinger. God, she was incredibly sexy and sensual. His mouth followed her hand, licking and biting the tender flesh. He felt completely lost and didn't care where he was anymore. The only thought in his mind was that he had to take this woman and take her soon.

The front door banged. "Hey, honey, does that Neanderthal have you handcuffed naked somewhere?"

With a sizzling sound, the lights flickered back on. Her mouth broke from his with a gasp. He stood; Daisy flopped to the ground at his feet with a *thud* and scrambled to stand. Without thinking, he reached out an arm. She grabbed it, pulled herself to her feet and turned around to face the open door and Tara, who stood with her mouth agape, rain drenching the entry carpet behind her.

Her mouth snapped shut, and she looked them up and down. “This does bring a whole new meaning to the word ‘frisked,’ now, doesn’t it?”

Chapter Eight

“I’m going to order breakfast. What can I get you?”

Blinking, Daisy sat up on the hard cot...thing. Tom called it a bed, but there was nothing bed-like about it. She ran her fingers through her hair and looked sleepily at Tom. The night came back to her in a rush. Heat suffused her cheeks, and she put a hand over her mouth. What the hell had she been thinking? Kissing Tom, humping his leg like a horny poodle, the most uptight, conservative jackass... *Screw it, girl. You climbed on his lap and practically raped the man.* It was the storm; it *had* to be the storm. She refused to let her mind go back to all the times she dreamed of him just like that. She’d out-stubborn her memories, one way or another.

His gaze bored into hers, but there was not a trace of anything other than what she hoped to be a professional demeanor on her face. It was almost like the lap humping hadn’t happened at all. *Ass.* Fine, two can play that game. She plastered on a smile. “Two eggs over medium and toast, please.” Good, she’d sounded nice and cheerful. Take that, Mr. Butter-Won’t-Melt-in-Your-Mouth.

He narrowed his eyes. “Is that enough food? I can order you more than that. It’s on the good people of the county.”

“Nope, that’s fine, and coffee, two creams, no sugar.”

He turned, and she got an eyeful of hot, tight ass. High and firm, with a roundness to it that had her biting her lip...what was she thinking? Probably the negative ions in the air getting her sexually charged up. There, a perfectly logical explanation. She was so not attracted to Tom Williams, stuck-up square peg and town goody-goody.

The man practically reeked of the “man first, woman two steps behind” ideals she loathed. He’d arrested her for carrying a dildo, for cripes’ sake. Okay, *eight* dildos.

She stood and pulled at the hem of her T-shirt to straighten it out. The wrinkles were hopeless. The judge was going to think she was being disrespectful or worse. She looked like she’d just climbed out of bed. With Tom. Daisy wished she’d asked Tara to bring along some clothes. Tara. She groaned. Her friend had not said another word about the compromising position she’d found them in, but the look in her eyes told Daisy that a serious grilling was yet to come.

She’d left ten minutes after arriving, a lame excuse about her answering machine and an expected call. Even Tara didn’t get calls at two in the morning on a Saturday. Not unless the sheriff was involved, and that particular hunk of meat was in the room with them. He’d tried to talk to Daisy after Tara left, but she’d stuck her nose in the air, marched into the cage, and slammed the barred door closed behind her.

She lay down on the cot and was busy congratulating herself on the self-control she’d exerted when the door opened and the blanket landed across her face. A blanket that now smelled like him.

She pulled it over her head and fought sleep for at least an hour before it mercifully came.

She glanced up at the window. Weak, watery light flooded in through the bars. Ugh, maybe this whole thing had been a bad idea. Maybe she should have listened to her foster dad and gone into accounting. She sighed and wrapped the blanket around her shoulders. It

still smelled like Tom. Tossing it off, she stood and began to pace her cage back and forth. Now she knew what the tiger in the zoo felt like. It sucked.

“Here’s your breakfast, Tom, honey. Well, my, my, look who’s in the lockup today. Hello, Daisy, honey. Had yerself a bad night, did ya?”

Ugh, Cora. Daisy glanced back at the cot and the blanket. Maybe she could take a running dive and hide. The other woman approached the bars.

“Looking good, honey. Rats do your hair this morning?”

Daisy fought off an almost uncontrollable urge to stick her tongue out at the other woman and turned away, her hand automatically went to her hair.

“Come on, Cora, leave my prisoner alone.”

“Why, Tom. Your prisoner? That sounds almost filthy. Can I take a turn?”

Daisy bit her tongue and stared straight ahead at the wall, counting bricks. She was not going to take this bait. She was not going to go there, not today, not tomorrow, not ever. The kiss was a one-time occurrence, and that was that. End of story.

“Okay, Cora. I’ve got to get Daisy to court. You can leave the food over there.”

There was a quiet exchange that Daisy closed her ears to by humming “We Shall Overcome.” The banging door brought a mixture of relief and an almost uncontrollable urge to cry welling up at the back of her throat. Daisy fought it back with a shaky, indrawn breath.

“Coffee? I didn’t tell her it was for you ’til she got here, and she didn’t have time to spit in it.”

Lips curving, she turned. “Good, ’cause I need it. What are you doing?”

The keys in his hand rattled as he unlocked the cell door. “Letting you out to eat and take care of your needs. I don’t think it’s going to storm today, so the bathroom should be safe.”

She blushed and took the coffee from him. The warm cup felt good in her hands. Even in the muggy morning air. She took a scalding sip, avoiding eye contact with Tom, and headed to the ladies' room.

Once inside, she eyeballed the window that had led to all the trouble the night before.

"Oh, screw it. The window didn't stick you in Tom Williams's arms. You did it all by yourself. You've wanted to kiss him since..." She shook her head. A long time. Since he led the high-school football team in rushing, while she was protesting cheerleading as being sexist and football as being violent. Since he debated her on election issues in Forensics Class. Since... A *very* long time.

She washed her face and tossed back the rest of the coffee.

There was a knock on the door. "You about done in there? You didn't escape, did you?" His dark head popped round the door.

Man, he is so adorable. He must have shaved, because the fuzz he'd sported earlier was gone from his face. His shirt looked clean, too. She glanced down. *Still rumped. Oh, well, no way through it, but to do it.*

"Ready when you are."

With a smile that melted her to her toes, he ushered her out of the office and across the street to the County Building.

Cold air-conditioning -- too cold -- slapped Daisy in the face as she entered the building. Tom led her to a bench and encouraged her to sit.

"Well, 'bout time you got here. Don't want to keep the pork rind prince waiting."

"Tara, shh. Don't call Judge Brown that."

"He is what he is, honey. You ready for this?"

Daisy nodded. Nerves shook her hands, but she stuck them under her thighs and pasted on a smile for Tara.

“Oh, you are so lying. You look like crap.” She reached into one of her bags and pulled out a paper napkin. Cranking open the top of a water bottle, she dumped some water on the soft paper and dabbed at Daisy’s face.

“Do you mind? That’s cold.”

“Sorry, but you have raccoon eyes.”

“Well, pardon me for not using a makeup remover last night.”

“Huh, I thought you did, or does the county sheriff sucking the makeup off your face not count?”

Daisy reached up and grabbed Tara’s arm, stopping her in mid-dab. “You did not just say that.”

Tara grinned. “I did. Now tell me all about it.”

With a sigh, Daisy pulled the napkin out of Tara’s hand and went to work under her eyes. “There’s nothing to tell.”

“Uh, uh, you don’t get to push me off like that.”

“Why? So you can put it in the paper? ‘Local sheriff caught mid-nookie with local nutcase.’ I’m sure that will help him in the next election.”

“Oh, my God. Did you go all the way?” The happy excitement in Tara’s voice irritated Daisy to no end.

Daisy rolled her eyes. “You sound like you’re sixteen. No, we did not. You know what I mean. I’m never, cross my heart and hope to die, going to have sex with Tom Williams. May I eat a bug if I do.”

“What kind of bug?”

At the sound of the deep voice, Daisy looked up. Crap. Tom, in all his blue-clad glory, stood not three feet away, and he’d heard every word. She wanted to die. The half smile on his lips told her he was teasing, but nerves rattled her to the point of shaking. *Nerves, ha. That’s sexual need.*

Crossing her arms at chest level, she cocked her head and swallowed some of the sarcastic crack that threatened to spill from her lips. "Palmetto. Are they ready for me?"

"Yep. You sure you don't want a lawyer?"

She shook her head. "No, it's not going to change anything with Judge Rich. He's going to yell, threaten to toss the book at me, and let me go 'til the trial."

"Okay, but I'm not sure I like this, Daisy. You should have representation."

"Are you counseling me, sheriff?"

"No, I'm just talking to you, friend to friend."

She pushed off the bench and walked toward the door. Tom got there first and held it open. Part of her was thrilled by the sweet gesture, and part of her wanted to snatch the door handle out of his hand and hold it open her damned self. She was a fully capable woman. Did she look so helpless that Tom thought she couldn't open a door?

She looked up to glower at him, but the sincere look of concern in his eyes stopped her mid-scowl. Maybe he *was* just trying to be nice. A movement at the bench caught her eye. The judge, already seated, sat hands folded, a look of tired patience on his features.

All of a sudden, the nerves that skittered around her stomach knotted into a ball of fear. Looking quickly behind her, Daisy hunted for a way out. Her gaze slammed into Tom's, and she took a breath. The reassurance in his eyes soothed her.

Stop it. He's the one who arrested your ass in the first place. Of course, you were breaking the law, and he was just doing his job.

"Spoilsport."

"Pardon me?"

She cringed. "Nothing, just thinking out loud."

Careful, or he's going to commit you for being unstable.

A nervous laugh rose in her throat, then turned into something that felt like a sob. A large, strong hand squeezed her shoulder. Calm settled over her, unknotting her stomach by a bare degree.

Tom led her to the defendant's box and moved to the table on the other side of the aisle, the prosecuting attorney at his side. She peeked back over her shoulder at Tara, who flashed the thumbs up sign.

"What the hell are you here for, Partridge? That business of yours finally catch up to you?" He looked at the court reporter, his wife Mary, who eyed him worshipfully. "Porn, the lady sells porn."

"With all due respect, your honor, it's not porn."

He banged his gavel. "Bullshit, young lady. Do you think I'm so naïve that I don't know porn when I see it? I'll thank you not to speak until I ask you to. How do you plead?"

Daisy wound her fingers around themselves and bit her lip. Yep, he was going to let her have it today.

The gavel came down once more, so hard the room seemed to shake with the boom. "I asked you how you plead?"

"I'm sorry. I was trying not to talk out of turn."

"I didn't ask for an explanation. I asked for a plea."

She drew in a breath. This was harder than she thought it would be. "Innocent."

Judge Brown's face reddened. Any minute now, steam would erupt from his ears. Unbidden, images of Mount St. Helen came to mind.

"Innocent? What the hell? Did you, or did you not, have a fake penis on your front seat?"

"Um, well, I guess."

"You guess?" He looked down at his wife. "She guesses. Did you hear that, Mary?" Looking back at Daisy, he pointed the business end of the gavel in her direction and waved it

in the air while he spoke. "You either did, or you didn't. Sheriff Williams, was there or was there not a fake penis on the front seat of her truck?"

Daisy looked over at Tom. He rose. "Yes, your honor. The list in your hands is accurate. Those were the items I removed from Ms. Partridge's truck."

The judge turned back to Daisy. Yep, it sure did look like he was about to spout fire. Daisy raised her shoulders and bit her lip.

"Miss Partridge, can you give me one good reason why I should not toss your ass in jail right now and throw away the key?"

"Because I have the right to due process? Your honor."

The judge snorted. "Unfortunately for the good folks of this county, who you are busy corrupting, you are correct. Does the prosecutor have anything to say in this matter?"

The prosecuting attorney, a kid just out of law school, stood and shook his head.

"Yer head don't rattle when it nods, boy. You gotta learn to speak up. Daisy Mae Partridge, since your home is in this county, I'm releasing you on your own recognizance. Trial will begin two weeks from today. In the meantime, keep your nose straight and stop selling porn. Am I making myself clear?"

Daisy nodded, then thought the better of it. "Yes, sir."

"Good, now get the hell out of my court."

Tara reached out and squeezed her arm. "Whew, I thought he was going to stick your lily-white ass in the county jail 'til the trial. So now what?"

"I go home, hug Elmer, and put the orders in from last night's party."

Tara's face visibly paled, and she put a hand on Daisy's shoulder. "Honey, I'm all for change, but he told you not to sell anymore."

Daisy shrugged. "I'm not going to sell anymore. I already sold last night's orders. I'm just delivering the goods."

“If Tom finds out, you’re screwed. Of course, that just might be your goal.” Tara laughed, seeming very pleased with her little joke.

“Very funny. Help me get my stuff together and give me an update on Elmer.” Daisy grabbed her purse and headed to the door, avoiding Tom’s gaze, while the thought in the back of her mind was that Tara just might be right.

Chapter Nine

“Hey, Elmer baby, how’s about some lunch?”

The big ears cocked and the tail thumped the floor slowly. Daisy didn’t blame him for his less than enthusiastic response. Pickings were slim in her fridge. She couldn’t face a grocery store full of stares and whispers right now. Which pissed her off to no end. She’d never minded being an outcast before. Butt firmly parked on the left side of the political fence, she’d been more comfortable on the outs than any other place in her life. Why now? Why this sudden need to hide from the world and lick her wounds?

“Maybe I’m just getting a bit too old to fight city hall anymore, Elmer.” Pulling the door to the refrigerator open, she eyeballed the dismal array of contents. Old milk, sweet iced tea, mustard, a beer, and a package of string cheese. “Hope cheese is enough of a meal. I’ll go out later today and deal with my issues.”

Breaking off a piece of the cheese, she lobbed it in the air, where it was snatched mid-descent and swallowed without chewing. “Whoa there, boy. Take it slow. This is it for now.”

Elmer sat on his butt and trembled with excitement, the closest thing the dog did to begging. She took a bite and held the rest out to him. She’d not been hungry lately and didn’t expect that to change anytime soon. Standing, she headed towards the bathroom scale. “At

least stress is good for weight loss, right, boy?” A knock on the door stopped her mid-stride. She did a one-eighty and headed to the front of the house. Cracking the door warily, she peeked out.

A large brown box sat on the stoop. Opening the door the rest of the way, she looked one way, then the other, before picking the unwieldy box up and setting it down in the middle of the living room floor.

Elmer sniffed at it once and lay down on his pillow with a sigh.

Daisy ran her fingers over the mailing label. The ladies’ orders and the stock she needed to replace what Tom confiscated. She waited for the thrill she got whenever she received an order from the company. It didn’t come. Instead, deep brown eyes and a wicked smile danced in her mind.

Why did what Tom Williams think suddenly matter so much to her? Uncomfortable with where her thoughts wandered, she grabbed her keys off the coffee table and ran one down the middle of the packing tape to open the box.

Packing peanuts flew in the air, sticking to her hair and T-shirt. Grabbing the invoice off the top, she scanned the list for backorders. None. There was no reason she could not start delivering the purchases right away.

“Maybe it would be better if I called everyone this time and had them stop by here, instead of taking them out? What do you think, Elmer?”

The dog cocked his eyes first one way, then the other, closing them with what sounded like a resigned sigh.

“You’re right. You know that. I am acting like a baby. I’m not ashamed of what I do. So what if Tom Williams doesn’t like it. I never took his opinion into consideration before.”

She stood. “Dammit, I’m going to bag this stuff up and deliver it today. I’m not a chicken. Screw the sheriff. It’s a stupid law. I refuse to tow some invisible line of right and wrong. Fuck ’em if they can’t take a joke.”

She stuffed the box under her desk and laid the invoice on the table next to her laptop. No way was she going to let fear stop her. Heading into the bedroom, she pulled off her sweatpants and pulled on a pair of jeans. Giving her hair a brush, she dabbed a little mascara on her eyes and headed back to the living room to begin bagging. Another knock at the door stopped her.

Heading to the door, she twisted the handle and began to open it. "Oh, what now? I have things to --"

"Hi, Daisy."

She gulped. Fit to his body, the uniform highlighted broad shoulders and taut abs. The gun belt only seemed to make him look sexier than normal. A breeze blew in, carrying the barest scent of masculine cologne with it. She fought the urge to lean against the doorjamb and breathe in deeply.

"Hi."

That was good. Subtle. She bit her lip. What was it about this man that seemed to pull the ability to converse from her?

He took his hat off and played with the brim. "I hadn't seen you around town lately, and I was wondering how you were and if I could get you anything."

"Isn't that going a little beyond the call of duty, sheriff?"

"Actually, I'm just off shift right now, so no duty to go beyond the call of. I consider this a friendly visit. Can I come in? I was hoping we could talk."

She pulled the door open wide and stepped to one side. "Sure, I guess."

He strode in, bringing the cologne he wore with him. Subtle, sensual, and sexy, her mind ran amok thinking about the places he sprayed it. The scent made her mind run amok in a fantasy about smelling his bare skin, all over.

“Can I get you some sweet tea?” Sweet tea -- the hospitality drink of the south. She’d said the right thing. Maybe she could talk to this man without acting like a moron, or humping his leg, after all.

“Sure, I’d like that.”

Gesturing to the couch, she watched him sit, then headed to the kitchen and poured two glasses of the tea. What was he doing here? She took a long sip of her tea, running the possibilities around in her brain. Had the judge sent him? She doubted Tom really noticed whether or not she’d been in town. He just said that to be nice. Well, there was only one way to find out. She turned and headed back into the living room to deal with the big man.

The couch looked dwarfed by the broad shoulders. *He sure takes up his share of room.* Bending, he stroked Elmer’s ear and spoke to him in a soft voice.

The urge to be in Elmer’s place shocked her. Daisy didn’t understand what she felt, and now was not the time for a close examination. Clearing her throat, she set the glass down in front of Tom and parked herself on the opposite end of the couch. He still felt too close.

“So, checking up on the town’s more radical element is a part of your job?”

He looked confused for a moment, then blew out a breath. “I guess.”

“I thought you said you were off shift?”

He shrugged.

“Oh.” She took another sip of her tea. “So...”

“So what brings me here?”

A nervous laugh escaped her lips. “Yeah, what brings you here?”

“I told you.” His hand touched her knee. “I was worried about you.”

An eyebrow rose. “Really?”

His laughter sounded a little forced, but Daisy grabbed onto it like a life raft in a sea of sharks. Anything to bring a bit of normalcy to the vision of Tom Williams’s adorable butt

parked on her living room sofa. The whole thing seemed like a fantasy come true. “Yes, really. I normally see you wandering around, causing a ruckus of one kind, or another. I’m used to it. When you’re gone...” He shrugged again. “You leave a big hole, for such a tiny person.”

The snort popped out unbidden. “Missed? Me? Come on, Tom. You must have loved the peace and quiet. The day I moved back had to be a nightmare for you.”

He shrugged, bringing her attention back to his shoulders. God, they were wide. “There’s not much excitement here. You bring some action to what could be a very boring job, and yes, I missed you when you were gone. Sometimes I wish...”

The hand that touched her knee began to stroke it. Mind distracted, she looked down and stared at the long fingers slowly tracing back and forth over her jean-clad leg. His touch felt incredibly delicious. Startled, she looked up, and their gazes mingled.

She wanted him to kiss her again, touch her, more. Licking her lips, she leaned in a little. A hand came up and stroked her hair, then moved to the back of her neck. Their lips met.

His skin smelled even better close up. She tilted her head and the kiss deepened, his tongue caressing the inside of her mouth. She placed her tongue in his mouth and was rewarded with a gentle sucking pressure that zinged itself all the way to her pussy.

Right or wrong, kissing this man felt wonderful. He put his arms around her and pulled her body onto his lap. Straddling him, her thigh brushed his gun holster, and she shivered. Tom Williams’s appeal was not his job, but something about being in the sheriff’s arms excited her. His handcuffs clanged softly together as she moved her knee, and the sound tightened her pussy so hard she fought off a moan.

His hands stroked down her back to her ass, where he squeezed and pulled her tight against him. His rock-hard erection pressed against her pussy lips. Blatantly, she moved her

hips to rub against him. Pulling back, he ran a tongue lightly along the side of her face to her ear where he took in panting breaths and bit gently at the tender lobe.

Her hands ran through his hair, and she pulled his mouth back to hers, licking and tasting his lips.

He pulled back. "Daisy, we have to stop." His breath came out in a hoarse moan.

She pulled back, trying to disguise the hurt in her eyes and climbed off his lap. "You're right. I'm sorry. I..."

He played with her hair. "Shh, I'm the one who's sorry. I took advantage of you. I'm wearing my uniform. I don't want to intimidate you. That's the last thing I want to do."

She stilled and looked at him suspiciously. "You think I kissed you because you have your uniform on?"

He smiled. It looked rueful and a bit sad. "Well, I'd like to think that's not the only reason, but it's not exactly good ethics to go to a woman's house in your uniform and try to make love to her."

Head cocked, she looked at him. "You came over here to make love to me?"

"That's not what I told myself, but I can't seem to get you out of my mind, and when you didn't come to town... I thought I was just checking on you, until you sat next to me. The truth hit me right about then. I'm sorry."

She shook her head. "Don't be."

The look on his face had the appeal of a hopeful kid who was looking at an ice cream sundae. She laughed.

"Are you toying with me?"

"I never toy with the law, sheriff." Reaching up, she placed her hand on his chest and unbuttoned the top button. The sucked-in breath entranced her, and she ran her fingers over the open V of skin she'd exposed.

Straddling his lap once more, she undid another button and played her fingers over his chest. A patch of fur met her. *Yum*. She never had liked men without any chest hair. She wondered how far down the patch went, undid three more buttons, and pulled the shirttails from his pants.

Leaning back, she looked down. The hair ran in a V over his chest and down to a thin line that disappeared beneath his belt. Her hands roamed his chest and stomach. Her gaze sought his. Half lidded, his eyes watched her face with an intensity that turned her insides to mush. Moving her knee, she clanged into his handcuffs once more. Her mind flew to thoughts of being cuffed while he fucked her, and she wiggled her blue jean-clad pussy against his hard cock.

His hands roamed her body and tangled in her hair. He pulled her face to meet his lips, his tongue fucking her mouth erotically, making her moan against him. Hands moving over her ass, he pulled her tight against his cock and grabbed her thighs. Standing, he pulled her body to his.

Daisy yelped and wrapped her arms around his neck, her lips never leaving his. God, he tasted so good. She pulled back and buried her head in his shoulder as he walked into the bedroom with her in his arms.

Dropping her onto the bed, he lay down beside her, head on his hand, fingers of his other hand trailing over her body.

“Are you sure, Daisy?”

“Oh, yeah.” She slapped a hand over her mouth to suppress a laugh.

“What, may I ask, is so funny, young lady?”

“I’m supposed to be demure and make you talk me into this. At least that’s what my college roommate always said.”

He placed his fingers on her chin, the look in his eyes serious and so sexy she shivered. “She was wrong. I love your direct approach. It’s one of the wonderful things about you.”

He dropped a kiss on her mouth and stood. Unbuckling his gun belt, he pulled it off and laid it on the table next to the bed.

She eyed it with her lower lip between her teeth.

He bent down and stroked across her bottom lip with his thumb, placing it against her mouth. She licked the digit and sucked it into her mouth. Fingers roamed over his stomach and down to the bulge in his pants. His cock felt huge beneath the cotton fabric. He pulled back.

“Strip for me.”

“Why, officer, I’d be delighted.”

The low chuckle tightened her pussy again. Pulling back, she grabbed the bottom of her T-shirt and pulled it over her head. His hands moved over the lace of her bra, his mouth following to suck one cloth-covered nipple between his teeth.

A cry broke from her lips as he nipped at tender flesh. He pulled back.

“Am I hurting you?”

She knew her eyes were glazed with lust. Placing both hands on his face, she pulled his gaze to hers and shook her head, then moved her fingers down her body to her breast. Never taking her eyes from his, she pulled the lace back to reveal her swollen nipple and pinched the flesh between her fingers.

“Oh, God. That’s hot.”

Pulling the other breast out, she pinched both nipples until she cried out and tossed her head back in pleasure.

He reached between his legs and rubbed over the thick bulge in his pants.

With a smile, her hands wandered lower, pulling at the button on her jeans. Pulling the zipper down, she parted the fabric and put a hand between her legs. God, she was wet and ready for him. She rubbed over her clit and pulled her hand up to lick at her juices. Midway to her mouth, his hand stopped hers. Leaning forward, he licked her fingers.

The sexual charge was almost overwhelming.

Grabbing her hips, he pulled her off balance and laid her back on the bed. Reaching to her ankles, he impatiently yanked the jeans from her legs, then the panties.

She twisted around to undo her bra, and a hand covered hers. "Leave it."

The command in his voice stopped her. Eyes wide, she turned back to look up at him. Kneeling over her, his size overwhelmed her. She felt small and almost helpless next to this man. A feeling that should have her running for the hills, but the thought of his body over hers, holding her down while he fucked her wet pussy was so hot. *Analyze later, fuck now.* She wanted this, her fantasy come true.

She reached up to touch his cloth-covered cock again and once more, he grabbed her wrist gently, but firmly. Pulling it over her head, he leaned down and bit her nipple once more. Moaning, her back arched off the bed. A hand captured her other arm, and his mouth licked and bit her other nipple. Once more, she groaned at the erotic feeling of his mouth biting her helpless body.

Her head twisted with the pleasure of his mouth, and her eyes came to rest on the dull gleam of the handcuffs attached to his gun belt. Hands shifted, and both wrists were caught in one hand. The other stroked her face, turning it so their gazes met.

"Do you like being held down and fucked, sweet Daisy?"

She fought the shy urge that told her to look away and nod. Instead, she met his gaze dead on. "I've never been tied down before, but I fantasize about it a lot."

"Do you want me to bind you and take you?"

The shiver that coursed down her body stunned her. Her pleasure sensors felt overwhelmed at the very thought of it. Eyes wide, she could only nod.

Tom reached up and twisted the handcuffs off the belt with a practiced clack of metal on metal. He pulled her body taut and clicked the metal over her wrists with a confident air that had Daisy longing to touch her clit. Not being able to felt incredibly sexy.

Releasing her wrists, he stood and took off his shoes, socks and trousers. His underwear followed. The large cock finally sprang free for her to look at. Thick around, it bobbed in the air in front of her. He stroked its length twice, and Daisy licked her lips.

He knelt at her side and ran it around her mouth. "Open your lips, sweetheart. Lick me."

She shot her tongue out and licked over the head of his cock, paying close attention to the underside. His moan opened her mouth, and she sucked the tip of it into her mouth.

A hand came down and twisted her nipple. She opened her mouth to gasp, and the thick cock buried itself in her mouth deeper.

"Look at me, Daisy."

Her gaze flew to his. "I'm going to fuck your mouth. If it's too much, just shake your head, and I'll stop. Do you understand?"

She nodded, and a hand tangled in her hair, stilling movement, but not so tight she could not shake her head. He pumped his cock into her mouth, almost to the hilt.

Opening her throat, she sucked hard on the soft skin. His free hand wandered down her body to her pussy where he stroked her patch of hair and played over the lips that covered her clit. Spreading her legs, she twisted to make his fingers come in contact with her hard button. His hand withdrew. Bucking her hips to meet it, she dropped the cock from her mouth with a moan.

"Touch me."

He laughed. The sound, low and a little menacing shook her to her core. "I can fuck you now, or I can tease you 'til you're begging me for it. What do you want, Daisy? For me to fuck you 'til you come, or show you what happens to bad girls who don't listen to me and who stop sucking my cock? I'll play it anyway you want it, but I have the feeling you'd like the latter a whole lot more. It's up to you."

She gaped at him. What did she want? His eyes were so serious. Another shudder moved through her body.

“Which is it?” He leaned down, until his mouth was against her ear. “I can take you now, take you over and over. Play it straight and safe, or I can punish you for dropping my cock in a way that has you screaming for release. It’s all up to you. Tell me what you want.”

Eyes wide, she stared at him. “Is that a no, Daisy, or are you too shy to tell me?”

Gulping in air, her pussy felt wetter than it ever had before. What did she want? Screw that. She damn well knew what she wanted, but would she have the guts to say it?

A hand caressed her hair. “Tell me, I want to hear it from your lips. ‘Fuck me or punish me.’ Which one?”

The depth of feeling in his voice, hoarse and needy, gave her courage. “Punish me.” It came out almost whisper soft. He didn’t say anything for a moment. Daisy was afraid he’d not heard her, and she swallowed nervously. Then, she found herself lifted in the air and flipped onto her stomach.

“If you want me to stop, Daisy, just say handcuffs. I’ll stop immediately. Do you understand? If you do, repeat what I said.”

She nodded. “I’ll say handcuffs if I want you to stop.”

“Good girl.” He drew her knees beneath her so that her ass was in the air, head down on the bed, turned to one side, arms above her. Her arms ached, slightly, but it felt good, too. He grabbed her thighs and pulled them apart slightly, exposing her pussy and asshole to his gaze.

A hand roamed over her ass, and she trembled in fear and excitement.

“You’re a bad girl, Daisy. I’m going to spank you, but not until you ask me to. Tell me you’re bad and need a spanking. Tell me to punish your naughty little body.”

The hand moved hypnotically over her ass. She licked her lips and tried to form the words, but they stuck in her throat.

The hand dipped lower, and a finger ran over her wet clit. She shivered and pressed her clit towards the hand. It felt so good. The finger flicked against her a few times. "Say it, baby. Beg me for it. Tell me how bad you are. Tell me you want a spanking."

The hand moved back now, over her ass again. She closed her eyes and imagined that hand coming down on her ass. God, she did want it. Badly. Wanted to be punished by this man, anything he wanted.

"Spank me." It came out as a plea, her voice filled with need.

The erotic, deep chuckle was drowned out by the crack of his hand against her bare skin. Pain, followed by the most amazing feeling of warmth and wetness over her pussy and clit overwhelmed her. Again his hand came down on her, and again the combination of pain and erotic heat threatened to overwhelm her. Sensors on overload, she gasped his name.

His free hand flicked over her clit again as his hand, once more, smacked her ass.

"I'm going to finger you while I spank your naughty ass, Daisy. I want you to come while I'm punishing you. Do you understand?"

"Yes." It came out choked, but so heated she couldn't have held it back if she wanted to.

His finger moved over her clit, rubbing back and forth, then his hand came down on her skin over and over. Never in the same place twice, always hard and without mercy, but so damn sexy. The combination of her clit being stroked and the slaps against her tender ass overwhelmed her. He touched her clit with his thumb and forefinger, and the feeling overwhelmed her. Screaming his name, she came.

Lifting her in the air, he turned her over while she shook through her orgasm, the most powerful of her life. Eyes closed, she heard a crinkle and glanced up. He rolled a condom down the length of his cock.

Kneeling between her thighs, his hands grabbed her ankles, spreading her legs wide. Helpless, she watched him position his cock at the entrance to her vagina. The feeling of him

plunging his length into her was both shocking and so good. The full length of him inside her felt indescribably wonderful.

He pulled out and plunged into her again. Then once more. Speed built as did the pressure as he slammed his cock into her without mercy. Wild and hard, he fucked her, the feeling of pressure building on her clit as the thick cock stroked in and out of her.

She wanted to play with herself, touch her clit, but her bound hands made it impossible. Tied up, a toy for his pleasure, and hers. The feeling of orgasm rolled over her once more, and she shuddered in release as he moaned above her. The thick cock twitched against the walls of her pussy and she clenched her muscles tight against him as he came.

Exhausted, she could barely move. Half aware, she felt him unlock the cuffs and pull them off. Hands rubbed her wrists, bringing feeling back to fingers she did not even know were asleep. She felt the bed rise as he got up and headed over to the wastebasket in the corner.

Sated, she vaguely wondered what was next. The bed sank under his weight, and arms wrapped around her as he pulled her tight to him.

A soft kiss against her ear brought a smile to her face, and she closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Ten

A big empty place inside Tom rumbled. *Hungry. What time is it?* Opening his eyes, he swallowed to get the taste of sleep from his mouth and blinked at the glowing numbers on the clock. 8:30. At night? Ugh, he'd slept for hours. A movement next to him caught his attention. Daisy. Snuggled close, her skin felt like satin against his skin. His stomach rumbled again, and she sighed and rolled to face him.

If he was hungry, she must be starving. She never seemed to eat much. He lifted his legs and dropped them gently over the bed, trying not to wake her. Sitting up, he began to root around on the floor for his clothes with his toes. Socks, boxers, shirt, he slid them over and picked the articles up. Where the hell were his pants? He looked around. Nothing. Oh, well, it wasn't like anyone but Daisy and Elmer would see him. He didn't mind Daisy looking. Elmer was a dog and didn't count in that department. Hardly interested in the naked human form. He tiptoed out of the bedroom and headed for the kitchen. Elmer stood up, stretched, and came over to stick his nose into Tom's hand.

"Good dog. Let's see what there is to eat here." He opened the fridge door and stared in horrified fascination. How did she survive? With a roll of his eyes, he closed the door and turned to the dog. "Is it always this bad?" The tail thumped slowly in answer.

“Okay, what about the cupboard?”

Two expired cans of soup later, he hunted down the phone and called Cora to place a takeout order. Didn’t Daisy ever eat? Sure, she was tiny, but this was ridiculous. Heading back to the bedroom, to resume the search for his pants, his attention was caught by a large box half stuffed under Daisy’s desk. Peanut packing shells and bits of packing tape littered the floor around it. He stepped towards it, curious.

“This is so none of your business, Williams. Grow up.” Nice words, but the cop in him couldn’t resist a mystery, and Daisy Partridge was darn near inscrutable. He stopped near the desk and hunkered down, undecided, when the word “Tickler” on what looked like an invoice captured his attention. With a look back over his shoulder to the bedroom door, he reached out his hand. Should he? The paper lay out in plain sight. That meant he didn’t need a search warrant.

This isn’t a criminal; this is the woman you made love to this afternoon. This is Daisy. He smiled. The whole thing had been a fantasy come true. Better. In his wildest dreams he never thought her tastes in sex would so nearly mirror his own.

Tentatively, he reached out and picked the invoice up. He shook his head. Daisy had a right to privacy. He was way out of line here. He trusted her, and this snooping was beneath him. Disgusted with himself, he set the invoice back on the desk.

“Looking for something?”

Tom jumped and spun around, knocking his knee into the leg of the table. Daisy stood in the bedroom doorway, hair a riot of wild blonde curls, robe wrapped tight around her lush body. Stunning, then he noticed the folded arms and explosive look on her face.

“Actually, I --”

She held up a slim hand. “Spare me, Tom. I get it. You’re snooping in my private business.”

He rubbed his knee where he'd banged it. "I wasn't. I know it looks bad, but I was putting it down when you walked in."

"And I'm supposed to believe that?"

He turned around and dropped the invoice back on the desk. "Yes, you are. I don't lie."

"You were holding *my* invoice." He heard her feet stomp on the floor as she marched towards him, hellfire in her eyes. For a little thing, she sure made a lot of noise when she was mad. Reaching around him, she grabbed the invoice and stuffed it in a drawer. "I'll thank you to get the heck out of my house right now, sheriff."

He turned to her and placed his hands on her shoulders; she flinched, and he dropped his arms to his side. "I wasn't looking. Okay, I almost looked, but I didn't. What the hell are you doing with this stuff anyway?" He pointed to the box.

"If you must know, it's my order from last Friday's party."

He felt his eyes bug. "You can't be serious."

"I'm dead serious. This is my business, Tom, and I owe those women their purchases." She toed the box further under the table and pushed past him to the couch. Instead of sitting, she paced to the far end, stopped, folded her arms again and stared him down.

"You're already in trouble, Daisy. You should be worried about keeping your nose clean 'til after your trial."

"Would you stop policing my morals, please."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. I *am* the police."

She took a step forward, index finger extended in a point. "Not in my house, you're not. Here you're Tom Williams, asshole. The judge told me not to sell anymore. He didn't say anything about not filling existing orders."

Tom tossed his hands in the air. "You're arguing semantics. You cannot deliver those...those *things*."

“Dildo. Say it. Anyone who did to me what you did in that bedroom should have no problem saying the word dildo. Dildo, dildo, dildo.”

“Oh, for shit’s sake... What happened in the bedroom is, well, it’s private. I’m not going to discuss it out here.”

“Private I’ll buy, but not sacred. You’re a prude, Tom Williams. A bonafide scaredy-cat prude. You can spank me ’til my ass is raw and give me the fucking of my life, but once it’s over, you’re what? Ashamed? What we did was nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I never said I was ashamed. It’s just that...”

“What? You’re embarrassed? There’s nothing wrong with owning a few toys to enhance sexual pleasure. You cannot police people’s bedrooms.”

“I’m not trying to. I just uphold the law.”

“It’s a bad law.”

What the hell was he going to do with her? He rubbed his face with both hands, trying to think of a way out of this argument. He didn’t want to fight with her. *No, you want to put her back in bed and spank her again.* Crap, he should never have gotten involved here. He felt all mixed up. “Look, I don’t care whether the law is bad or good. I just do my job.” He strode to the bedroom door. “I think you’re right about one thing. I need to get some space.”

Entering the bedroom, he grabbed his gun belt off the nightstand, handcuffs from the floor, and bent down to find his pants. There they were, rumpled up under the bed. He grabbed them.

Stomping sounds moved from the direction of the living room, getting closer with every bang. Two slender bare legs stopped in front of his face. He looked up. Daisy’s amazing body stood over him. Every muscle looked taut and incredibly touchable. *Maybe I’m making a mistake I should stay and try to work this out.*

“Just go, now. I can’t do this anymore.”

Her eyes looked liquid soft, like she was about to cry. He swallowed and started to rise.
“Look, I --”

“Please.”

It came out as a whisper. He sighed in defeat. “I’m going. Just let me get my pants on.”

“No, Tom, right this minute. I want your traitorous ass out of my house.” The words exploded out of her at so many decibels he wondered which was louder -- Daisy or the siren on his cruiser?

“You’re not being reasonable, and I won’t talk to an unreasonable woman.” He rose to his feet, gun belt and handcuffs in one hand, pants in the other, and looked at her. If he thought she looked mad before, he was mistaken. That was just a prelude to the anger that shot from her eyes now. Maybe he shouldn’t have made that crack about women? *Ya think?*

“God Dammit. I don’t want to be reasonable. I want to be unreasonable and mad as hell right now. Most of all I. Want. You. Out.” The last word came out almost like a sob. He didn’t want to make her cry or make her anything but pliant and soft and turned on by his touch. What a mess.

Heading into the living room, he stepped into his shoes and took another look back at her. Terry robe too big for her frame, body shaking with anger, she looked small and lost. He wanted to say the right thing, pull her into his arms, and make it all better, but he couldn’t condone her refusal to follow the law, either. Torn was a good description for the twisting of his innards.

“Daisy, I --”

“No, just go. Okay? This was a huge mistake.”

He hung his head. Mistake? “What we did was a lot of things, sexy, delicious, wonderful, but a mistake? No. Call me when you’ve thought this through and come to your senses.”

“Goodbye, Tom.”

Twisting the door handle, he looked back at her, one last time. “Goodbye, Daisy, I ...” Forget it, there was nothing left to say. He plunked his hat on his head and stepped out onto the porch and into something sharp.

“Ouch, what the hell --”

“Gee, Tom, nice to run into you.” Tara looked him up and down. “All of you.” She snorted.

Oh ,shit. He’d been so mad he’d forgotten to put on his pants.

Pulling himself up to his full height he carefully set his gun belt on the bench next to the door, shucked his shoes, and pulled his pants on. He took his time. There was no way he was going to lose his dignity now. *Any* more *of your dignity*. He secured the button at the top, stepped back into his shoes, grabbed his gun belt, and nodded to the reporter. “Tara, nice night.”

Head held high, he made his way to his patrol car. The sound of Tara’s laughter followed.

Chapter Eleven

“Can you knock? I’m overloaded?”

Tara rolled her eyes, shifted the usual assortment of bags to her other arm and pounded her fist on Eva Williams’s ornate wooden door. Mid-knock, it opened, leaving her wrist bent forward at an awkward angle.

Daisy smiled. Tara’d been following her around all day, annoying the heck out of her. Anything she could do to pester her best friend back seemed like a good deal. Ostensibly, Tara was after an interview for the paper, but it felt more like an interrogation about Tom. A subject Daisy placed one-hundred percent off limits. Too bad Tara couldn’t respect that. She’d tell her to buzz off, but facing Tom’s mom might be easier with reinforcements. There was something about Eva Williams that made you want to confide in her, and Daisy’s feelings for Tom seemed too raw and new to lay out on his mother’s kitchen table, along with assorted lubes.

“Daisy, bless your heart. You didn’t have to drop this stuff off today. I’d have been happy to pick it up at your place.”

“It wasn’t a problem, Eva. I’m happy to do it. Where do you want the stuff?”

The elegant older woman winked. “You mean the contraband?” She nodded her head in the direction of the living room. Daisy walked into her home and set the box of paraphernalia down on the table with a sigh of relief.

Eva had been kind enough to offer to deliver the goods to her party guests, and after a lot of thought, Daisy accepted the offer. Turned out, it was a good decision. Driving over to Eva’s had been a nerve-wracking experience. She’d spent the whole ride looking in the rearview mirror. To deliver the contraband all over town would have been asking for it, and she didn’t want anything from Tom, especially not another arrest.

Voices and laughter followed behind her, as the ladies made their way to the living room.

“I hope you’re both hungry, I made chicken salad and sweet tea, oh, and this terrific chocolate cake I’ve been dying to try for dessert. I was hoping you’d both stay.”

Tara patted her flat-as-a-board stomach. “Food? I’m in.”

Daisy rolled her eyes. “I have no idea how she stays so skinny eating the way she does.”

“I’m genetically gifted.” Tara reached inside the box and pulled out an elaborately decorated box that held the largest dildo *A Liberated Woman* sold. “So, who ordered this?”

Daisy grabbed it out of her hand and placed it firmly back in the larger box. “None of your business, nosy.”

Tara put a wounded look on her face. “I’m a reporter. I’m supposed to be nosy.”

“Well, not about my clients.” Daisy turned to Eva, who smiled at them indulgently. “Watch what you say to her. It’ll end up on the cover of the *Eagle*.”

“Oh, stop. I’ve never put the really interesting stuff in the paper, especially the comings and goings of the folks in the county. Some of those tidbits are super juicy, but the populace would all call me a liar if I reported it.” One eye winked at Daisy.

“Um, about that chicken salad? Do you have whole wheat?” Daisy stuck her arm through Eva’s and walked her toward the kitchen with a dirty look in Tara’s direction. *She’d*

better not. Not if she knows what's good for her. Tara stuck her tongue out, then plastered on an angelic smile that set Daisy's teeth on edge.

Eva sat them at the kitchen table while she put the finishing touches on lunch. Daisy'd not eaten much in the past few days. Stress always killed her appetite, but the conversation flowed, and the food was delicious. She found herself downing two sandwiches and a large slice of cake.

Finished, Daisy stood, dish in hand. "Let me clear. It's the least I can do."

"Okay. Go for it. Don't let it be said I'm someone who won't accept help. The dishwasher's next to the sink."

"Tara, you coming?" Daisy shot a pointed look at her friend.

There was that smile again. "Nope, I think I'll sit here and have a girl-to-girl chat with Miss Eva."

A sinking feeling in the pit of Daisy's stomach made her want to sit down and ignore the dishes, but she'd already spoken up. It was too late. Damn, she was stuck. Grabbing dishes off the table and piling them on one another, she made a quick trip to the sink. If she listened carefully, maybe she could head Tara off at the pass. Flipping the lever on the faucet started a flow of water that drowned out the conversation at the table. *Damn.* She couldn't hear a thing. Grabbing a dish brush, she scrubbed the plates furiously, before stuffing them in the dishwasher as fast as she could without breaking them.

Finished, she headed back to the table and plastered on a big smile. "All done. Is there anything else I can do?"

"No, dear, thank you. So what's new? Is my son bothering you?"

Tara began to cough wildly. Daisy pounded her on the back, hoping she'd knock some sense into her friend.

"Tara, honey, are you all right?"

The genuine concern in Eva's voice only seemed to make Tara gasp more, a smile hovering around her lips. "I'm --" Cough. "-- fine." Hack. Laughter bubbled out of her friend. Daisy scowled, unamused.

"Oh, dear. I get the feeling I've missed something. What's my boneheaded son done now?"

"Not what, whom."

Please, God, let the house fall into a sinkhole. Well, not the house, but the tiles I'm standing on. Just those would be fine.

Eva looked from Tara to Daisy and back. Daisy felt her face heat with shame and embarrassment.

"So, I take it my son finally decided to act on his feelings? Good for him. You, too, Daisy."

Placing a hand over her face, all the better to hide behind, she pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Are you okay, dear?"

She looked up. "No, actually, I'm not okay. I'm going to die of embarrassment right here. I'll try not to leak any bodily fluids on your floor as I rot."

"Sit." The tone brooked no argument.

Daisy dropped to the nearest chair.

Eva placed a gentle hand on Daisy's arm. "Daisy, you make your living selling sex toys, and you're embarrassed because you had sex?"

"Because I had sex? No. Because I'm talking about it with his mother? That could be a small factor in my embarrassment."

"Good Lord, honey. You stood in my living room and explained how to use a vibrator to the minister's wife using a blow-up doll as a prop."

"I didn't sleep with her son."

"Well, of course not, dear. He's gay."

"Can I quote you on that?" Tara dug in her purse, coming up with a notebook and pen.

"Oh, put that away. This isn't an interview. You want the dirt on Norbert, I suggest you ask him. He's quite open about it." Eva turned back to Daisy. "Look at me, honey. That's better. I'm thrilled you're with my son. I've been terrified that revolving door of a woman Cora Withers was going to get her hooks into him. I can't think of anyone I'd rather have in the family than you, Daisy."

It started as a sniff in her nose, then turned into a choked hiccup. Finally, she could hold back no longer, and a tear leaked down her face.

"Oh, no. Tara, honey, go get me the tissue box. It's on the piano bench."

Daisy didn't see Tara go and come back, her eyes too filled with big waves of tears that wobbled around and threatened to leak all over her face. She grabbed the tissue Tara stuffed into her hand and dabbed at her eyes. "I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to disappoint you, Eva. Tom and I don't have a future together. We're too different. I don't know why I'm crying. I feel silly. It's not as if I'm surprised. I don't know what I was thinking, when..."

"That's okay, I do. I was young once, and Tom's father was so handsome. Now why do you say you don't have a future together? You're perfect for one another." Eva reached out, grabbed the pitcher of sweet tea, and re-filled their glasses.

"They had a fight."

Daisy held up her hand. "Tara, do you mind? This isn't about you."

The loud snort Tara let out was full of disbelief. "Well, it wouldn't have been, if Tom was wearing pants the last time I saw him. Your son has nice legs, by the way." A self-satisfied smirk crossed Tara's features, and she took a long sip of her tea.

"Tara."

"What? He does. Don't you think so, Eva?"

The older woman nodded with a fond smile. "I always thought so. So, Daisy, tell me what happened between the two of you."

Groaning, Daisy tossed her hands in the air. "Oh, all right. We had a fight. He didn't want me to make my deliveries, and I saw it as an obligation...and maybe I saw a way to let him know I wasn't scared of him, too." Toying with the rivulets of condensation on her glass of tea, she stroked patterns into the chaos. "He's so odd, Eva. I don't mean that in a bad way, but one minute he's conservative and the next... I don't get him."

Eva stood. She walked to the sideboard and picked up a picture frame. Handing it to Daisy, she sat again. "The picture on the left is Tom and his father, about a month before Big Tom died. The one on the right was taken the day my son became the sheriff. You can see the difference in that boy."

Daisy looked at the photos, first one, then the other. At first glance, she didn't understand what Eva was trying to tell her, but when she looked into Tom's eyes... It was almost like the light had been switched off within him. Her mind wandered back to his father's funeral and the cold reserve that seemed to clamp Tom's heart. She hadn't been surprised when she moved to Tampa in the fall, and Tom stayed home.

Eva's breath shook as she pulled it in. "He just shut down after his dad died. Went from being my happy young man that everyone adored, a leader, to a man whose whole life was pulled out from under him. Poor guy."

Running her finger over the images, Daisy tried to imagine what Tom had gone through. On the left, the man in his sheriff's uniform, an arm draped casually over his son's shoulder, and a smiling Tom. The boy she remembered from high school, the one kissing her neck the day his dad was killed. On the right...a different person all together. Dour, serious, focused. She glanced at Tara, who sat in uncharacteristic silence, hands folded in front of her.

Daisy had tried to get through to Tom that summer. Tried her hardest, but he turned into a stick-in-the-mud jerk, and nothing she said or did seemed to make a difference.

“Tom was so alive, and then the joy just drained out of him. All he could talk about was becoming the sheriff and carrying on his father’s legacy. Big Tom was a bit more conservative than I am, bless him. It was one of the things that gave our marriage a nice spark. Tom ran a good campaign. He used a huge chunk of his inheritance to pay for it. Plus, most of what he’d earned working part time while he was at school. He probably didn’t need to. He won in a landslide. Overnight, he went from being a party guy to a conservative man that I hardly knew. He wanted to be like his father, but my husband wasn’t at all like the man Tom remembers.” She looked off out through the large picture window, and a smile stole over her features. Part sadness, part secrecy and mischief.

Daisy thought back to Tom, *her* Tom, and her stomach clenched. Pushing off the confusing mass of thoughts that rose to the surface of her brain, her gaze followed Eva’s. The live oak in the back yard commanded the space. Old, venerable, and thick. Like Big Tom used to be. Daisy’s heart broke for the older woman. To be so obviously in love and then to lose her husband like that.

Not unlike the death of Tree.

Funny, filled with nature and a love for the land, Tree’s death had been a crushing blow to Daisy. She still hurt with the loss, even though the cancer had given them time to say goodbye. How much harder was it on Tom? Someone who had idolized his father? A death out of the blue.

Eva placed her hand over Daisy’s and looked into her eyes. “I thought I’d seen the last of the son I raised, ‘til you moved back to town. Sure, he’s got his back up. He’s awfully hung up on morals and following the letter of the law. I have no idea where that came from. Probably that twisted view of his father, but he’s also alive again. He gets a spark in his eye when he talks about you. It gives me hope. I think you’re good for him, Daisy.” She glanced down at her watch and squinted. “Oh, for crying out loud, would you look at the time? I promised Sally Handman that I’d have that Space Glide delivered by four. She wants to attack her husband when he comes home from work.”

Daisy stood and glanced at Tara with a nod. The other woman reached under her seat, collecting the mass of stuff into semi-manageable piles.

"Thank you for the lunch, Eva, and thank you for..." Daisy waved in the direction of the large box on the table.

"Delivering the goods? Don't think another thing about it. When some of those ladies see me on the porch with their new toys." She laughed. "That's all the thanks I need."

"Thanks, Eva." Tara stuck her hand out to shake the older woman's, and a bag dropped to the floor. Daisy laughed and scooped it up. She felt lighter somehow than she had when she came into Eva's house, despite the piles of food she'd stuffed down. She didn't want to think why the conversation about Tom seemed to be so important. Plenty of time to analyze later.

They followed Eve out and plunked Tara's crap into the tiny back seat of Daisy's truck.

Tara stuck her purse on top, like a cherry on an ice cream sundae. She held out both hands in case it fell. When it appeared stable, she turned to Daisy. "So, a lot of food for thought, huh? Did you learn anything new about the man you're in love with?"

Daisy rolled her eyes and climbed into the driver's seat. "Love? You're kidding, right? I barely know who he is anymore."

"Liar. You slept with him. I've known you a long time, Daisy Mae Partridge. You don't sleep around. You may talk about sex a lot, but I bet you get less than almost anyone in this county does. 'Til today, that is."

"It's a new millennium. A woman can have casual sex if she wants to. There's nothing wrong with that. It's not the dark ages anymore when you were supposed to be a virgin 'til you married your husband and had two point --"

"Oh, spare me. Yes, you believe that woman can have sex and not be in love, in theory, but I'd bet a steak dinner that you can't do it."

"Can't do what?"

“Have casual sex without feelings becoming involved. Have you ever slept with someone you weren’t dating for less than six months?”

“Yes.” Daisy looked out at the road with so much concentration she felt a headache coming on.

“I meant besides Tom.”

Turning on her blinker, Daisy headed up Main Street towards her house. She pretended to be very absorbed in the process of driving. Maybe if she didn’t look at Tara...

“Ahem, I asked you a question, Daisy. Have you ever slept with anyone you’ve been dating --”

Daisy blew out a huff of air. “No. Are you happy? I’ve not slept with anyone, besides Tom, that I haven’t dated for less than six months.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Tara cross her arms. “How many?”

“How many what?”

“Would you stop playing games? You know exactly what I meant. How many men have you slept with?”

“Including Tom?”

Another exasperated sigh answered her.

“Okay, two. There have been two men in my life that I’ve had actual intercourse with. Satisfied? I see you laughing, Tara. I have amazing peripheral vision.”

“Oh, honey, I’m not laughing with you. I’m laughing *at* you. Daisy Mae Partridge, the queen of the right to the orgasm, is a big fat fraud. Wonder how many papers that headline would sell?”

Daisy pulled into her driveway, shoved the gearshift into park, and flipped the key with so much force the chain she had it on bashed her in the hand. *Ouch*. “I never said I had a lot of sex, Tara.”

“No, you never did, but you have to admit, for someone with such limited experience, you seem to have a lot of knowledge about the subject.”

“Of course, I do. I read.” Shoving the door open, she stomped up to the front porch and turned the handle to her front door. Elmer greeted her with a woof, then streaked past her to the nearest bush. Poor guy, she’d been neglectful lately. She’d make that up to him with a trip to the beach in the next week or so. That is, if she could leave the county. Stuffing her hands in her jeans pockets, she sighed and plopped onto the porch swing. Tara parked herself beside her, and they pushed the swing back and forth in silence.

“I don’t mean to make fun of you. I’m sorry, okay?”

Daisy let out a breath and kicked her foot against the floor of the porch to push them higher. “I know. I think it’s funny, too, in a sad, sort of pathetic way.”

“So, what are you going to do about this?”

“You mean my mess with Tom? I don’t know.”

“Do you love him?”

Her head started to shake in the negative, then she stopped. She thought back over her life. In each important moment, he seemed to be there, hovering around the edges, out of focus. Then she came to the last couple of weeks. In every important frame, Tom’s body, laugh, and smile were heavily featured. When he arrested her, the feeling of desire that washed over her. His touch, the need for more. His lopsided smile, laughter, and the incredible way he made her feel when they had sex. The erotic command in his voice and the tender way he held her after. “Oh, no.”

“What?”

“I think I *am* falling in love with him. What do I do?”

“Seems to me you take it one day at a time.”

“Thanks. You’re a lot of help.” She knew her tone dripped sarcasm, but she was part irritated and a good chunk scared to death. How on earth was she going to face him again? She couldn’t exactly run and hide, not without becoming a fugitive.

“Look, you can go to him and tell him how you feel, or you can wait and see how it all works out. The situation seems simple enough to me. Just because he hates your job, and you resent him...”

“Come off it, Tara. I don’t resent him.”

Tara stood. “Sometimes love and resentment walk a pretty blurry line, honey. Closer than love and hate. Oh, before I forget, I need to get a quote from you for the story I’m going to run on this. What do you have to say about the laws in this county?”

“Besides that they’re antiquated, stupid, and subjugate women?”

“Yeah, besides all that.”

“That there needs to be a change. Every woman has the right to sexual satisfaction. No one should try to control that.”

“Good enough. Lunch tomorrow?”

Daisy nodded distractedly, reaching out to pet Elmer as he jumped into Tara’s abandoned place on the swing and tried to crawl into Daisy’s lap.

“Okay, sweetie. See you then, and try not to lose sleep over this. It really will work itself out.”

Daisy shrugged. She hoped the gesture would convey the words she didn’t have the guts to share with her friend.

Tara turned and headed to her car. Daisy watched her put her bags in the passenger seat and drive away. She fondled Elmer’s ears and sighed. It was easy for Tara to think everything would work out. Tara’s life seemed so charmed compared to hers. Parents who adored her, the ability to laugh at herself, always positive and upbeat. Daisy just didn’t share her friend’s outlook or her optimistic convictions.

Chapter Twelve

“Here ya go, sugar. Two eggs, over medium, juice, sausage, biscuit, and toast. Want any more coffee?”

Tom nodded towards his cup. He didn’t feel much like talking right now, especially to Cora. The night shift had felt never-ending. He was happy it was over. He could eat and go home. Fanny waving, Cora walked off, probably to get the coffee, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Cora was okay; he’d actually thought about asking her out for a brief moment six months ago, right before Daisy moved back into town. Now, he had no interest in the restaurant owner.

Daisy. What was he going to do about her? She had to be the most exasperating woman on the face of the earth. Frustrating, strong-willed, hardheaded, and utterly adorable. *You’re screwed, old boy.*

Yeah, didn’t he know it, too. What he felt for her...what the hell *did* he feel for her? Confusion. Now there was an answer. Holding his OJ in the air, he mentally toasted himself.

To all the fools who fall in love.

His hand froze mid-motion. Love? His hand dropped, slamming the glass into the booth top with a *thunk*. Orange juice sloshed over the table, and he reached out to the napkin holder to sop the mess up. What the --

"Here, Tom. I brought you a paper, along with your coffee. I thought you'd like to read it. Gosh, you made a bit of a mess. Let me." Cora leaned in close enough for him to see down her shirt as she mopped the mess up from the table.

He looked up and away from her cleavage. He had enough problems with women right now. Besides, Cora's boobs did not interest him. Not the way... An image of Daisy's face rose to the forefront of his mind, and he pushed it back with a sigh.

He must have been louder than he'd planned on being, because instead of pouring the coffee and leaving, Cora slid into the booth seat across from him, chin on the backs of her hands. The look on her face was one of smug satisfaction. She looked pointedly at the paper she'd set in front of him, then back up into his eyes with a wink.

Why couldn't he be attracted to Cora? Why did his obstinate heart have to fall for the most annoying... He looked down. There she was, the cause of all his current misery staring out from the front page of the *Boxer Eagle*. Tom looked from the paper to Cora in confusion.

"Thought you might be interested in what it says."

"Um, thanks." He'd been hoping to dismiss her, but Cora looked like she'd settled in for the long haul. He picked up the paper and started to read the article beneath the attention-grabbing headline: "Local Feminist Vows Freedom for the Women of Boxer County." The photo of Daisy was a good one. Taken as they left the courthouse, her blonde hair blew in a breeze around her head, the wild curls tangling in the wind. The look on her face made his heart feel like it stopped for a second. A smile hovered there, mysterious and welcoming, all at the same time. He remembered when Tara shot the photo, Daisy had been looking at him. He looked closer at her pretty features, her wide-open heart reflected in her eyes.

"So, are you going to let her get away with this?"

Tom pulled the paper back and looked at Cora. She could be pretty if only the hard lines of disappointment weren't settled into her face. Next to Daisy's joyful outlook on life. Joy. That's what she brought to his life. Daisy brought joy and an in-the-moment zest Tom thought he'd lost years ago. The day...the day his father's car spun out of control on a dirt road and crashed into a pole. Daisy's screwball outlook on life had the effect of kick-starting the part of his soul he thought was dead and buried.

"What the hell are you going to do about this, Tom?"

Tom glanced up. Judge Brown stormed into the café, his face a thundercloud of anger, and stood at the end of the table.

"I assume you mean the article."

"Hell, yes, boy, I mean the article. I'm getting it on all sides. Men at the lodge telling me to throw the book at her, and Mary... Shit boy, Mary's threatening to replace me with one of those dang fool contraptions that pain-in-the-ass, screw-loose feminist is selling."

Cora stood, gathering the orange juice-stained napkins in her hands. "Told you she's nothing but trouble, Tom."

"Thanks, Cora. Why don't you get a cup for Rich here?"

Her lips pursed, but she headed to the back of the counter with a nod.

"Have a seat, Judge. I've not even read the article yet. What does it say?"

The larger man wedged himself into the booth with a "woof," grabbed the sugar dispenser, and dumped what looked like six teaspoonfuls into the coffee Cora set in front of him.

Smiling at the judge, Cora parked her butt on the bench next to Tom, touching her thigh to his. Tom scooted to the left, but she followed right behind him.

"So, what are you two going to do about her? The whole town is sick of her trying to force her ideas down our throats. Can't you just suggest she leave, Tom? It would make

everything so much easier if she moved to a city somewhere. It's not as if she belongs here. She's just a foster kid. Why can't she go to Miami or someplace like that?"

Tom tried to smile, but inwardly he flinched. Whom would it be easier for? The town or Cora? He glanced down at the newspaper article, scanning it for whatever Daisy said that had these two so riled up.

Rich took a sip of his coffee, frowned, and grabbed the creamer. "I think you need to haul her in again, Tom. Maybe another night in jail would wake her up and bring her to her senses."

Tom cocked at eyebrow at the judge. "I don't see anything in this article that's illegal. She's just expressing her opinion. I can't haul someone in for that."

"Well, I for one, think she's a menace. No one asked her to move back here after college. She can just go live somewhere else and leave us alone." Cora placed a possessive hand on Tom's arm.

He moved his arm towards his body, and Cora's hand followed. It seemed stuck. "She can live where she wants to, Cora. She grew up here. Is your problem what she's saying or her?"

The café owner frowned and stood with a sniff. "You're always taking her side. What's up with that?"

Tom shrugged. "It's not about sides. It's about following the law. I arrested her in the first place because she broke a law, not because I don't like what she has to say or how she says it. I don't make the laws."

"Oh, poo. You arrested her because your mom got involved and is on her side. You should straighten her out, Tom. You don't want your mom to become like Daisy. She's an upstanding member of this community."

Concentrating on folding the newspaper, Tom avoided Cora's eyes. Did she have a point? Was Daisy corrupting people? Isn't that why he arrested her in the first place? Because

of his mother. His mother who taught him right from wrong and was pissed as hell that he'd gotten involved in the first place. He groaned. What a mess.

Snapping a piece of gum, Cora continued. "She's going to morally bankrupt us. Isn't that what you're here for? To stop this sort of thing? It's sleazy." She placed a hand on his shoulder. "You're a good man, Tom. Better than her. She's corrupting the fabric of who we are. You have to put a stop to it."

Tom looked at the judge. The man was still busy fiddling with his coffee and appeared not to be listening. He thought back to Daisy's sweet smile and her determination to change things for the better. What Cora was talking about was running someone out of town on a rail because you didn't like the way they thought. If she got her way, and Daisy left, who would be next?

Pushing past her, he stood. "Sorry, Cora. I don't think I'm in the position to be the moral compass for the entire county. Daisy's right, it's a stupid law. It's not corrupting anyone, let alone my mother. She had a good time at that party. Everyone did. If you want to force Daisy to move, then do it on your own, but I suggest you follow the law. I'm more than happy to put you behind bars for intimidation."

He grabbed his hat and put it on. "Judge, if you'd like to discuss this further, I'm happy to meet with you." He looked pointedly at Cora, who had the decency to blush. "In private." With a grim smile, he headed out of the café to have a long overdue honest chat with Daisy.

Chapter Thirteen

He heard the sound of the pump running, but Daisy didn't answer the door to his repeated knocks, and her truck wasn't in the drive. Turning around to give up, a flash of tan in the underbrush caught his eye. "Hey, Elmer, where's your mistress?" The dog stopped mid-sniff and looked up, joyously thumping his tail against the brambles. With a *woof*, he ran at Tom with puppy-like exuberance.

Two muddy paws planted themselves on his shoulders, and the tongue came out to swipe over his face. Tom laughed, petted the dog, and gently pushed him away. Good thing he'd stopped by home to change before heading over. He didn't want Daisy to think he'd come over in any official capacity. A T-shirt and jeans felt more comfortable anyway.

"Where is she, boy?"

Elmer bounded to the edge of the porch, stopped, and looked back at Tom expectantly.

"Okay, I get it. I'm coming."

The dog disappeared around the corner of the house, and Tom followed. Off-key singing, followed by a splash, led him the rest of the way. Rounding the corner to the backyard, he caught sight of her and stopped short.

Shorts, tight T-shirt, bare feet, and headphones on, she made one suggestive picture. A soapy sponge squished in her hand. Her bottom wiggled to a beat he could not hear, peeking out from the too-short shorts. She sang out every now and then and did a little boogie to the music as she soaped her truck. His cock hardened in his jeans, making the already tight fit decidedly uncomfortable. He absently adjusted it while he watched her.

When she turned, her breasts looked ripe and lickable in the mid-morning light. Braless, her areolas clearly visible through the damp fabric, begged for his mouth. Both nipples so hard they strained against the fabric. Twirling, she finally caught sight of him. Her breasts bobbed a little at the suddenness of her stop. She bit her bottom lip, displaying pearly teeth. An enchanting and seductive picture against the backdrop of the wet truck. She looked like a body-shop calendar girl, her lush body picture perfect and ripe.

Her cheeks flushed pink, and she ducked her head, dropping the halo of blonde curls over her face. The sponge splashed into the bucket of soapy water at her feet. She wiped her hands on a towel and walked toward him. Good thing she came to him. There was no way on earth he could walk comfortably right now.

She stopped a few feet from him and looked up shyly. "Hi." One foot toyed with the ground, her toe dragging in the dirt.

"Hi to you, too."

"Nice day. I'm washing my truck."

Fighting back a smile, he glanced at the truck and back at her. "I thought that's what you were doing. Seems like all those courses I took in college paid off."

She smiled fleetingly. Silence stretched between them, uncomfortable and long. Tom wished he'd bothered to put on his sunglasses. Then he could stare at that see-through T-shirt without being caught. As it was, he was having a hard time looking her in the eyes. Every breath distracted him, making his mouth water as he forced down thoughts of putting

those hard little nubs in his mouth and sucking on them 'til she moaned in pleasure. His cock grew even harder, straining the denim.

She cleared her throat. "I've got some beer in the fridge. Want one?"

"Sure, that would be great." He held back a groan. This was some conversation they were having. It couldn't be more uncomfortable if they tried. She turned and headed up the back steps to get the beer, her ass cheeks showing beneath the shorts. The heat of the late spring morning suddenly got to him and he felt sweat bead along his brow. *Heat nothing. It's her ass in those shorts.* He swallowed hard. She looked amazing. Better in the tight bottoms and see-through top than if she was naked. Thoughts of ripping her clothes off and bending her over the porch rail danced through his head.

"Here." The cold beer touched his arm, and he jumped. He'd been so busy fantasizing that he'd not even heard her return. Grabbing the beer, he popped the top and took a long gulp to hide his unease.

She sat her pert ass on the porch steps and looked up expectantly. "So, to what do I owe the honor, sheriff?"

Frowning, he sat beside her. "I'm not in uniform, Daisy, You can call me Tom. It's not like we..."

"We don't know each other. Really know each other." She toyed with the top of her beer can.

"About that..."

"It was a mistake."

He opened his mouth to rebut her words, but she shook her head.

"We come from such different worlds and points of view. You're conservative, and I'm so left-winged, I fly in a circle. It's not going to work between us. I don't know what happened the other day." She stared down at her own beer and toyed with the lip of the can.

“Moment of weakness, I guess.” She shrugged her shoulders and looked off into the scrub brush and riot of tangled trees that grew up into her backyard with a sigh.

Now it was his turn to toy with his beer. Running his fingers around the smooth top, he thought about what to say, but nothing came to mind. Maybe she was right. He glanced over at her profile, nose perky, just like her personality. Her fire for life evident in every line of her face. Dammit. He didn’t want to walk away and pretend what he felt wasn’t more. More what? Love? He could fight, or he could walk away and give up, rise to her expectations. Just like he rose to his father’s. Frustrated, he crumpled the can.

“Hey, that’s recyclable.” Her hand reached out and touched his. Exquisite bursts of energy shot up his arm. His gaze searched hers. The momentary widening of her eyes told him she felt something. Wasn’t that a start? A place to put a toehold in. Dammit, he was not going to let her just push him out without trying to make this work. Whatever the hell *it* was.

Turning to her, he placed his hand on her cheek. His thumb stroked her skin, enjoying the velvet texture. For a moment, she leaned into his hand, then pulled back with a jerk. Gently, but firmly he placed his fingers on her chin and turned her to face him.

“What are you afraid of, sweetheart?”

Eyes huge, her gaze darted around, like a hunted animal. A soft mewling sound erupted from her throat. Common sense said to let her go. To walk away from her and not look back. Maybe even leave the county, but his heart was begging for an answer to all the confusing emotions that coursed through him where she was concerned.

She looked down and sniffed.

Gathering her into his arms, he pulled her onto his lap and held her tight, expecting tears to flow. They didn’t. Instead, she trembled silently in his arms. Was he wrong? Pushing her for the sake of pushing, or was it something more? Running his hand over her curls, he reveled in the springiness of her hair against his hand. Almost as if it had a life of its own.

Wild, full of stubborn beauty, just like Daisy: unique and wonderful. Someone who never gave in, never showed fear, well, except for thunder. He smiled against her hair at the memory of her huddled body behind the bathroom door. She was so original, so complex, and...what?

"I'm sorry, Tom. I'm being an idiot."

"No, you're not. I'm the idiot. I tried to change you, and I'm sorry. You're right. It's a stupid law. What goes on in behind closed doors is no one's business but the adults who consent."

She leaned back and looked into his eyes. "Really?"

He stroked over her hair again and dropped a kiss on her forehead. "Really."

Blue eyes narrowed, and her forehead wrinkled. "What's the catch?"

"The catch, my dear Daisy, is up to you." He waggled his eyebrows, and she laughed. Then she grew silent again, her forehead furrowed.

"This doesn't fix anything, though, does it? You're still at the opposite end of the spectrum from me, and I'm not going to change."

"I don't want you to. I thought I did, but that would take all the heart and fire out of you."

The hope in her eyes sucked the breath from his lungs. Then she looked away. "So, where does that leave us?"

"I don't know. I think that's up to us."

Wiggling her ass against his lap, she brought his erection back to roaring life. God, this woman was hard on his cock.

"You keep doing that, and you're going to be sorry."

Her gaze innocent and beguiling met his. "Doing what?" The cheeks of her ass moved against his cock again. This time, the intent unmistakable.

Reaching out, he pinched her nipple 'til she gasped. "You're being a bad girl, and you know what happens to bad girls, don't you?"

Her gaze became dark and hooded. A slender hand reached up and pinched her other nipple, hard. She gasped again and moaned. "They get what's coming to them?"

She spread her legs and pulled the shorts tight against her pussy. A damp spot grew over the crotch of her shorts, and he groaned. "Yes, they get what they deserve."

Once more, she rotated her hips to rub against his engorged cock. "I want to be a very bad girl for you. I want you to punish me, then fuck me hard. I loved being handcuffed the other day. It felt so sexy to be at your mercy, open to you. I wanted it so much."

Rotating in his lap, she pressed her ass hard against his cock. Arching her back, she lay against his body, open for his touch. He groaned. Capturing her wrists with one hand, he roamed over her breasts with the other. Pinching first one nipple, then the other, 'til she squirmed against him. She moaned and twisted her body erotically. His hand moved lower, to the top of her shorts. With a flick of his fingers, he moved the elastic aside and ran his hands down to her pussy. No underwear barred the way. God, she was hot. Slipping a finger between her lips, he stroked over the silky wet slit, then over her hard clit.

"Strip for me." He let her go; her breasts heaved.

Sitting up, she pulled her wrists from his hand. She turned to look at him, eyes wide. "Here?"

"Yes, here."

"But, what if somebody comes?"

"Then they're going to see your naked body. You're beautiful, Daisy. I want to fuck you right here on the porch. I don't want to confine what I feel for you to the bedroom, anymore. I love the thought that someone could catch me taking you. Listen to you begging me to make you come."

She bit her lower lip in thought, then smiled a naughty smile. Without a word, she rose from his lap, spread her legs wide on either side of him, and pulled the cotton tee over her head. Dropping it in a damp pile on the ground, she stood before him, breasts thrust forward. Perfect. He reached up and ran his hand over one, then the other, then looked pointedly at her shorts.

With a furtive glance at the side of the house, she peeled them off.

“Sit on the railing and spread your legs for me.”

She struggled to get her petite frame up on the railing. Precariously balanced, she spread her legs, hooking her feet on the lower rail.

Tom rose from the steps, pulled off his shirt, and kicked off his shoes. Her appreciative gasp brought a smile to his lips. She was so open, completely unguarded. Unzipping his fly, he pulled his cock out and stroked it a few times. She reached toward him with one hand to touch his cock, but wobbled on her precarious perch and grabbed for the railing.

He smiled. This was exactly the position he wanted her in. Bending down, he placed his hands on her thighs and stroked over her clit with his tongue. The gasp above him tightened his balls. He felt her tremble, then her body tense as she fought not to fall off the railing.

His tongue bathed over her pussy time and again. Nibbling and licking her while she fought to maintain her presence of mind and balance above him. Feeling her struggle against her desire was the most erotic and powerful experience he'd ever known. Her open trust in him made the tip of his cock weep with pre-come. He sucked the hard little clit into his mouth and stroked it with his lips. Above him, moans rained down on his ears as she fought against letting go physically and emotionally. Pulling back, he pressed his lips to hers, then entered her soft mouth with his tongue.

“I want to make your fantasies come true. What do you think about when you play with your sweet clit, baby?”

She moaned and pulled away with a shake of her head. "I don't...I'm not ready to share, yet. Is that okay?"

He chuckled. "There's nothing you can't tell me, Daisy. It's okay."

She looked up with a wicked smile. "In the meantime, I'd be happy to make your fantasies come true."

He sucked in a breath. Better and better. "Will you bend over that chair there? Ass in the air, ready for me?"

He felt her gulp and nod. Scrambling off the porch rail, she jumped down and bent over the chair so fast it inched along the floor. They both laughed, Tom's stopping short as her tight ass rode high in the air. She spread her legs and waited for him. The sight of her pink pussy ready for him, dripping juice, her tight ass available to view, was amazing.

Pulling off his boxers and jeans at the same time, he reached into the front pocket and pulled out a condom. Ripping open the packet with his teeth, he rolled it on, hoping he'd not come inside her on the first stroke. He wanted to savor this moment.

He squeezed his cock and ran the tip of it over her slit and down to rub against her clit. She let out a gasp and trembled against him. The fingers of his other hand reached out and stroked her clit. Rewarded with a rotation of her hips, he flicked the nub with the tip of his fingers. She shook against his hand and moaned.

"Do you like the way I play with your clit?"

A nod was what he got and was all the answer he needed. "Beg me, beg me to make you come."

"Please. Please make me come. I want it so bad." Without hesitation, her voice, breathless and pleading, filled with need was an incredible turn-on. Tapping her clit with his fingertips, he felt her muscles tense with the need for release. He slowed his movements, gently rubbing against her, knowing she ached for relief. Hearing her moan in need was an incredible turn on. He held his cock near the entrance to her pussy and played over her clit

harder, teasing faster and pleasuring her. WWWith a cry she began to quake with orgasm. Thrusting his cock deep into her pussy, he felt her muscles clench around him.

He pulled back out of the tight hole and rammed his cock in again. Her moans grew louder, and she pushed back hard against his cock. Grabbing her hips, he thrust hard over and over into her, while she moaned and shook against him, coming again while he fucked her.

Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. With a grunt of satisfaction, he let go and bucked his hips wildly against her willing pussy, exploding into her.

Panting, he pulled out of her, gathered her into his arms and collapsed in the chair, her body draped across his lap.

Kissing her face, he pulled back, looked into her eyes, and watched her begin to laugh.

"Gee, was it that bad?"

She kissed the tip of his nose. "No, silly. That good. It felt wonderful. You're wonderful." Snuggling against him, she laid her head on his shoulder with a sigh. "Can we do that again?"

"Can I have another beer first, and maybe, a nap?"

"If you insist."

He chuckled. "I do." It felt so good with her in his arms, resting against him. He closed his eyes for a moment and kissed her cheek. As he began to fall asleep, the last thought that ran through his head was he'd fallen in love. "You're one in a million."

Chapter Fourteen

“One in a million?” *What the hell did that mean, and why is it bothering you so much?* “Did you expect him to jump up and tell you he’s in love? You’re too different.” Daisy sighed as the water washed over her. They’d left the porch a couple hours ago and moved into the bedroom. Tom fell asleep immediately, probably tired from the night shift. Daisy lay there staring up at the ceiling. Finally, she gave up over-analyzing in the bed and decided to do it in the shower. Some of her best thinking happened in the shower.

Sex with Tom was great. Laughter with Tom was great. Discussing things with Tom was great. Too great. She was about to have her heart broken. She could just feel it. Just like her college boyfriend, who dumped her when she dressed up as a condom fairy on Halloween and spent the night handing out rubber raincoats to everyone she ran into. He’d called her an idiot and taken off in a snit. Daisy had held her heart in reserve ever since.

“Priorities. You can have equal rights for all women, or love. Your cause does not fit with a love life. They just do not go together. Any man who loves you is going to want to rein you in. No matter what he says.” For the first time, the words felt hollow and cold in her heart. Her beliefs still rang true, but taking one for the team by living her life alone didn’t warm her or fill her with resolve like it usually did. Was she willing to give up her hopes and

dreams for Tom? Could she have both? *Ugh, why bother even thinking about it?* He'd not said a word, but no one in the public eye wanted an erstwhile condom fairy for a wife. "Whoa, what the hell was that? Wife? Who ever said anything about a wife? Not ever marry, always remain free, no man can hold me, Daisy Mae Partridge." Oh, who the hell was she fooling? She'd drop it all if Tom just crooked a finger. Then what? She'd be happy 'til the shine wore off, and then spend the rest of her life feeling compromised? No way. Even if it did sting now, okay, hurt like hell, she had to tell him this wasn't working. Yes, he said all the right things, but he was so much her opposite. He couldn't possibly mean them.

The door to the shower opened, startling her.

"Hey, beautiful, want company?"

She thought about saying, no, but the eager, little boy look on his face brought a smile to her lips and evaporated her fears like the puff of a dandelion on a summer's day.

"Sure, come on in. How can I say no to that face?"

"And this body." He made his arm into a muscle, and she laughed. "I think about you when I work out, you know."

"You're full of shit."

He looked serious. "Actually, I'm not. I do think of you to pass the time while I pump iron."

She pulled back, water spraying her face. "You do?"

"Um, hmm. I think about you a lot." Bending forward, he nuzzled her neck. "I think about you clothed. I think about you naked. What you would look like in the shower. So this is a fantasy come true, and I'm happy to say my image of you was about perfect."

She giggled. "Sorry, but my showers are not that sexy."

His grin was wolfish. "I'll be the judge of that." A finger flicked over her breast, and Daisy drew in a breath.

He knew how to get to her physically. Oh hell, on every damned level. She was falling in love with the enemy. Correction. Was *in* love. She eyed him. He didn't look like the enemy now. Naked, wet, every muscle defined by the water sluicing down his body. Every single... She looked lower. Day-am, the man had a gorgeous penis. Thick, long, and the shape...arrow straight with a stunning purple head. She licked her lips. What she really wanted to do was put that hard cock in her mouth. She shrugged her shoulders. Why not?

Dropping to her knees, she placed a hand around its girth and heard him gasp. With a firm squeeze, she ran her hand up and down its length to be rewarded with a drop of pre-come glistening at its tip. She reached out with her tongue and felt him take in a shuddering breath. Plunging her mouth over his cock, she sucked hard, pulled back, and licked the tip again.

A moan above her caused her to glance up. Arms braced on either side of the shower stall, Tom's head dropped back at the pleasure he felt. She smiled and sucked the impressive cock into her mouth once more.

Sucking hard, she placed her hand around it and pumped in concert with her mouth.

His hips bucked against her, and she opened her throat to accommodate more of his length. A hand wrapped in her hair, forming a fist. He held her head still and pumped in and out of her mouth.

Slurping the length of his thick cock, she shuddered at the barely restrained strength of his fucking. With a wicked laugh, she sucked hard and was rewarded with a long, low moan as his cock twitched, and he came in her mouth.

She sucked his come into her mouth and swallowed with a smile.

Reaching down, he grabbed her shoulders and pulled her to her feet. "Can we continue this where it's a bit warmer?"

She laughed, just noticing that the shower water had begun to turn from lukewarm to chilly.

Exiting the shower, they towed one another off and went into the bedroom hand in hand. Falling onto the bed, laughing so hard she felt like she would run out of air, Daisy felt more free than she'd felt in a long time. All her earlier worries seemed unimportant.

He lay on one elbow and looked down at her, brushing a stray curl from her face. "You're beautiful."

Ducking her head, she smiled. "Thank you."

"I meant it earlier. I want you to tell me your fantasies. I want to make them come true. When you're ready."

Crossing her arms, she looked at him. Would he think there was something wrong with her? She bit her lip and looked into his deep-brown eyes.

"Screw it."

He scrunched his eyebrows together. "Screw what?"

Sitting up, she leaned over him and opened the drawer next to her bed. "Now, I want you to stay out of this drawer, 'cause I'm not interested in getting arrested again, but these are legal enough." She rummaged around 'til she found what she was looking for and dragged it out, then reached in again. Success. She had her pile. Plunking it down in front of him, she waved at it with a free hand.

"If you call me a freak and run away, I'll understand. I'll probably die of humiliation, but I will understand." She held her breath and waited.

He picked up the whip first. Long as his forearm, bound in leather, flat pads on the end gave it away as equestrian. Then he rooted through the restraints, four of them. One for each corner of her bed. She wanted to look away, but she forced herself to take in his reaction. Lastly, he picked up her butt plug and lube. Thick and wicked-looking, she'd not had the guts to use it yet, but with Tom...

Finally, he looked up. "What? No dildos?" He smiled.

“Well, I didn’t want you to have to arrest yourself.” Grabbing the nearest pillow, she smacked him with it, once, then twice. He laughed and grabbed her wrists, easily flipping her over across his lap, face up. Gripping both wrists with one hand, he tickled her sides ’til she laughed and squirmed in his arms.

“Am I to take it you were scared to show me these things?”

“Well, I didn’t know how you’d take it.” Her words came out with a bit of defensive whine at the end. Damn. She didn’t want to feel shame.

His hand roamed her legs, taking away her ability to put two thoughts together. “Why were you embarrassed?”

She pulled away and rolled to her side to look up at him. “I just don’t want anyone – you -- to get the wrong idea. I’m a strong woman, Tom. I don’t...”

“You’re afraid you’re weak for liking to be tied up and spanked?” His brow knit together.

Hanging her head, she nodded.

His hand stroked over her hair. “You’re not weak for having fantasies, sweetheart. You’re in control of every aspect of your life. You’re the strongest person I’ve ever known. I’m honored that you would let me into your soul like this.”

Strongest person. Not woman, the strongest person he knew. Maybe there was hope for the sheriff yet. She cocked her head, picked up the whip, and handed it to him. He swallowed visibly and plucked it from her fingers.

She watched his cock harden as he held the tool in his hands. Just seeing him with the leather held so competently had her ready and wet for him. She swallowed.

Reaching out with the whip, he flicked the end over her nipple. She watched it harden. He did the same to the other, and she squirmed. She’d used it on herself, but having him run it over her body, preparing to spank her, was a rush she’d never thought she’d be brave enough to share with anyone, let alone Tom. There would always have to be a lot of love and

trust there. Love. She loved him. More than she thought possible. How did this happen so fast?

“On your hands and knees.”

Gulping, she nodded and rolled into position. The leather caressed her back and the outside of first one thigh, then the other. Just the kiss of the toy against her body brought her to trembling excitement. She felt her pussy dampen in response to its touch.

She felt him lift off the bed and looked back. Standing at the foot, his body tall and strong, sizing her up, excited her more than she'd ever felt before.

“Turn around.” The tone was soft, but the command was unarguable. Nodding, she looked down at the blankets on the bed.

He ran the tool over her ass and down the crack, following it to her pussy. It was gone, then smacked lightly against her mound. A gasp left her lips, filled with the pleasure of what he was doing to her.

“Spread your legs and open yourself with your fingers for me.”

Reaching back with one hand, she pulled her lips apart to expose her clit to his gaze and the leather he ran up and down the insides of her thighs.

“Good girl.” The leather lightly played over her clit, causing her hips to move against it.

Crack. The sound of the whip coming down on her ass was unexpected, painful, and transported her into a whirl of pain-borne pleasure she'd dreamed about, but never dared voice before. She felt the cry slip out of her mouth and bit her lip to stifle it.

When it didn't come again, she looked back. Tom held the lube in one hand and the plug in the other. He squirted lube over the tip. With a sigh, she dropped her head and waited in breathless anticipation.

Slippery, it worked over her asshole, then pressed gently, but firmly into her ass. Stretched and a little scared, she felt the thickest part at the entrance. With a gasp, she almost sat up in fear, but Tom's reassuring touch on her ass relaxed her. The sting, as the

thickest part entered her was almost too much, then it was inside her. She felt the wide hilt against her asshole.

“God, you look incredible. Open, trusting. I can’t wait to fuck you like this.

The leather came down against her skin several times. The feeling erupted in her mind in euphoric joy. The plug in her ass made the feeling more intense and sensual.

Tom moved around to kneel in front of her. He placed the tip of his rock-hard cock against her mouth, increasing the pressure, until she opened for him. He moved carefully in and out of her mouth, gently fucking her while he plied the whip over her back and ass, occasionally smacking it in a hissing whack of erotic pleasure. She felt his balls tighten against her chin. Licking and sucking harder, she worked to give him release. He pulled back.

Flipping her on her back, he knelt between her legs. He pushed the handle into her hand.

“Pleasure yourself for me.”

Licking her lips, she took the whip and placed the tip against her aching cunt. His hands pushed gently on her knees until she held them against her stomach. Wide open, he held her there and looked at her expectantly.

With a nod, she gently flicked the tip across her pussy, then smacked herself harder, moaning and meeting the exquisite torture. She rubbed the tip against her slit and in between the folds of her pussy to her clit. The feeling of the leather on her raw button sent her into ecstasy. She arched her back and rubbed it against her clit faster and faster.

She felt her hand pushed aside and his mouth move over her. Licking and sucking, he brought her to screaming orgasm in moments.

Still trembling, she rolled on top of him. Firmly grasping his cock, she lowered herself onto him and began to pump up and down. The butt plug shifted inside her and burned, making Tom’s cock feel even thicker as it glided in and out of her. It was a feeling she’d be

willing to repeat in the future. He held her hips in his hands and guided her over him again and again, 'til he, too, cried out and came deep inside her.

Collapsing on top of him, she snuggled against his body. A hand roamed her hair.

“What else do you have in that magic nightstand?”

“Oh, three dildos, some nipple clamps, a couple more butt plugs --”

“And a partridge in a pear tree?”

“Very funny.”

“I’d arrest you, but I’m too tired to bother with it.”

“Damn. I love those handcuffs.”

He laughed. “Good, I love using them. Next time --” He kissed her forehead again. “-- the restraints.”

Chapter Fifteen

Her phone rang when she returned from the bathroom. She looked at the display. Tara. Crud, she rarely called after six. Daisy picked the phone up.

“Hey, Tara. What’s --”

“You better get down here, now.”

Daisy sat down on the edge of the bed. “What’s wrong?”

“Just get down here. I’m at the courthouse. Hurry, before the sheriff gets here.”

Daisy glanced at Tom. She had the feeling they’d both get there at the same time.

“Okay, I’ll be right there.”

“Great. And Daisy?”

“Hmm?”

“Bring bail money.”

She punched the off button on the phone, just as Tom’s cell began to ring.

“Hello? What do you mean a situation? All right, calm down, Rich. I’ll be right there. Yes, I know where the Partridge woman is. Yes, she’ll come, too.”

“What the...”

He shook his head. "I don't know, and I don't think I want to know. Let's just get going."

She nodded, ran to her dresser, and grabbed the first clothes she came to. Pulling the T-shirt over her head, she looked down. "Woman Power" strained across her boobs.

"Nice. I'm all for it."

Daisy's brows slammed together. "All for it, I thought..."

A hand rested gently against her mouth. "I've told you before. I thought you understood, but clearly, we're on different pages. I'm not against sexual freedom. I just follow the laws. It's not my job to comment on them."

"But...your mom."

He rolled his eyes. "Maybe some people don't mind knowing all about their mom's sex life, but it makes me nervous. It's not toys I have a problem with. It's imagining my mom using them. I'm pretty sure I handled the situation like a moron by freaking out, but she's my mom."

"So she's not entitled to pleasure. Oh, brother." Daisy threw her hands up. "What about your dream to be just like your dad? Your mom spoke quite a bit about that."

"She did? Remind me to let her have it the next time we see her. Yes, I took this job to honor my dad. I miss him every day, but I want to be the best parts of him. Not the old-fashioned, women-in-the-kitchen parts. Now, we'd better get moving. We can ride in my car."

Following him to the car, she bit her lip and thought about what Tom had just told her. With a smile, he held the door for her. Biting back a defensive crack, she sank into the cold pleather. It felt a little weird to not close her own door, but maybe Tom held her door to be nice. Not because he didn't think she was capable.

They drove downtown in relative silence. Rounding the corner onto Main Street, Daisy blinked twice. Nope, she hadn't imagined it. There, blocking Main Street, looked like every woman in the town. Each held a lit candle making the street glow an eerie yellow/orange.

Judge Brown stood in front of the crowd, hopping up and down and yelling at them. A few men lingered around the sidelines, whispering to one another. Cora and Mary, the judge's wife, stood off to one side. Cora looked pissed. Her hands on her hips, back hunched, the judge's wife looked ready to explode.

"Oh, shit." Tom let out a low whistle, filled with disbelief.

"You can say that again."

He grinned at her. "Oh, shit."

"You are so not funny. What is all this?"

"Well, in my professional opinion, I'd say it's a protest."

Daisy opened the door and swung her legs out. "Ya think? 'Cause I thought it looked more like the cakewalk at the annual church social. It's a good thing you went to college to become a cop."

She came around the car, to stand beside him.

He smacked her on the butt. "Very funny."

The judge turned to look at Daisy. His eyes narrowed.

She let Tom step ahead of her. Nerves quaked along her limbs. No way was she going to be arrested again. *Too bad, Daisy girl. With the look on the judge's face, right now I'd put your odds at fifty-fifty.*

"Sheriff, thank God. Arrest these women."

Tom crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against his car. "On what grounds?"

"Are you blind, man? For disturbing the peace."

Tom looked over the group and back at the judge with a raised brow. "They're peaceful."

"They're blocking traffic."

"True, but then again, so are you." Murmurs of agreement rose from the women.

Bushy eyebrows merged on his beet-red face. "I'm only out here trying to stop this nonsense. It's all that Partridge woman's fault."

Tom held up a hand. The crowd quieted. "Can someone please explain what's going on here?"

Eva stepped forward. "We're protesting Daisy's arrest. We want the charges dropped, and we're not going to do one darn thing to help the men in this town 'til they are."

Several heads nodded in agreement along with a chorus of affirmatives from the crowd.

Cora turned and delivered a hate-filled look on Daisy. Shivers of fear crawled up Daisy's spine. "See what you've done? You've corrupted this town. We were fine, 'til you came back with all your empowerment bullshit. It's all your fault, you two-bit tramp."

Tom held up his hands. "There's no reason to call anyone names here, Cora. Why don't you just go back to your diner and give me a chance to break this up?"

Cora shot another nasty look Daisy's way. "What do you have to say for yourself, whore?"

Daisy bit her tongue and looked away. She was not about to make things worse with Cora.

"Cora, what the hell? Stop her." The judge's voice sounded frantic.

Daisy started to turn around when a sharp pain exploded at the back of her head. She hit the ground hard, the wind knocked from her lungs. Lying on the ground, she gasped for air.

"I'm done with you, bitch, and forget Tom. He's mine."

Daisy looked up into a snarling face. Cora's outburst overflowed the dam of courtesy that surrounded the assembled women. Shouts to come to Daisy's aid mingled with chants for justice as the crowd surged forward. Out of the corner of her eye, Daisy saw a flickering rush of candlelight that seemed to merge and come right at her. Daisy tried to scramble away, but Cora got a chunk of her hair and yanked. Stopped in her tracks, she felt a vicious kick to her butt. Judge Brown screamed something about out-of-control apron-wearers at the women, and everyone started yelling. It felt surreal. Daisy darted her glance around for an escape route.

A shot rang out.

The entire assemblage stopped in their tracks. Cora's hand was still entangled in Daisy's hair. Daisy reached up, pulled her hair from the woman's fingers, and stood up.

"Can you all please calm down?"

The bullhorn sounded overloud in the stillness that followed the gunshot.

Still on her knees, Cora raised her hand and pointed at Daisy. "Arrest her. It's all her fault."

Tom stepped forward, handcuffs unclipped and ready. Daisy gulped and held her hands out in front of her. She'd go peacefully this time.

Walking right by her, he grabbed Cora's hands, pulled them behind her back and clipped them together.

"Cora Withers, you're under arrest for aggravated assault."

He pulled the other woman to her feet, and placed her in the back of the patrol car. Cora looked stunned.

What a damn mess.

Daisy stood up and ran to Tom. "I don't want to press charges. She's right."

He placed an arm around her and leaned down. "She's not right. You're fine. We can drop the charges later. Just let her calm down first, okay?"

Daisy looked into sincere brown eyes and nodded. She trusted Tom. When the hell had that happened?

“Arrest her. All of them. I’ve had it.” They turned. The judge’s face had moved on from red to a purpled blue so vivid Daisy wondered if he was about to have a heart attack. He looked like he was about to explode.

“Just a damn minute, Rich Brown. I’ve had enough of your high-handed bossiness. Leave Daisy alone, or you’ll never have marital relations with me again.”

Mary Brown stepped forward. “For a man who dotes on his private business like you do, you’ve got some nerve telling the women of this town how to spend time in their own homes.”

She turned to Daisy, whose jaw felt like it hung to the ground. “You’re right. It’s a stupid law, and it should be overturned. Best way I can figure is to put it on the next ballot. I’m willing to sign the petition, and I’ll guarantee Rich will, too. Won’t you, honey?”

Hands on her hips, she glared at her husband. He gulped and hung his head. “Yes, dear.”

“And you’re going to drop the charges against Daisy here, right?”

“First thing in the morning, dear.” She nodded, a satisfied smile on her face.

“Now, I’m going home. Eva, you call me in the morning, and we’ll draft this thing. Seems like Daisy’s stuck her neck out enough for this town. It’s our turn to do the same for her. Oh, and Daisy, honey, you call me. I’ve got a list of women who need your products in Alabama.”

“But, Mary, they’re illegal there.”

The woman’s eyes sparkled. “I know.”

The crowd began to disperse. Some of the women stopped to speak to Daisy. A couple even told her they would book parties with her in the next few days. Soon, she stood alone

in the middle of Main Street. Exhausted, she turned towards Tom's patrol car. He sat on the front bumper, a cuffed Cora next to him, talking quietly.

Jealousy, raw and unwelcome, skittered up Daisy's spine. With a sigh, Cora nodded. Tom reached behind her and unclipped the cuffs from her wrists. Cora stood and walked slowly towards the diner.

Daisy followed the other woman with her gaze. She hoped this would be the end of the animosity between them. An arm came around her to rest on her shoulders. For a moment, she leaned in to enjoy the feel of him. Then, she pushed herself upright and took a step back.

She tried to sound casual, but the thumping of her heart sounded so loud she was afraid he'd heard it. "So, now what?"

She felt rather than saw the shrug. "Now we wait for the charges to be dropped against you and change the law."

"She was only trying to protect you."

"No, she was trying to recruit me to be her next husband. Somewhere along the way, she decided I was a good candidate for husband number four. County sheriff's wife is a nice title."

Daisy shrugged. "You'd be better off with someone like her. Someone who doesn't make waves."

He turned her around and stared at her, his mouth open. "She knocked you to the ground and tried to pull your hair out. I'd call those waves. I watched you fall, Daisy. You did everything you could not to harm her, even if it meant getting hurt yourself. You're a good woman, someone I'm proud to love."

She knit her brow and looked up. The butterflies in her heart seemed to dance with joy. "Love?"

He dropped a kiss on her forehead. "Yes, love. I think I've been in love with you since you bashed me over the head in fifth grade."

She smiled. "For helping me carry my lunch. I'm sorry about that." She shook her head sadly. "Tom, it'll never work. We're opposites."

"So what? Lots of good marriages are built on love of an opposite. Look at my parents."

She narrowed her eyes. "Marriages?"

"I know it's too soon, but when the time is right, I'm going to ask you."

He took a step back, laughing. "Okay, you can ask me."

"That's better."

"First, you have to forgive me."

"What for?"

"I did something stupid. I forgot the condom today. I'm clean, but..."

She cocked her head. "I'm clean, too."

"Yes, but what if? Would you mind having kids? With me, I mean. I know your career means a lot to you, and --"

"Tom Williams, you did not just say that. I believe in equal rights. That doesn't preclude children. Just as long as you're prepared to share in diaper duty, I think it would be wonderful to have your child. Oh, and always cuddle me through storms, like this one. And I love you, too."

A look of hope lit his features. "You do? Then, you aren't mad?"

"Probably, but you can ease my pain by signing that petition the ladies are going to circulate. We need to overturn that law, and quick."

"What's the rush?"

"I don't want to get arrested if you find out what's in that drawer next to my bed."

"Okay, I'll bite. What exactly do you have in there?"

She smiled. "Let's just say you're going to have fun finding out."

He pulled her into his arms, leaned down, and waggled his eyebrows. “You know, before we go any further in this relationship, there’s something you have to do.”

She looked up at him suspiciously. “What’s that?”

“Eat a bug. I believe your choice was palmetto.”

“Oh, good grief. You’re not going to hold me to that, are you?”

Lightning snaked across the sky to the west. She felt her eyes go big, and she stepped closer to Tom. His scent surrounded her. She felt safe.

“That depends.”

She eyed the sky to the west nervously. “On what?”

“Can I look in your bedside drawer?”

She laughed and looked up at him, the impending storm chased from her mind by his request. “Tom Williams, you know what I have in there could get me into trouble.”

“I know, but think of the fun I’ll have getting you out.”

The first raindrops hit Daisy in the face, and she stepped back. Tom grabbed her hand and together they ran to the car.

They were gonna break some laws.

 THE END 

Nancy Lindquist

I spend lazy days lounging on a chaise, while my husband rubs my feet with rose oil and the boys bring me Godiva chocolates. What do you mean, you don't believe me? A girl can dream. I'm a fiction writer, after all.

The reality lacks glamour

I write as Nancy Lindquist so as not to upset the relatives. I'm the married mother of four boys. I have been a devoted fan of love and romance all my reading life. I enjoy writing for the virtually limitless world of erotic romance. After all, a penis does not a "throbbing love muscle" make.

In my limited free time I belly dance, travel, race, and train for triathlons (often the last one over the finish line and darn proud of it), and love to cook.

I am devoted to my children, two adopted and two made the old-fashioned way. I am an active advocate for building a family through adoption.

Dyslexic, writing is my passion, and something I never believed I could do until the advent of spell check. (We will now observe a moment of silence in its honor). The unwavering support of my dedicated husband buoys me when it all seems like the world is caving in around me.

I can be e-mailed at nancy@liedel.org. I love contact with my readers. Obviously, e-mails of a stalkerish type will not be returned and no, she is not interested in new sexual partners. Thanks for asking.