

EXOTIKA

ELLORA'S CAVE

# ROUGH RIDER

SHAWNA MOORE

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Roughrider

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# ***ROUGH RIDER***

**Shawna Moore**

### *Dedication*

This Western tale of hard living and loving is dedicated to my beloved late mother who's with me in spirit every day. Also to my husband, the man who serves as heroic inspiration for my stories. And to two of my dearest friends, Patti and Leslie, both savvy and sassy Texas ladies whose unflagging support means the world to me.

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

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Fudgesicle: Unilever Supply Chain, Inc.

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## **Chapter One**

Grease and good-looking men. One I wore on my clothes for hours after finishing a meal here at the Lone Star Diner. The other...well, I simply wore a sexy guy whenever talk turned to action and enough sparks generated between us to set even a flame-retardant mattress on fire.

Another short order slid onto the counter. The Lone Star boasted more full bellies than any diner within the fine state of Texas.

Hearty helpings of fried food, grits, griddle-browned toast and ink-black coffee kept this roadside landmark's customers coming back at least once every day except Sunday.

"You're a damned sight prettier than any of your newspaper pictures, Kim." Cattle baron Clyde Porter of the Far Reaches Ranch blocked my path and held out his meaty hand.

The big order he'd recently placed with my outfitting business would buy thousands of melted milkshakes.

"Thanks for the compliment." I returned his handshake and nodded at Belinda Maddox, Mesa Junction's sassiest hair stylist, as she passed me. "Let me know if those navy twill embroidered work shirts don't work out for you and your ranch hands, Clyde."

"Will do." His tobacco-tainted kiss wetted my right cheek. "Who'd a thought Maureen and Dodge Taylor's little angel would prefer selling Western wear to raising a family. You ain't been around Mesa Junction in a good many years."

"That's why I hand-delivered your shirt order. Same with the square-dancing outfits and boots for you and Trudy. I decided this was the best place for my two weeks of vacation."

Best place on earth, actually. Every year until I turned nineteen I came here in the summertime. Before the car accident that claimed their lives right after my tenth birthday, Mama and Daddy marked our July visits on the kitchen calendar. After that, Grandma Libby and Grandpappy Bo brought me here to Mesa Junction after my parents' passing.

Mama and Gloria Dodson were best friends. They grew up together in Mariana, only a short distance from San Antonio. Never lost touch even when Mama went off to college and Gloria married Mike and moved to Mesa Junction. The fact it was less than a three-hour drive from our home in Mariana to Mesa Junction made for some fun shared times between the families.

Clyde removed a red bandana from the rear pocket of his jeans and swiped the cloth over his nose a couple times. "Two weeks? Hardworking woman like you should take off more than two weeks."

"Business is doing well. Can't spend too much time away or Linc Morgan will have another round with his stomach ulcer."

"Linc...your boyfriend?" He dabbed his nose a final time before shoving the crumpled cowboy-tissue back where it came from.

Hardly. Linc was a good twenty years my senior. "He's my general manager. Reliable to a fault."

Clyde touched the brim on his Stetson. "Must be hard on old Libby and Bo, going to the nursing home. Tell them I asked about them."

"Will do. They're doing well. Grandma doesn't like being cooped up. She misses her bridge club and flower garden."

He laughed. "Bridge ain't the only game she's good at. Libby beat the pants off me at poker when we all played over at Mike and Gloria's. Say, you stayin' at the Dodson place while you're in town?"

I sidestepped a waitress bringing a tray of sandwiches and fries to the booth behind us. "Sure am."

"Jack's sittin' over there now." He hitched a thumb toward the most delicious thing in this busy eatery. "Probably figuring how to deal with the woman you've become. As kids you two were tight as Harriet Lloyd's pants."

No sense telling Clyde that Jack was the main reason I'd come back. Clyde's order could have been shipped but this visit-cum-vacation gave me an excuse to check out the guy of my dirtiest fantasies.

"Couldn't stay away from Gloria's fried chicken and buttermilk biscuits." Wasn't any of his business a far different appetite brought me back to Mesa Junction.

Placing his hands on his lower back, Clyde stretched. "Jack's single. Wild as ever. Can't say he hasn't likely had his share of...dated lots of women. But I'm betting you could set him straight."

As long as I could set my childhood friend's cock straight, that was my first priority.

"You have my cell phone number. And the Mariana store's number. Let Linc or me know if something doesn't suit you all with the order." *And please let me get back to the late supper containing more calories than I've consumed in almost two days.*

His arm came around my shoulders and the silver arrowhead on his bolo flashed. "Get on over there and kick some sense into Jack's stubborn ass." The palm slapped gently between my shoulder blades. "If he'll listen to anyone, he'll listen to you."

A pivot of my feet put both my shoes in a semi-straight path with my lunch counter stool. "Nice talking with you today. Give my best to Trudy." I peeked over my shoulder.

He walked away, stopped near the booth where Deputy Danny Noonan sat, and waved. "Sure will. Stop by if you get a chance."

My feet paused over a crackling floor tile. "Will do, Clyde."

Sexy Jack gulped some of his soda and glanced in my direction. I swallowed a laugh. Wonderful thing about sexual attraction. Any fantasies it spurred could play out

in a person's mind without anyone else becoming privy.

Footsteps came from behind. "Don't ever let those stars in your eyes fade," whispered.

A shake of my head sent the childhood memory back where it belonged. "Perhaps blood vessels from lack of sleep but hardly stars." And it was time to end those sleepless nights and satisfy the hunger that consumed me.

The hunger for Jack Dodson. While my recent dreams had him served up hot, naked and covered in blond hair on those cool white cotton sheets back in my king-size bed in Mariana, I could accomplish the same on his bed here in Mesa Junction.

The place didn't matter. The sexy man did.

"Take care, Kim. Hope to see you around." The clomp-clomp of Clyde's boot heels likely scuffed marks on The Lone Star's floor.

I returned to the stool and mounted it slowly. If this split vinyl seat were Jack's lap, my moves would be better off behind closed doors.

Jack's knife blade carved through the bread, beef slices and gravy. Stainless steel tines speared the sandwich and brought one dripping bite to his mouth. A section of his pink tongue came out and urged the morsel off the fork. Those kissable narrow lips parted and pulled the diner's Monday special inside. How good Jack's tongue would feel licking and rubbing against my clit. I opened my legs, leaned forward and swiveled slightly in his direction. If only we weren't in this greasy spoon, with two people sitting between us, it wouldn't take me more than a second to make the introduction. Cock, meet pussy. The pussy that's been hot and wet for you for so long. No law against friends fucking each other. But such a bold public performance would put me in the headlines of Mesa Junction's *Courier* and in jail. Still, shaking up an otherwise average two weeks of summer vacation was better than sitting on my ass and making it wider by eating fried specials here.

*Marina outfitter gets down and dirty with champion roper.*

Let them bring on the camera crews and make the movie. I swatted a fly and it



glanced off the fingerprint-smeared napkin holder before taunting the town's oldest bachelor, Mervin Haller.

Each suck on my plastic straw brought more wetness between my legs. Never had one of the double-chocolate milkshakes served here tasted this good. Once a proud establishment that served the governor and other politicians passing through our town, the eatery that always advertised what our state stood for had lost the "L" on its sign. It was short on staff and most everything else—even the tall griddle stack served every morning until eleven probably came up two pancakes under par.

My right sandal thumped against the counter partition. Only one thing made my legs and every other part of me restless—Jack Dodson. Daydreams of pouring my frozen drink over his naked body and sucking off every bit of mocha-fudge froth sparked a far more potent hunger.

*Take heart, Kimberly Taylor. This August getaway might yet yield some interesting moments and memories.*

A glance at the red and white wall clock in the shape of a winking cow warned it was time to stop feeding my face. Anything passing my lips after eight in the evening always ended up on my ass or my thighs. Late at night only thicker, full-blooded snacks were welcome for a tour between my legs. At twenty-four minutes until ten, any more fat calories would seek somewhere on my body every man within spitting distance would notice.

Sweet, mouth-watering Jack. My exhaled breath bubbled the milky remnants at the fountain glass's bottom. My resistance was worn thinner than the faded blue blouse that showed off Trina Isley's nipples tonight. Either she made too little at this place to afford a bra or she loved showing off her tits to every man who wasn't too drunk to care. She traced her tongue across the crooked and chipped teeth, the damage due to her brawling with the short-order cook almost ten years ago. Strapping Morley Adams had hauled off and closed her mouth after she flung a scalding burger at him off the grill.

Time stood still in Mesa Junction but Jack got better with age. Hell-raising as the devil. Handsome as any foal. Roping and the rodeo circuit hadn't taken their toll on him. At least nowhere I could tell. During those many vacations spent on the Dodson's ranch property over the years, we'd stared at each other over countless bowls of sugar-frosted flakes and anodized tumblers filled with fresh-squeezed orange juice.

The couple sitting between Jack and me got up, said goodnight and took their tab. Before I dabbed away the moisture my glass made on the counter, Alice Mae Muller's voice asked the departing diners if they enjoyed their meal. Same as when we were kids, Alice Mae reigned over the glass counter filled with assorted candy, tins of snuff and collectables. Always old-fashioned. Hard to tell how much of a fuss she put up when they replaced that old jamb-keyed manual model with an electronic cash register.

Jack glanced my way and licked off his fork. "Nice having you back here for a visit. Mama's talked about nothing else for the past month."

*And you? Has my visit meant anything more to you than another body at your mama's breakfast table?* "Mesa Junction is one of my favorite places. Lots to see and do here when I'm not catching up on sleep."

"Depends on what you're seeing and who you're doing." Jack winked and returned his attention to another slice of beef. "Not much exciting in here unless you count the fact they got a new chicken fryer last week. 'Bout time for that."

"You always loved your mama's fried chicken. Couldn't get enough."

He gulped some of his water and grinned. "Always have had a big appetite."

Each time Jack swiveled toward or away from the counter the stool squeaked. The front of his jeans bore faded spots, either from too many rounds on the rodeo circuit or from the many times his ornery ass had gotten in water so hot it's small wonder his balls weren't shrunken. I took another long suck on the straw and dropped my gaze to his crotch. Definitely lots of inches and action behind that metal zipper.

Damn. It should be against Texas law for a man to walk around looking so fine. Fine? Hell no. He beat corn silk all solid when it came to that. According to Gloria he'd

given up the rodeo bit and accepted a career as co-manager and roughrider over at the Circle Red Ranch. With that ranch only about forty-five minutes north of the Dodson property, I'd have more chances of coming into contact with bad boy Jack and his hot body.

Depends on what I'm seeing or who I'm doing? Did he sense my sexual attraction to him or was he simply avoiding an issue as was his habit ever since I could remember?

Blond, buff and oh-so beddable planted his snakeskin boots on the cracked faux terracotta linoleum tiles and tossed a couple bills onto the counter. *Yeah, sure, pay Trina a tip. But what about paying for the misery you've put me through for the past decade?* Too many dirty dreams to count and I remembered most of them as though they'd just happened.

Lean as the finest piece of meat, Jack turned toward me. "Let's head on over to Trail Dust for a couple cold ones. We can catch up on everything."

*Don't think so, melt-in-my-mouth handsome.* He paid Alice Mae and waited at the front door. I climbed down and headed straight for Heaven on Earth. After I settled my bill and tipped Alice Mae instead of Trina, he held the door for me and I stepped into the night air. I'd never catch up on all the hours of sleep I'd lost.

But I could catch up with a commitment-shy guy like Jack if he kept on wearing those toe-pinching cowboy boots.

Bring on the catching up and so much more.

\* \* \* \* \*

Smoke curled from a stranger's cigarette toward the glasses racked over the busiest bar in Mesa Junction. Trail Dust never wanted for customers and served up the best hot wings in the world. Sharma Goodwin wiped wet spots and crumbs from the bar counter, her meaty upper arm flapping with each pass of the rumpled cloth. Waylon wailed one of his classics from the jukebox in need of a service call. Lord help anyone who suggested replacing that relic with a new one. Hank Miller, the sentimental owner

of the Trail Dust, wouldn't hear of such a waste and travesty.

Bubbles churned inside the glowing red panel of the jukebox. Peanut shells snapped underneath my cinnamon-red-dyed snakeskin boots as I approached the bubbling beauty. So many quarters jammed into its slot over the years.

Someone caught me by the belt loops of the jeans that fit so tight they'd split if I sneezed too hard, and I staggered backward. I looked down, lifted my left heel and smashed it down on the size thirteen or fourteen boot of the man who dared holding me hostage.

"You got tougher with age. But I'll bet there's something soft underneath that t-shirt." Whiskey breath floated beside my ear and reached my nose.

"Stop sneaking up on me, Jack. If there's any rope around here I'll tie you up, Jack. See how you like that."

He cupped my breasts. "Like to see you try. These grew since I last saw you."

"Guess so." Along with my fondness of wild men.

"Wes Lyles always liked them. Always talked about you down at the garage."

I broke loose from his hold and wheeled on the biggest flirt in this bar or any other. "That grease monkey watched all the women who stopped by his daddy's gas station and garage." I played with the top snap of his chambray shirt and popped it loose. "Don't say that isn't so."

"Maybe, but Wes was a good guy. Got married about four years ago, sold the station and garage and moved to Oklahoma with his pregnant wife."

Lacing my fingers with his, I tugged him toward a table in the far corner. After I managed to choose the chair with the bum leg, he settled into the one facing away from the dance floor and bar. Both long legs, encased in faded and torn denim, stretched to near my right boot toe.

Bethanne Jervis sauntered over and set a canister of pretzels on our table. "Can I get you both something to drink?"

Jack nodded at me and I ordered a diet soda. He chose a draft beer and unscrewed the jar lid. His long fingers closed around a full hard pretzel and pulled it out. As the crispy dough struck the red and black vinyl tablecloth it split almost in half.

"Nice trick."

"Wasn't a trick. How long are you back for?"

*Long enough to find out if doing you will be a cure for...*

Whoops and applause caused us both to search for the cause of all the excitement. Straddling a bar stool, Paul Westcott waved a bill underneath Sharma's nose. Each time she tried snatching the money he pulled away.

Paul thumped the counter. "Set the bar up, honey. Hell, set the whole damned place up. I feel good tonight. Nothing can piss me off."

Jack snapped off a wedge of pretzel, chomped it several times and swallowed. "Wonder what the hell crawled up his ass and tickled him?"

Too bad it only tickled and couldn't gag Westcott. "If only something would spit on Paul. Remember Mrs. Johnston's precious cat, Tinker? That black and white cat that hissed every time someone walked past her porch on Poole Street. But Tinker really disliked Paul Westcott. Even your mama used to talk about that."

"Yeah." Jack stirred a few pieces of fallen salt with his fingertip. "Paul's been wired up like this for the past year, year and a half. Puts so much money in the church's collection plate the folks at the Baptist church on Reilly Avenue call him Wealthy Westcott."

"How did he hit it so big? He owns those small orchards and the old hotel, The Madison Arms, but those would hardly put him in a league with the Rockefellers."

A flick of Jack's right middle finger sent the remaining pretzel my way. "Don't know. He pisses Jacksons and Grants. Tips Sharma and the girls with nothing less than Hamiltons. But he won't touch a drop of alcohol. Only drinks root beer or soda."

"I see he's taken up with your mama. Wouldn't have ever thought Gloria Dodson

would fall for such a limp-dicked loser like him.”

Jack’s fist met with the tabletop and several chips of pretzel jumped up off the cloth. “Don’t remind me. He’s up to something but she won’t listen to my reasoning. Of course I’m not around all that much. Last week I accepted a position over at the Circle Red Ranch. Up in Luxaloosa in McMullen County. Co-managing with Tim Mallory. Get to break in those horses too.”

“The same Tim Mallory whose family hosted those big barbecues every summer?”

“Very same. Has a wife and four kids. Great guy.”

“What do Westcott and your mother have in common?”

“He’s looking for a woman who’ll put up with his bullshit and she’s looking to get laid since Dad passed away. Never saw a smart woman act like such a fool over...such a fool. Mama never was a glutton for punishment but then Dad treated her with respect. This Westcott brings her flowers and then proceeds to tell her how it’s gonna be.”

“I’d tell him how it’s gonna be—through a closed door with every lock secured. If Paul’s so pious what’s he doing in this bar?”

“I suspect he has a part interest in it somehow.”

About a hundred feet from where we sat a hairy arm sent a chair crashing to the floor. On the tabletop beside him a woman with her legs splayed wide swayed to the tune blaring in the background. The bottle in her right hand disappeared underneath the short skirt. She swirled her hand around a couple times and the bottle reappeared.

“Here ya go. It’ll taste better now.” Laughing and stomping her bare feet, she passed the beer back to a guy young enough to be her son.

The muscular chair hurler laid a left hook to the jaw of the man who encouraged the antics of the frizzy-haired bimbo. Though the young brown-haired guy teetered he stood his ground and wore a shit-eating grin. Another guy helped the troublemaking table dancer down and shooed her away from her current lover and the one who’d just put his mouth over the place where her pussy had been.

Another swing of the hefty brawler's arm sent the beer bottle flying from the grinning guy's hand. Beer rained down and struck the table while the bottle split against the floor. The cursing men traded punches and jabs.

"Come on." Jack's chair grated against the wooden floorboards. He stood and brought me to my feet. "Let's get out of this damned place before all hell breaks loose."

When I didn't move he scooped me into his arms and carried me past the onlookers and couples still slow dancing. More glass shattered and a loud crack, likely of wood splitting, sent a shiver down my spine. Despite my struggling, Jack's hold wouldn't budge.

We weaved past Westcott and got stuck behind a group of rowdies who had just arrived. If they were looking for a decent good time, they'd come to the wrong place, unless they got off on bar brawls.

"You think that's something?" Paul "Wild Eye" Westcott's voice boomed. "Don't see me crying about the economy. There's money to be made if a man goes about it right."

"If you weren't with me I'd punch him in the damned big mouth." Jack thanked the guy holding the door for us and forged straight ahead. "Needs to keep his ugly face away from my mama and me."

A discarded beer bottle caught a bit of red neon from the gaudy sign. My hand tingled underneath Jack's and he steered us across the macadam toward his pickup.

Not yet eleven and Trail Dust's parking lot was filled save for a few spaces near the trash receptacle.

No doubt about it. Nighttime in Mesa Junction beat the daylights out of the remaining hours.

French fry grease and freshly mowed grass came in with my next breath. At least there wasn't any smoke out here. "So much for conversation and reconnecting in there." I blew a stale breath toward the sky where the moon flirted with an overstuffed cloud.

Jack lowered the tailgate and lifted me into the truck's bed. Cold steel met my bare legs and I wiggled backward. Bits of hay clung to my palms.

In a single blink he grabbed my feet and slipped off my thong sandals. His callused fingers worked over the soles and top, sometimes teasing, sometimes massaging. "We never connected on the level either of us wanted."

"We've always been good friends. You even shared your blankets on the Christmases that Mama, Daddy and I visited you all."

Four fingers from his right hand spread the toes of my left foot. "But I never shared my bed."

I gave a slight kick and the fingers curled over the top of my foot. "You were too much of a bed hog to do that. Heard Gloria call you that a couple times. Said you sprawled out more than your hound dog, Rascal."

"Remember the time you and Grace Palmer went swimming in Broadmann's Creek?" He pulled my foot toward his mouth and popped the big toe between his lips.

"I...uh...Broadmann's Creek?" The time we went skinny-dipping?

He nodded and bit down hard. My clit and toe throbbed and wetness pooled in my panties. The sucking became more intense, his tongue even swirling around the toe's underside.

"I went swimming in the creek lots of times." Without him, unfortunately.

He surrendered my well-sucked and spit-wet toe. "That day you showed anyone around your naked tits and ass. Grace had the weirdest nipples. Large and purple like grapes." Several fingers swiped down my cleavage. "But yours were pink. Pink like those tea roses on Mama's trellis."

Many words described Jack Dodson. Subtle was never one of them. "Where were you?"

"I rode up on my bike. Heard you two giggling and propped my bike against a tree some distance away. Ducked down and hid. You two were busy talking about that



shopping trip you took with Grace's mother earlier that morning."

"You remember that?"

He climbed up beside me and pulled me down so that our bodies fit together in a straight line. The glow of the bar's signs, a couple distant pole lights and a half-moon flashed in his eyes. His breath came hot against my mouth and I curled my lips over it.

His left arm flopped over my hip. "That and a whole lot more. Watched you two get off. You showed Grace where to find her clit. She started rubbing herself like she was getting a pork shoulder ready for the barbecue pit."

My laugh hit his nose and he blinked.

"You couldn't have seen all that."

"Damned well did. You had your legs apart and were touching yourself. All those red curls..." He trailed his hand down over my hip and thigh and fit it against my crotch. "Probably shaved 'em all off. So fucking sexy. Bet you're wet tonight."

I ground my crotch against his hand. "You think you know everything."

"Not everything." The zipper on my shorts followed his hand down and then up again. "But I do know how to make a woman happy."

## Chapter Two

Each of the farmhouse's steps I descended creaked louder than the previous one. This night wasn't going to give me a second's more sleep than any other. So much for trying to connect with Jack on a more intimate level hours ago. Talking dirty was fun. But I preferred action to talking. Action as in my body riding his. Action that never came close to happening. My next step brought a groan from the carpet-covered wood. Things never creaked and groaned in this house when Mike Dodson was alive. I couldn't have announced my early morning wandering any more by setting off a powder keg on the front porch.

If only Jack hadn't played with my zipper. And my mind. He likely knew how to please a woman, but instead of proving that to me he'd hauled his ass out of the truck bed and into the driver's seat. All that teasing turned on my mind and body and sleep away.

No use tossing and turning, pretending the clit vibe and pleasure balls were Jack instead of cheap plastic thrills that never lived up to their claims.

Sheba, Gloria's Siamese, purred and padded past me. In the brief flash of her light-blue eyes she possessed the same animal tendencies as another blue-eyed creature. A male creature with unruly blond hair and a way of making me wet like no other.

Dawn's first light shone through the sheers in the dining room. Even though Mike had been gone for almost five years, his place setting remained as always—including the beveled glass into which Consuela always poured his tomato juice at breakfast time.

I forced my eyelids open wide and snapped on the kitchen light. Tuesday morning already. All I'd managed since leaving Jack was wearing out batteries and watching the changing patterns of the red digits on the clock's display for the past four and a half hours. The hair clips yielded to my pinches and came loose. My still-damp hair teased

down my back and swished against my ass and I tossed the tortoiseshell accessories onto the kitchen table. Bathed in the subtle yellow light, I shuffled over to the fridge and shoved my head inside. A carton of limeade sat so close to the orange juice I fully expected a tongue-curling experience upon opening either and swigging down some of the contents. Make no mistake. We of human extraction knew nothing of what went on behind the closed refrigerator door.

The eggs might even prefer mingling with the mustard on occasion.

With a carton of milk in one hand and a pink foam carton of eggs in the other, I bumped the fridge door closed with my hip. Consuela had already placed a mint green ceramic bowl of buckwheat flour on the counter. I set the milk and eggs beside it and counted down the numerous drawers housing every utensil known to kitchen witches and culinary artistes.

“Want me to show you how to make the best pancakes?” Jack entered the kitchen and swatted my ass. Not yet dawn and already one sexy man was likely rising in more ways than one.

How long had he been watching me? I spun around and my left pink fuzzy slipper skidded underneath the kitchen table. “Sure, Jack. Show me what you want to *eat* this morning.”

Boy, I had to lose sleep more often. My inhibitions were down and off faster than Angela Morris’ panties during halftime at the high school football games.

Two drawers down from where I stood wearing one slipper and keeping my lips closed to prevent salivation, Jack removed a set of beaters. “You’ll need these to get everything together the way it should be.”

Huh? What I was cooking up at the moment hardly required crazy loops of metal and buckwheat flour. “I’ll warn you in advance. Cooking isn’t one of my strong points.”

“Neither is eating.” He slapped the eggbeater’s handle and the curved blades spun around a couple times. “That nice body of yours won’t stay that way if you starve it. Spent more time playing with your food at the diner than eating it last night.”

He set down the implement, cracked open the new carton of milk and poured liberally over the bowl. Drawing back his tanned arm, he put the open flap up to his mouth and tossed back a long swallow. I drifted my gaze over his bare tanned chest. Golden hairs coiled around each pink nipple. Over his belly a sparser thatch sprouted and trailed to the waistband of his sapphire blue and white striped pajama bottoms. Lord but I could feed on him for every meal and not mind the ravages of starvation whatsoever.

The tie ends dangled over his crotch and underneath the fly lay a bulge my fingers were obligated to uncover before any batter hit Sue's griddle. The burning in my belly competed with the hammering in my head.

*Strip him bare. Do him on the kitchen floor. Tear that carton out of his hands and put them to better use.*

"Care for some?" He passed me the carton.

I grabbed it from his grip and plunked it beside the mixing bowl. *Cut the crap.* "We both know what we want this morning."

He twirled the one pajama bottom tie around his finger but not enough to separate the flap opening. "Yeah. I always have a bigger appetite about this time of day."

The right slipper joined the left and I closed the distance between Mister-oh-so-hot-I-could-scramble-the-eggs-right-on-him and myself.

At touching his left biceps my fingers tingled. "Care to show me how to make your morning the best it can be?"

A grin parted his kissable lips and revealed the straight teeth underneath. His long tongue swiped along the lower lip before disappearing back inside. He immersed the beaters in the mix and stirred them around. Not a drop of battered milk splashed out.

"Crack two eggs in here and that'll get things going."

*Going? Excuse me, rodeo man. Can't you hear my heart over here? And my clit's throbbing more than your mother's head when she gets those migraines. I'm already going.*

A sharp rap of each beige shell against the mint green ceramic brought an ooze of egg white and then a plump yolk into the foamy mess. I scooped the empty, slick eggshells into a paper towel and dumped them in the trashcan. The lid clanked shut as my foot left the lever.

Soft whirring and sloshing filled the kitchen. The grandfather clock in the foyer chimed five times. No cock crowing around here anymore, but some banty rooster wasn't what I wanted anyway.

He gave the pancake batter one last whirl and set the beaters against the side of the bowl. I followed his shower-clean scent to a spot where his body heat met mine. His hands played along my sides and eased the coral nightshirt upward over my hips.

My nipples tingled against the sheer cotton fabric. All of his fingers found my bare ass and clenched, pulling the cheeks apart. He leaned down and clamped my nipple and a section of nightshirt between his teeth. Over and under, he sucked and licked the nipple until cum dripped down my leg.

"You smell so damned good, Kim. That wet pussy is so damned sweet. Pink and juicy. Just waiting for me to lick your clit and shove some fingers in there."

"Yes. Finger fuck me. Then put your tongue and cock in me."

He straightened but kept his hands on me. The nightshirt snaked up over my belly. I raised my arms. Another jerk of his hands brought the garment over my head and swishing behind me. He grabbed my waist and I guided his kissing mouth to my nipple. The flesh bloomed almost to a bursting point under his rough tongue and teeth. He thumbed my clit and more wetness came.

The tongue stopped its torment and he drew his slick hand to his mouth. In a heartbeat the puddle of cum was wiped clean by his tongue. "I've dreamed about fucking you for so long. My cock was hard all night thinking about you and those tight cutoffs. I wasn't the only man wanting to lick off that diner stool after you got up last night."

"I..."

Several of his fingers thrust inside my pussy and worked their way deeper. I rode his hand and reached toward our homemade breakfast. My stiff fingers curled and scooped some of the batter from the mixing bowl. I brought the handful of goop over his chest and the fingers popped free.

His grin widened. "What you put on me, you have to suck off."

"Only if I can suck your cock too."

"Deal." Both of his hands delved into the milk-scented muck. "Turn around and let me see your ass. Bend over and give me a good-morning smile."

As my arms dangled, he landed a hard slap to both cheeks. Squeezing and kneading both buttocks, he tracked some of the pancake mixture onto my pussy. Next the metal spatula struck me soundly. Then again. And again.

"Bad girls get their asses whipped."

"I thought that was for the eggs."

His tongue trailed over my sticky ass and down into the crease. More cum dripped down my legs. I scooted forward and spun on him. The cloth pajama bottom ties came undone with little effort and I stripped the pants off his lean hips.

"Don't have any condoms on me right now. But I can get one upstairs if you want." Jack wiped a smear of batter off his chin.

"Won't be necessary." I kissed the spot where the batter had been. "I'm on the Pill and know you have better sense than to screw other women without using protection."

He stroked my cheek. "Got that right."

Eight or nine inches of thick cock pointed at me. I wiped the rest of my batter onto his legs and knelt. The cock head penetrated my mouth and I cuffed the base with my thumb and forefinger. Heavy and musky, the balls draped against my thumb and I pumped and swallowed him.

"Deep throat, honey. Take me all the way down."

The cock head nudged past my tonsils and I tickled his balls. His hips moved his

hardness deeper until my breath caught below him. Slowly I surrendered every engorged inch.

He pulled me upright and crushed his mouth on mine. The room whirled and he danced me toward the kitchen table. At reaching our destination he stopped. His strong arm shoved the closest chair out of the way and turned me so I faced the piece of furniture on which the Dodsons dined. My belly bumped against the table's edge and the plastic cloth shifted at the pressure. I splayed my legs wide, pressed my palms against the tabletop and balanced on the balls of my feet. Blood throbbed in my fingertips and his warm cock head grazed my left buttock.

"Open up wider and raise your sweet ass higher. I want to see that pink juicy pussy."

My sticky feet had tracked some of the batter onto the floor near the table. At fulfilling his request my arches and calf muscles strained. While my legs slipped backward my upper body lurched forward. Jack's hands grabbed my hips and squeezed.

"I'll bet you'll wring every damned drop out of me."

"That's for me to know and you to —"

He entered me from behind, taking control and every bit of breath from my body. My nails carved half moons in the tomato-red plastic table covering and I swallowed a scream. In and out he worked, like a piston. Each thrust drove the table and farthest end chair toward the opposite cabinets and I clung on for the delicious ride.

His right hand caught my hair and he dragged his knuckles over the back of my neck. "So damned good. We've waited a long time for this." He slapped my left buttock

A faint gasp came from my far right. I heaved the hot air from my mouth. Her black hair framed against the stark whiteness of the kitchen door, Consuela—affectionately nicknamed "Sue" by the Dodson family—watched us doing the dirtiest deed in what usually served as her domain.

The hand that likely would griddle our pancakes and scramble our eggs covered

her mouth and she backed out the way she'd come in. A coil of heat wound its way from my belly to my pussy – and probably scalded his balls, from the guttural noises rumbling in his throat.

Jack's hips pummeled me. The saltshaker tipped over, spilling granules toward the carnival glass green apple that served as the only table decoration. Another grand slam opened my mouth and the scream came out.

"Damn. You have such a fine pussy. So hot. I could stay in there all day long." The carnal collision stopped and he pulled out. "At least until nine. Mama never gets up before then."

I let my heels touch the floor. "Come on my ass. Let it drip down and then lick me off."

Warm cum squirted against my left buttock and lower back and he tapped the cock head against my crease. More cum shot out and dripped down my ass.

"I...shit." He pulled me hard against him, his hot breath coming in pants against my scalp. Damp fingers cupped my pussy and smeared my stickiness onto the Brazilian strip of hair above.

How I would have loved looking into his eyes at this moment. "Mmmmm...uuhhhh." Bottle rockets exploded in my belly and the ripple effect carried to my feet. My toes curled against the cool linoleum and I rode out the orgasm.

Jack supported my body, rubbing my cum- and batter-covered ass against his front. His teeth sank into the tender skin of my shoulder. When they stopped their torment a few kisses eased the sting.

"Think Sue will make us those pancakes and eggs?" He pulled my tangled hair into a loose ponytail and licked my earlobe.

A little wiggle and pinch to his leg allowed me freedom. I stepped sideways and away from the table, turned and sprang at him. We both toppled to the floor. At our landing the egg timer bounced off the counter and crashed not too far from his head. I sat on top of my lover and locked my legs against his heaving sides.



Lowering to the level of his blond-stubble-covered cheeks, I stared him down. "Safer to say, you man the griddle and I'll tend the cast-iron skillet. Let this be our bribe so she won't spill our secret."

"What are you going to do after breakfast?" His next breath rustled my bangs.

"I'm going upstairs to get a little more sleep." The tip of my nose touched his. "Alone."

\* \* \* \* \*

Another shift on the bed bunched the handcrafted spread underneath my butt. How stupid, thinking I could sleep after a solid helping of breakfast food and Jack. What's a girl to do when she wants more and the man she wants has a job awaiting his sexy hide?

*Plip. Plop. Plip. Plop.*

This bedroom had turned into the ultimate torment. Mike Dodson was once the best plumber in Duval County. God rest his friendly soul. The faucets in this farmhouse probably never dripped more than a couple hours without being repaired. I fitted my hands over my ears but dropped them. No use. If it wasn't the dripping faucets making me long to tear my hair out, it was the drip down the hall screwing Gloria for the past half hour.

Being the guest, I couldn't even tell her to get a room. She had one—in her own house.

Each time I tracked my nail over the buttercup chenille bedspread, more fuzzy threads clung to my damp fingertip. Damned fools down the hall. Fucking like wildcats. How was my delicious breakfast supposed to settle?

Gloria and Paul really had it bad for one another but my skin crawled south of the Tex-Mex border every time I got within fifty feet of the beady-eyed bastard. More squeaking from the box spring they'd worn out well before my arrival last weekend. If I wanted any naps I'd have to learn to close my door first.

I rubbed my backside where Jack had spread the pancake batter early this morning. How delicious, that sticky egg, milk and buckwheat flour mixture oozing down the crease and clinging to my pussy. He'd struck me with the spatula and made several red marks. But he kissed each one and made it better.

My bent leg drove the Daisy Dukes into my crotch and my clit throbbed underneath the constricting denim. Rocking forward brought more heat and wetness. I closed my eyes. Naughty daydreams played against the black backdrop of my lids. Jack tonguing my nipples. Deep in my pussy when Consuela walked into the kitchen. Her honey-brown hand clamped across her mouth.

Unfastening the snap did little to lessen the tightness in my belly. I sprang off the bed, grabbed my huaraches and headed through the door. At reaching the hallway I paused. Paul's groans carried to where I stood. Toupee-wearing jerk. Gloria would do far better buying one of those extra thick dildos at Francine's Boutique and screwing her own self.

The hum of Sue's vacuum cleaner echoed from the front parlor. I pounded down the steps. Who gave a damn if they heard? My feet hit the foyer runner and I rounded the corner. A black cord stretched behind Sue and my approach didn't faze the most fastidious cleaner and cook in the glorious state of Texas.

At reaching what used to serve as Mike's den, I hurried inside and closed the door behind me. From the bookcase I pulled *Moby Dick*. Still secured to the wooden support panel behind with a strip of electrical tape was the key. I peeled it loose, locked the door and tossed the brass instrument of my solitude onto the mahogany desk.

Settling into the sturdy captain's chair, I turned on the computer. As the graphics and programs loaded, each breath I took brought a bitter woodiness onto my tongue. *Some damned idiot took a bath in cologne.* My brain seized. Wait a damned minute. My hand struck the mouse and nearly sent it to the floor. Westcott wore that same fragrance. The whole upstairs reeked of his signature skunk scent.

But why did I still smell that piss-awful stuff down here? Almost as strong as

though I were in the same room with him.

Mike's favorite screensaver appeared. Two does and a fawn posed among pines and some undergrowth. I opened a new document file and typed a sexy message to Jack. Where I wanted him to touch and suck. Where he could put his cock. How I'd love putting syrup on his balls and licking it off. After saving the draft I leaned back and stretched.

Be careful. Don't appear too eager for his sexual attention. There are lots of women out there who've been fucked and forgotten by Jack Dodson. Just like the bulls and calves, he roped women in and probably tied them head to heels. But none of them had my gorgeous pair of black patent leather fuck-me boots that could be worn in bed. Boots I'd designed. I accessed the draft document and hit delete. Where would these weeks of vacation take me other than Mesa Junction and the cedar-scented guestroom where everything was wearing out except its latest occupant?

Another click accessed the recycle bin. One file remained besides mine. How odd. Mike was always careful about cleaning out anything unnecessary at the end of his work sessions in this den. And he'd been gone for almost five years now. Gloria admitted she never came in here. Sue likely never touched a thing other than to dust and vacuum. Jack was too busy to bother with computers. According to Gloria, he came home for his father's funeral but left the next day on another circuit tour.

*Go ahead, nosy woman with the aching pussy. Open the mystery file and see what's there.*

Why not? Mike was always a kind soul. Let me come in here and read when I was a teenager. Told me where he kept the key hidden if I wanted a bit of privacy. He'd never haunt me from his grave.

I aimed and clicked. Ten names appeared, all using first initials. Listed vertically, one after the other. Three spaces between each name. Had other information been here but deleted?

Cursing Paul Westcott, I closed out the suspicious file but let it remain in the trash. For good measure I removed my file. A search of the computer's contents delivered

several clues to another user's identity. Several trashy boutiques specializing in everything from lotions to lingerie of the worst ilk. A couple URLs for tracking of packages or mail.

Today my curiosity and computer savvy came in handy. What a mother lode of crap. Someone was really desperate to enhance his or her sexuality. Surely not Gloria. Her idea of seduction used to be candlelit dinners, Latin music and possibly a sexy soak for two in the hot tub Mike had gifted her on her forty-third birthday.

The times and sexual tides were changing around here. Rising right along with the suspicious man upstairs in Gloria's bed.

I shut down the computer. After unlocking the door and replacing the key, I emerged from the only place one could escape bad-sex noises that made my orange juice do a dirty dance with the scrambled eggs.

One other thing I had to check. The phone bills. Was there a pattern of calls to a certain area or person? Calls that might provide further clues and a connection to the URLs I'd found? No way would I believe Gloria could suddenly be interested in purchasing merchandise from the types of places she'd always denounced.

Not the woman who always wore cotton flannel and two-piece summer pajamas to bed while Uncle Mike was still living.

While Sue buffed orange-oil polish into every piece of wood furniture in the front room, I headed for the pantry where Gloria kept the most unique filing system known to womankind. I snatched the spare pen from the kitchen drawer and a napkin from the orange plastic holder. Once inside the pantry I pulled the floppy cardboard box filled with utility and other bills from the farthest bottom cupboard. At finding the phone bills, I swallowed a scream that would surely rival any of those from the master bedroom where two desperate souls rode each other raw.

The same three numbers showed up multiple times on each phone bill for the past seven months and I jotted them on the napkin. Aloma. Just outside of Laredo. Who did Gloria call so much in that tiny town where even the bugs got bored and moved on?

And if she didn't dial those digits, who had used her phone and computer to conduct questionable transactions? Not hard to figure out. No harder than the pinhead of her bed partner, Paul Westcott.

Humming and the squeaking of linoleum tiles came from the kitchen. I shoved the bills back into the box and hauled the floppy storage chest into the cupboard just as Sue peeped into the pantry.

"Don't tell anyone you saw me in here please."

As she nodded, a wavy section of raven hair fell over Sue's right eye. "No more than I'll tell how you and Jack made pancakes and ate them off each other before the griddle was hot this morning."

## Chapter Three

Mike Dodson's den provided the perfect place to collect my thoughts, check out some things with my business and figure out Paul Westcott's wicked angles. If luck prevailed my dirty secret of sex with Jack and my snooping would remain safe with Sue. I shifted position on the captain's chair and shot another glance at the door. Household tasks now kept Sue occupied. Gloria mentioned running an errand.

Another mouse click loaded the Cowboy Connection's website loaded on my laptop and my latest collection of leather and suede goods appeared on the screen. I drained the dregs of my limeade and shoved the blue plastic tumbler past the printouts I'd pulled from my attaché. Vacation was a welcome shift of pace but my work never waited while I relaxed. Relaxed? How could I relax in a house where a sex-starved widow sought solace in the arms of a hairy baboon whose stare could strip ten coats of paint off any barn or outhouse? Speaking of outhouses, he'd do better to sit in one and close the door. Then he wouldn't stink up this place so much.

Paul Westcott had to be behind those Aloma calls on the phone bill.

He was worse than the blister on my finger caused by a splatter of bacon grease this morning. I loosened the fit of my bandage and tamped the sticky end back down. A long time since I'd worn any bandages. Probably not since I fell off that old tire swing Mike Dodson rigged for Jack and me when we were twelve.

I closed my eyes and a pimple-faced Jack knelt before me in the farmyard.

*"Told you not to swing so high, Kim. You could have broken your leg." He swabbed the clump of antiseptic-soaked cotton over my knee and then fanned the area dry. "Mom will have my hide for pushing you that hard."*

*"I asked you to. Besides, what's the use of swinging if you don't get too far off the ground?" The stinging subsided but the wound and some fresh blood remained.*

*Jack laid a bandage over the spot and pushed the sticky ends down. "You're a girl. Girls aren't used to doing stuff like boys."*

The vacuum cleaner droned closer to the den door. I opened my eyes and sat forward in the chair. Stuff like boys?

Jack Dodson was no longer a boy and I did as I damned well pleased. If a woman could settle his wild hide, he had the makings of a perfect husband. Compassionate. Hardworking. Handsome.

Capable of causing multiple orgasms in a single morning.

I sniffed, pulled a travel-size bottle from my handbag and shot a couple sprays of green tea essence into the air. That should remove the lingering stench of the cat-piss cologne Paul wore. Gloria had no business letting him use Mike's den.

Another glance at the screen brought a wonderful burrowing warmth in my belly. The Cowboy Connection's profits were up twenty percent from the last quarter. Elwood Jennings' order made that possible. He'd selected the crimson brushed twill shirts with the custom-embroidered bull's horn insignia and stud detail for his ranch hands, trainers and managers. All staff at his six ranching properties throughout Montana wore my gear.

My next breath came sneezing back out. No more mouth-watering aroma of cinnamon sugar, fried eggs, fluffy pancakes...and Jack's cum. I drummed the fingers of my right hand over the printouts. My business back in Mariana was more than fine. But the business going on here in Mesa Junction and Aloma wasn't.

Aloma. Even Consuela shuddered when I mentioned that town. Only the most desperate sought rooming or refuge there. Laborers, drifters, pawnshops, dollar stores...

Wait a minute. In Aloma only one thing was looser than the hinges on my Grandpappy's old barn door—the morals of the people living and loving there. What business would a supposedly Christian man such as Paul conduct in that town?

Damned if I'd let Paul hurt Gloria or Jack in any way.

A soft rap sounded on the den door. I shoved the printout into the attaché, clicked out of the website and shut down the laptop. Another rap came, this one more pronounced. At opening the door I came face to face with Consuela.

"Please. I need to talk to you. You have to know what's going on. Gloria's just mentioned to one of her friends that she might be getting engaged." The words panted from between her thin lips.

Stepping back, I let her pass and locked the door behind us. "You look ten shades paler than a polecat's stripe."

"It's that Paul Westcott. He's a devil."

"You didn't come in here to tell me that." A touch of my hand on her forearm relaxed her shoulders and jaw.

"He's into some awful business over in Aloma. Bad business."

"And this business is probably the way he makes the most of his money."

She nodded, the scent of cornbread and peppers on her skin and clothing. "A friend of mine got away from him before it was too late."

"He was dating another woman while sleeping with Gloria? The filthy bastard. Someone should cut him off at more than the pass."

With each shake of her head her Kokopelli earrings slapped against the sides of her neck. "Not dating. He was my friend's...what do you call it...not really a pimp. He has women trained to cater to him and other men. She and twelve other women came here several years ago. They worked in his orchards for a little while."

I walked her over to the desk. "What were they doing when they weren't working in the orchards?" The carriage clock's workings twirled and ticked off the seconds and minutes. A narrow shaft of afternoon sun came through the parted curtain and caught on the brass dagger letter opener.

Her mouth opened, closed and opened again. "They serve as slaves. He keeps them in an old rooming house."



"A whorehouse?"

Her lips worked together but no words came out. She looked over my left shoulder, both dark brown eyes filling with tears. "Can't say for sure."

"Does he charge for their favors?"

She sank her teeth into the back of her hand and dropped her gaze. Her breath came in rasps interspersed with tiny, half-swallowed cries.

"You can tell me, Sue. I trust what you have to say." I placed my hand over hers and eased it away from further bites.

"They are tied up some of the time. Those men do things I dare not mention." She reached into her blouse and brought the crucifix into view. Her fingers worked over the gold-plated possession and she muttered something I couldn't discern. "Evil doesn't begin to describe Paul Westcott. He even forced himself on me once."

"What did you do?"

"I was frying a skillet of chicken. As I removed the pan from the stove he backed off and zipped himself back up."

"You should have tossed that melted fat in his face. He deserves to be marked for what he does. I hope I can make Gloria see the error in her choice in men before it's too late."

She dropped the crucifix and fumbled in the pink apron pocket. Popping a peppermint into her mouth, she sucked for a moment, the candy clattering against her teeth. "She's blind to his ways. Believes his fool talk. He gives her those flowers or a bottle of perfume and she falls at his feet."

"Not anymore." Strange heat flared throughout my body.

Sue's fingers fastened around my arms and squeezed. "You'd better be careful. He carries a gun in the glove compartment of his truck."

"Let him. Where is that place in Aloma?"

"A mile or two out of town. 'Bout an hour's drive from here. Has a pair of bulls

painted on the sign."

The sizzling in my gut rose to a boil. "If only a real one would gore him."

Sue dropped her hands and turned away from me. "None of those horses in the stable can stand him. One tossed him off."

"Which one?"

"Voodoo. Belongs to Jack. Now that he's over at the Circle Red, that horse will be going with him." She paused at the door, her hand on the knob, and glanced over her shoulder. "Things aren't good anymore without Mr. Dodson around."

I walked toward her. "Jack doesn't seem as close to his mother as he once was. Is that true or just my imagination?"

"Paul Westcott has driven a wedge between Gloria and her son. They almost came to blows one night after supper."

The mere mention of a fight, especially between Jack and the Jackass, made my adrenaline rush. "Over what?"

"Paul said something about Gloria and him going into business together. I was coming through the kitchen door. Stayed put until he and Jack sat down."

"What type of business?"

"Can't say. Talk around town is that Westcott is into no-good business at the old rooming house."

"Such as harboring sex slaves in Aloma. Tell me more about the night Jack and Paul clashed." I massaged above both eyebrows.

"Paul went for the carving knife. Dripped beef broth all over Gloria's tablecloth. But she stayed quiet. Jack threatened to split Paul's skull."

"There's more to Westcott than meets most eyes. His Christian façade is thinner than toilet paper."

"If you ask me..." Sue turned sideways, raised her hand to her mouth and dropped it. "He's no better than the shit that ends up on the paper."

Truer words were never spoken. "Did Gloria stand up for Jack?"

"No. She later started in on him about the rodeo. Screamed about how he couldn't ever settle himself down. One day last week he stormed into the front room and told her about the ranch job. Otherwise they haven't been speaking much."

I drew in a deep breath and heaved it out. "He didn't mention anything to me about problems between him and his mother. They were always deeper than a brand on a bull's hide."

She managed a weak smile. "Since you've come back to visit, I guess Jack will be eating more breakfasts here. He's played scarce of late."

Several steps closed the distance between us. "Tell me where that friend of yours lives. The one who worked for Paul. I'm going to pay her a visit."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dust roiled behind the rear bumper. No wonder the population remained low in the town aptly named Desperate. No movie theaters. A single fast-food establishment with one customer parked in the crushed-stone lot. Not much to see or do. I heaved a long breath. But a search for the truth brought me here, not local attractions.

I bumped along the unpaved driveway and parked the battered and rusting Pinto in front of a garage needing several coats of paint. The gearshift groaned and I shut off the sputtering engine. If this borrowed car got me back to the Dodsons' later without a tow, God was truly on my side during this fact-finding mission.

A petite woman, black hair flowing over her shoulders, came out the side door of the screened-in porch. The tattered panel of mesh wiring inside the door frame wore more holes than a hundred packs of Swiss cheese.

"Consuela's friend?" Her words were clipped closer than Mr. Bandwell's field during plowing season.

"Yes." I offered my hand but she refused. "Valencia?"

She motioned me onto the porch and then into a kitchen scented with roasting chilé

peppers and meat. My mouth watered. Four little children, two boys and two girls all about a year apart in age, scampered and dragged their butts over the clean midnight-blue linoleum tiles. The boy who appeared the oldest sucked a taffy candy. Some of the goop clung to his upper lip and left cheek.

Valencia paused near the stove. "You shouldn't go there. I can't imagine why anyone would want to visit that devil's place."

"I appreciate the warning. Your cousin will take me there?"

She nodded. "Terencio knows the place. I worked there for a little while but Terencio and his strong friends got me out. Westcott fears them."

"Sue's help and yours are greatly appreciated. " I pulled my ponytail over my shoulder. The temporary maroon rinse wasn't too bad. And with turquoise contact lenses in and a heavy layer of makeup, even Grandma Libby wouldn't recognize me now. All the better. My true identity would remain safe when I visited Paul Westcott's property in Aloma a bit later.

She stirred the bubbling cast-iron crock of stew and replaced the steam-dripping lid. "Don't underestimate Paul. He's worse than the devil and twice as rich. We girls got only a small part of the money we brought in each week." From a fat golden loaf of home-baked bread, she tore off two pieces and passed me one. "Barely enough to buy some groceries. But Miguel, my husband, got a job at a bar not far from here. That helps out. And I do some sewing for the people around here."

"Your husband let you work in such a place? Westcott's place?"

"It helped pay the bills. Put some food on the table. Miguel is crippled. Can't do much work. Bartending doesn't bother him and he makes tips."

I bit into the sweet and savory bread, chewed the soft morsel and swallowed. "Is this place...the place where Westcott keeps the slaves...is it..."

"Clean? Oh, yes. The deeds are dirty but all of the rooms are kept up. We girls saw to that. None of the women are diseased. For a short time I was the only Mexican woman. Something different. The rest was all white pussy. But Terencio says that has

changed." Valencia chewed on a corner of her bread hunk.

"What goes on there?" As if my mind hadn't already reconciled itself to the fact I'd be up to my ovaries in deviant behavior. I passed her the keys to the loaner car.

A slight forward movement stirred the silver bells on her ankle bracelet. The jingling blended with the *whoosh-churn* of the washing machine on the porch. One of the children behind me giggled. Valencia's foot thumped against a curling tile and drove it back into place. A second after she stepped past it, it turned up again.

Narrowing lids blotted the brilliant brown of her eyes. "Terencio will be here soon. I'll put your car in the garage. Miguel takes our truck to work." Warm and steady, her hand rested on my forearm. "I pray you are a strong woman. Take care. What hell refuses, Paul and those awful men welcome."

## Chapter Four

As Sue had described, two faded black bulls posed on the sign marking the spot where sex likely knew no boundaries. In broken English, Terencio promised to watch out for me later while I feigned interest in the happenings just beyond the gleaming white door that wore a summer floral wreath. Each strike of my wedged soles against the clean-swept wooden steps echoed in my brain. A black cat sprawled underneath a window to my right and mewled at me. The flicking tail and intense gaze did little to quell the rumbling in my gut and I swallowed several times.

A press of Terencio's wide thumb and long nail sounded the front bell. The door opened before I gulped another breath. Either someone always stood at the ready to answer that door or we'd been watched. Probably the latter. Someone likely had binoculars or a high-powered scope trained on us before the poorly inflated tires hit the macadam lot.

I stared into the cool gray eyes of the brown-haired man behind the screen door. He let his gaze drift from my nose to my nipples and then took a slower tour down to my hips and crotch. Then he hurried through the return trip.

"Terencio." Several words I couldn't translate. "What have you brought us today? A woman with hair almost down to her ass and nice full tits?" The screen door opened several inches.

My guide into the underworld of Westcott nodded and took my hand. Together we hurried past the man while he lit a cigarette. The only light in the entire place came from artificial sources. A converted gasolier glowed overhead and leaded-glass sconces were placed at intervals along the staircase wall.

The stranger grabbed my ass and squeezed the right buttock. "Hope she's willing to play today. One of the girls isn't feeling well. She's only sucking off cocks today." The

hot fingers teased underneath my tight pink cotton skirt. "If this bitch isn't wet yet, she will be soon."

Bitch? For that remark I could blacken Big Mouth's eye.

I shook loose of Terencio's hand and the fondling, headed for the first step, set my foot down and shot our doorman a backward glance. "Today I just want to look around. I'm new in town. Terencio tells me I'll enjoy it here."

"Got a name?" The smoldering cigarette bobbed between his full lips.

Damn. What could I call myself? "Jenna."

"Last name?" His wide black pupils flashed.

"For now we'll remain on a first name basis."

"Have it your way. I'm Dan. When will you tell me more about yourself?"

Okay. I'd played harder games than this during grade school recesses. Crooking my index finger, I motioned him closer. With each step I climbed I worked my ass like never before.

And he caught up without any problem, his boot heels clonking against the faded crimson carpeting. "Well when will you? I don't like secrets but I enjoy pretty women." He landed a playful swat on my left hip. "When you get to the top turn right. That's where the rooms are."

We reached the landing and Dan rolled the hemline of my skirt up over my hips and smacked my ass. "Did that damned cat on the porch get your tongue?"

I shoved the skirt back into place and snatched his right hand. I raked my long nails over his palm and up the backs of each of his hot fingers. "Show me around a little and there won't be anything I won't say or do."

\* \* \* \* \*

All of the doors had been removed from the rooms on the second floor. Music blared. The tang of cum flooded my nostrils and clung to my tongue. I could taste these

people yet didn't know a thing about any one of them.

While I headed toward one doorway Terencio caught up with Dan. The repeated screams of a woman either on the edge of orgasm or being tortured echoed in the hallway. Mere inches before I reached my destination, someone's hands hauled me backward. My ass met with the banister. Devil-man Dan let me go and ground his cigarette out in the white glass ashtray atop a drop-leaf table nearby.

Grayish-white smoke poured from between his lips and spiraled toward the ceiling. "Pull up that skirt and put your leg up here." Dan stroked along the smooth polished wood of the banister and brought the butt of his hand down hard.

"What if I can't get my leg up that far?"

Behind Dan, Terencio shot me a don't-go-there look.

"I'll bet you can."

Double damn. He was right about that. I'd been a member of the gymnastics team for almost five years while in junior and senior high school. But what if this creep had oral herpes?

"Fuck me with your hand instead." I lifted my left foot and landed it solidly only inches in front of his right boot. My heel throbbed.

*What am I saying? Quick. Someone douse with me with a bucket of ice water and wake me up!*

"You like being in charge, bitch?"

"My name isn't *bitch*. In case you've forgotten, it's Jenna."

Instead of striking me he stroked my cheek. The brown eyes appeared honeyed and studied me with the intensity of a chess player. "I'm sorry, lovely lady. Today you're a guest here. I'd be glad to give you what you want." The snap on his black jeans popped upon and the zipper hissed to the bottom. A thatch of coarse dark brown hair ran from the base of his belly and coiled over the open panels of his pants. He worked his fingers between the flaps and pulled out his hardening cock.



If he wasn't ten to eleven inches when all the way up I'd burn every pair of my beaded moccasins and designer stilettos once back home in Mariana.

I curled my fingers into a fist and gnawed my lips. This numbskull probably had full balls too. Enough cum in them to choke ten sluts, maybe more.

"How can you get your fingers inside of me with my panties still on?"

"Sure you don't want my dick instead? Lots longer than these." Eight fingers and two thumbs wiggled in front of my face.

"There will be time for that another day. I want you to get me ready for when I enter those rooms." Was I convincing enough? Heaven help my bold ass if not.

"I'm sure that pussy can take me. Turn around and let me see how tight your ass is."

With Dan's unwanted help, I pivoted and braced against the banister. Strong hands shucked my panties down and took them to my ankles. Those same hands closed around my inner thighs and splayed my legs wide.

"So smooth back here. Paul appreciates smooth asses. Sure you don't want me to lick you? This tongue has made lots of women scream."

*No shit, Sherlock. One look at that lizard length told me the same.*

"Not today. Ter brought me here to see how the sexually satisfied live. There's nothing I'd like better than serving the men who cum here."

Two fingers wedged into my crease and tracked to the bottom where my cheeks curved. "I'll bet your long hair is a lot of fun to play with when you're on top. Damn good reins to hold while you ride me. You into doing several men at once? Sucking one off while one or two others fill the rest of you?"

"Bring it on." *And bring on the restraints when you cart me off to the psychiatric ward for saying such a stupid thing.* If any man ever pulled my hair during sex I'd do more to his stupid dick than ride it.

"Look at you." Several kisses rained over my ass. "Ter, come over here and see this.

Jenna's ass and legs are all wet." Some of Dan's free fingers smeared in the cum dripping down my thighs. Slurping noises made my temples pound and my heart pumped harder. At least he kept his tongue to himself.

I turned at Terencio's approach. He drew a finger over the wet spot near my right knee, met my gaze and stuck the finger into his mouth.

Dan's exaggerated slurps grew louder and rocked me to the temporarily dyed roots. The ends of my loose, dyed ponytail trailed over the banister, only held in place by a gum band. Somehow during my trip between the car and here the metal heart barrette had come out.

The tip of Dan's finger rimmed my anus. He sank his teeth into my right cheek and I bit the inside of my own to prevent my yelp from slipping out. I swallowed the blood's bitterness and nursed the wound with my tongue. Terencio shook his head.

*I know. This nosy woman is getting in too deep for her own good.*

But I couldn't let Westcott harm Gloria or drive a wedge between her and Jack.

Another fan switched on somewhere. Cool air wafted over the wetness on my skin. Gooseflesh rose on my arms and the reddish-golden hairs stood up. No telltale red hairs left on my pussy. A quick early morning shave rinsed them all down the shower's drain.

Two fingers thrust deep inside me and drove my belly against the slab of glossy wood. In and out they worked. Dan cupped my left breast and kneaded the lace-covered flesh until my nipples were swollen and at bursting point.

A ripping noise blended with my moans. My white cotton waist-tie blouse came apart. Pearly buttons rained down and bounced against the carpeted steps. I shivered against him as he continued plunging those fingers in and out of me. Harder. Faster. Blood boiled underneath my skin and I closed my eyes.

He popped the front clasp of my bra and grabbed my heaving breast. Rolling and pinching the nipple. Grazing my shoulder with sharp teeth. Pumping those long fingers.

I backed away from the banister and rode down the slick fingers. He pulled them from me, spun me around and bundled me close against his hard body.

"You are something else, Jenna. Really wild. You'll work out fine here. How did you find this one, Ter?"

"One of my friends." Ter's voice quavered not in the slightest. "She's new in town, I'm told. Kind of a drifter who lives on the edge."

I swallowed the blood-tainted mouthful of saliva and locked gazes with Dan. "Will you give me a tour now?"

"Sure thing. Only, you have to get branded first."

Branded? Oh my God. Could I go through with...? Dan's face blurred, my knees buckled and I grabbed for his shoulders. My fingertips missed their target and my body reeled backward.

Callused fingers stroked my cheek. I blinked several times to clear the waves from my field of vision. A couple shakes of my head stopped the banging in my brain.

"Jenna. Are you okay?" Ter asked while bracing my body against his.

Each blink burned but cleared my vision. We'd entered one of the rooms. Ter jostled me slightly. All four walls converged upon us. At the far corner of the playroom, water poured from the mouth of a gargoyle and splashed in the jade marble fountain's base. Without a doubt, the temperature in this room was twenty degrees hotter than in the hallway where Dan had plugged me with his fingers.

A willowy woman with spiky platinum hair entered. Around her neck a silvery heart pendant glinted. I trained my gaze on the jewelry instead of the half-naked breasts spilling from the bodice of her black patent leather bustier. Tears stirred but I blinked them back. There was no mistaking that bauble. It was the same necklace Mike had given Gloria not too many Christmases before he passed away.

Jackhammers set to work inside my skull. That lying, cheating, no-good flesh peddler Westcott had stolen Gloria's favorite necklace. Now some piece of trash wore

the gift Gentleman Mike Dodson had once given to the love of his life.

The Dom's slender arms sliced the air as she walked and each step closer brought the cloying scent of gardenias and possibly another oil. "Is she the one?" Both of her ruby red lips opened and closed much as would a puppet's at its master's touch. So damned fake in every way. Was this bitch sent in here to brand and torture me?

Fat chance. She'd find me hard to hold and even harder to keep from biting that beak she called a nose.

She drew the pendant and chain over her head. "It will be a pleasure to put some marks on her."

Dan grinned and swept me into the path of the grinning control freak. "Not too many. Only use the heart."

Put marks on me? *Just try it sister, and you'll go down like the Titanic.* "Sorry, I don't get off on pain. If she thinks I'm going to turn into some type of minion she's dead wrong."

Dan pecked a warm wet kiss on my right cheek. "But this is our way of keeping track of the women who play here."

"Keeping track? Inventory is for retail stores and warehouses. I'm a person, not an object."

White teeth appeared between my so-called brander's red lips. "Oh, but you belong to us once you're here. At least during the hours you're serving."

"Serving is for waitresses. As for belonging, I belong to myself. No one else. Go out and brand a damned bull." From my neck to my navel, sweat seeped from every pore.

*Get your ass out the front door and burn some rubber before they burn you for life.*

"If you won't cooperate, then you must be here for another reason." Dan snagged my earlobe between his teeth and gradually increased the pressure before releasing. "Care to tell us who you really are? I'm not into playing stupid-assed games."

I spun away from Dan and the dominatrix and dove for the plush champagne satin

coverlet on the bed. At landing, the back vent of my skirt ripped toward my ass. Someone's hand smacked me and I turned onto my back.

Dan's toothy smile greeted me. "You and me after Anneke gets her little business out of the way? We can fuck on top of my bed. This satin will stick to your skin every time you jerk against me or try to move. But it will be so soft against your knees."

"Where does she want to brand me?"

Terencio chatted with bondage bitch but kept an eye on us.

The mint Dan now sucked diminished the tobacco stench. "Anneke usually likes to put those hearts on a woman's ass. Often they fade, so we have to do touch-ups from time to time." He turned me over gently as a griddlecake and hiked up my skirt. Each stroke of his fingers over my bare ass coaxed more cum from my pussy. "This ass is too perfect to ruin."

Damn my body for betraying me. But I was only human. Despite what my mind advised, my sex-hungry body couldn't help reacting to a man's skilled touch.

Even if that man was a jackass in every respect.

I crumpled two fistfuls of the bedspread and thrust my buttocks toward him. Against my left cheek, the silky fabric delivered a delicate rose scent. "You'll let me pick the place for the brand?" *While you pick out a psychiatrist for me.*

"Yes." A wet finger zipped down my crease and back up again. "Where would you like to wear our mark, Jenna?"

Sirens wailed within my brain and I landed on my side. My pulse thrummed at a dangerous pace. I stiffened. What would happen if I headbutted him? Could Terencio subdue Anneke? Was there a chance we could get out of this hellhole with our lives and wits intact?

Behind the fountain was a small table covered with a black velvet cloth. Anneke whipped off the drape and flung it onto the floor. A thick white pillar candle rested dead center. From a book of matches, she removed a single matchstick, closed the cover

and struck the red tip against the flint edge. The head ignited and she held it against the wick. After passing the flame she opened her mouth, inserted the glowing match and closed her lips. With a wink she dropped her jaw, removed the damped match and blew us an air kiss.

"Decide where you want this to go?" She dangled the pendant and it swung at me like a pendulum. "I can give you a couple ideas."

"I can think for myself."

Dan reached down and tickled my wet pussy. "We need more like you. You're quite a hellion. Men like women who take control. Anneke's also into women. You'll learn a lot from her."

A shift of my hips unseated his stroking hand. "I don't have anything to learn. And I didn't make a commitment to working here yet. You promised to show me around. There's nothing happening in here that excites me in the least."

Anneke held the metal heart over the flame and I studied the pendant's hollow back. "Make up your mind. Or I'll make it up for you."

"Mess with me and die, bitch." *Oh, shit. I didn't just said that, did I?*

Laughter softened her stern expression. "Good. You'll do well here. Let me at that ass."

"I want to see where the others have their brands first."

"How long is this shit going to take? I have other things to do." Terencio flopped onto the bed beside me and created a barrier between the woman I'd bitchslap if she stuck anything hot near my skin and me.

Dan squeezed my biceps. "Ter, you hold Jenna down. She can have her way only if she lets me do something else."

Dan crossed to the dresser. He opened the top drawer and withdrew a black velvet pouch with braided gold silk drawstrings. The parcel lofted from his hand and struck beside my bent right knee. "Check it out, honey. See if you can ride that."

My entire body tingling, I retrieved what was likely a toy and opened the gathered top. A push of my fingers against the bottom of the sack brought a frosted blue glass dildo into view. This pleasure wand was around four inches thick. How nice for the pussy. Plunging this in and out would satisfy some of my sexual hunger and, at the same time, I hoped, keep Dan's cock in his pants. I inserted the dildo just past my wet opening.

The butt of Dan's hand sent the drawer crashing closed. "Oh no. Too easy. I'll put that up your ass and see how much of a cowgirl you really are. Ever have a man that thick?"

Even Jack wasn't quite that hefty. But that fact, and a million others, were none of Dan's damned business. Suck it up. My ass might smart for a couple days but when it came to helping out friends in possible danger, a little discomfort wasn't any hardship.

Terencio's sable eyes calmed and comforted me as something drove the room temperature up several more degrees. He helped position my wobbly body on its knees and caught me in a bear hug around the waist.

To my left, Dan grabbed the toy and licked the entire length. Then he disappeared behind me. "Want any lube on this or are you able to take it the way it is?"

"It's glass. I'll be fine." *Yeah, right. Say that tomorrow when you try to –*

The smooth head plunged in. I huffed out a long breath and relaxed every muscle as much as possible. With a corkscrewing motion, he advanced the dildo farther up into my burning ass.

"How are you doing?" The plugging stilled and two wet kisses landed on my right buttock. "Say when if..."

"Like hell say when. Give it all to her. She asked for it. Don't be such a fucking idiot." Blonde and bitchy stretched her slim body and big tits over the bank of gold and plum decorator pillows at the headboard. "I want to see her sweat and hear her scream."

Not as much as I wanted to spit in her ugly face. "Everything's fine. I've had it this

thick before back there.” *And Eskimos build igloos in Hawaii.*

Dan twisted a bit more and Terencio gave me a reassuring pat above my navel. The screwing stopped again and a sharp swat drove me toward Blondie.

“That proves she’s more of a woman than most.” Dan took away his hand but the toy remained inside me. He patted and nipped both buttocks. “Not a single noise. Care to show us how hard you can push a man?”

I clenched with every ounce of strength remaining, closed my eyes and pushed as though the birth of triplets was at stake. A soft thump sounded as the dildo bounced against the quilted bedspread. Sweat dripped down my cheeks and the dominatrix reached out to wipe it away.

Terencio let me loose and grabbed her hand. “Let her alone. You can play with her another time. Today we don’t have time to waste. Dan promised to show Jenna more of this place. Stop fucking around and let’s continue her tour.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Once we claimed my panties from the hallway I hooked two fingers through a belt loop on Terencio’s khakis and we headed toward the room Dan guaranteed would blow me away.

But the only blowing being done would likely be me deep-throating someone if we didn’t get the hell out of here.

A short distance from where we walked, sassy dance music swelled into the hallway from an open door on our right. At entering I narrowly missed stepping on a woman’s flowing black hair as she took it from behind from a man who must have weighed three hundred pounds. Patchouli and cinnamon oil teased my nostrils and I pinched off a sneeze. Not a spare ounce of fat on his body, either. Sweat dripped from his nose and chin and made a puddle on her bare back.

On a rose-velvet upholstered chaise, two women knelt, each sucking a sizable cock and dangerously close to whiplash from their technique. Each time they let loose of the



men's cocks a quick peek revealed the deep blue distended veins along the spit-slick shafts. But that wasn't the main event of this bizarre sex show. A couple feet away, arms lifted and hands tethered to a bedpost, a slight redhead wrapped her legs around the waist of a man who began riding her harder than he would any rodeo bull. We walked beside the couple, the woodsy scent of the wiry, tanned man's skin blending with his sweat and causing olfactory overload. The woman struggled against her bonds but he'd tied red bandanas around the leather in such a way that it didn't cut into her pale flesh.

*Jack Dodson must do me that way before we part company and I return to Mariana. I'll have the fondest summer memory ever made.*

While Dan unzipped and pulled out his cock for a busty brunette wearing a purple vinyl teddy with the nipples and crotch cut out, Terencio pulled me away from my gawking and toward a neutral zone.

"Keep close to me." His hot breath rasped against my ear. "You've seen enough to know what this place is about. I know a way out."

I took two baby steps, stood on tiptoe and laced my fingers through his damp black hair. Placing my lips next to his, I swallowed hard. "Won't they come after us if I don't let them brand me today?"

"They might but they know I always carry a gun. There's a shoulder holster inside this leather jacket. I know too many people for Paul Westcott to make trouble for me."

"I appreciate your bringing me here."

"Are you okay? Hard to believe you let him screw you with that thing."

"Actually it didn't bother me much. But Westcott does."

He nodded. "Take off your shoes. Make up an excuse if he asks about the reason."

Dan looked our way and I claimed Ter's mouth in a hard kiss. He accepted and returned my embrace. Damn. I never messed with married men but today there wasn't any choice in the matter.

Ter reached into the coin pocket on his pants and popped something into his mouth. "Take this pill from me now and swallow it. It'll make you sick and allow us to get out of here without further questioning. Nothing poisonous or harmful. Just some herbs that will upset your stomach and burn going down."

The small tablet rested on his tongue and I licked it away. As my saliva dissolved the outer layer the heat of haba ero peppers flared in my mouth and throat. I swallowed, removed my shoes, laced the straps around the fingers of my right hand and nodded toward the entrance.

A woman paraded into the room wearing only a snake. From all appearances it was a copperhead. Hopefully someone had milked this snake. She drifted among the gropers and ropers, finally perching on a straight-backed chair and watching the perverse proceedings.

Dan stabbed a finger at me. "If you want to play, get undressed. Otherwise we'll continue the tour. Why'd you take your shoes off?"

"Because these things are murder on my feet."

More swallows delivered the snot-and-saliva-inducing contents to my stomach. As Ter and I stepped over more bodies and declined sexual invitations, my stomach roiled. By the time my feet hit the gaudy hallway carpeting, bile washed into my throat. Instead of swallowing I prayed hard and the churning intensified. Dan followed hot on our heels.

"Are you alright, Jenna?" Ter clutched my hand and pointed me toward the staircase. "You don't look so good."

"Have her lie down in my room for a while." Dan's voice came closer. "I'll make her feel better."

The contents of my stomach heaved toward my throat. My entire body shuddered as I coughed threw up. Ter squeezed me hard and walked us away from Dan.

"Where are you going? Sorry she got sick but I'm not finished showing our lady around."

*Our lady? Whatever made this shit-for-brains ringleader of losers think I belong to him or Ter? I am my own woman, thank you very much!*

*If I ever belong to any man, that man will be Jack Dodson.*

Ter quickened his pace. "We'll be back tomorrow."

With each step we descended, I said another prayer. Strangely enough, no further incident or upheaval occurred with my stomach and we reached the foyer. Dan's boots clattered behind and I bristled as he tugged on my hair.

Ter reached back and jerked Dan's hand free. "Stop messing with her. She needs to rest."

"Too much for you, Jenna?" Dan's taunting echoed in my brain. "Can't stand seeing sex the way we have it here?"

I shifted position and shot him a sideways glance. "It wasn't what happened here that made me sick. Too much whiskey and too little sleep don't mix with that greasy food I ate this morning." All lies, but Dan deserved no better.

Ter pulled me toward the front door. "No trouble today. I don't want to have to tell Westcott you've been pissing me off again."

My queasiness ebbed. Thank goodness Ter didn't take any crap from Dan and held his ground.

"I enjoyed the tour you gave me." I shot Dan another glance, winked and swallowed the sour saliva still in my mouth. "We'll be back."

"You'd better keep that promise." Dan puckered and blew me a kiss. "I need a new woman to keep me company. Anneke's a cold bitch. Not the type I prefer. Now you..."

*Need to hit the highway and get something to wash this foulness out of my mouth. "You have my promise this isn't the last time we'll meet." Hopefully the next time will be in a court of law, when they're convicting your dirty ass along with Paul Westcott's.*

Dan rubbed his lower lip. "Our women aren't whores. They come here to serve because they enjoy themselves."

And because they're too stupid to know any better or find a decent man to fill their lives and beds. "See you soon."

Dan took another couple steps and stopped. "Soon isn't soon enough."

## Chapter Five

No one made fried chicken better than Gloria Dodson. The platter of golden-brown meat passed from my hands to Jack, followed by the mustard-yellow bowl brimming with seasoned corn and red peppers. Despite Ter's assurances to the contrary, those herbs still had my stomach churning more than the time I swallowed an entire bottle of cough medicine as a child.

Gloria sneaked a drumstick and a couple spoonfuls of mashed potatoes onto my dinner plate. "Where on earth were you all afternoon? Mrs. Larson called here five times about getting her car back."

"Sightseeing." If only she knew what those sights were.

"Well don't stay away from here so long." Once again the potato-laden spoon hit my plate before she put it back in the bowl and concentrated on her own supper. "A single woman isn't safe on the highways these days. There are too many crazy people out there."

Jack squirmed in his chair as though fire ants had taken up residence in his jeans. "I agree. If you need a ride I'll take you around."

*Just take me to your room and spank my ass for being a bad girl.* "But you're busy with your new job."

"That hasn't officially started. Rory doesn't leave until Thursday. Then I get the keys and take over his part of the office full time." Jack speared a chicken breast with his fork and dropped it onto his plate. "Texas is a great place but there's lots of trouble to be found if you go looking."

Mind-blowing and a mind reader. "How about a ride on Voodoo?"

Gloria's knife clattered against the plate's edge. "God forbid. That animal is a menace to mankind. He'll throw you off as soon as look at you."

Jack bit off half of his cornbread and laid the uneaten hunk aside. The swallow bulged his Adam's apple. "Not if I'm also on him. Besides, Kim's already met Voodoo and made friends with him."

"Oh?" Gloria took a long sip of her iced tea and swallowed. "When was that?"

I crammed the drumstick between my lips and sank my teeth into the juicy dark meat. Jack toyed with his fork handle and drifted his baby blue gaze between his mother and me.

*Come up with something quick or we'll both be here long past the time Sue drapes the damp dishtowel over the rack to dry.*

Jack drew his tongue over his teeth and swallowed. "This morning before breakfast. You weren't up yet. Kim was wandering around the stable. I was polishing the saddle and introduced her to my best bud."

"Best bud? Pity you never took much time to make human friends. Except for Kim." Gloria ate a couple forkfuls of corn medley. "Why on earth did you wash your hair twice today, honey?"

That "honey" could only mean me. "Hot day. Don't mean to waste the water." I flipped the still-damp strands back over my shoulder. An hour ago the last trace of burgundy hair color washed down the drain. Wearing my favorite Stetson wasn't an option for the sum total of my stay here. "I'd like to go riding now. Get some fresh air."

"I know a place." Jack drained half the contents of his tea glass.

"Too much dust come in the car windows while you were driving around today?" The woman too wise about everyone's life but her own squeezed more lemon into the tall cactus-print glass of tea.

With the chicken breast in one hand and a wedge of biscuit between his teeth, Jack backed the chair away from the table, stood and headed toward the back porch door. Those faded jeans never had it as good as when they were next to him.

"See you for a couple minutes before you turn in tonight?" The tea glass rested only a few inches from the desperate but loving mother's lips.

Jack didn't look back but grunted a response.

*"We'll be back before the sun sets." But not before I see more of Jack's restless side and sexy hide.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Sunlight glanced off the creek. A chortling bird wearing dun-brown and black feathers swooped past. But that birdbrain was wrong. What lay ahead was no laughing matter. Sex was serious. Nothing like the notion of sex in the water to get me wet in more ways than one.

The button on Jack's jeans yielded. A fine patch of golden hair tracked from below his belly to the top of the zipper. Inch by inch his steady fingers made short work of the fastener and bared his crotch. Both of his hands hooked into the waistband and shoved toward the ground. My mouth watered at the curve of his hardening cock and the full balls between his legs.

"Coming in with me?" He stepped free of the jeans, a smile baring his teeth.

"Your mama would frown on us being in the water together. Even when we were kids she wouldn't let us go swimming together at the Arentsons'."

"Like you really care about all that now." Once both of his legs were free of the confining faded clothing, he crumpled the jeans and tossed them at me.

I caught them and ran my hands over the places where his hot body had been. With each step he took, his full balls swayed underneath a hard thick canopy of cock.

"I'll come in but only with my clothes on."

"What fun is that? Don't tell me you're scared to let me see you naked."

Scared? "Scared isn't part of my vocabulary when it comes to playing in Broadmann's Creek. You've seen my naked ass before up here." I lofted his jeans behind me and stood. "I'm not scared of you or anything else."

"What about snakes? One might bite you."

"I never came across any snakes in that creek."

He laughed and walked toward the swimming hole. His arms and ass were toned from years on the rodeo circuit. How good it would feel to have him riding me again. A soft splash sounded as his feet hit the water. I sprinted in the direction of the man I wanted deep inside me again before another dawn.

The afternoon sun warmed my scalp. A short trip down the grassy bank landed me ankle-deep in the cool water. By now Jack was in up to his knees and facing me. He bent, scooped up some water and sluiced it over his face and chest.

"Bring any extra water bottles along?" If not I could always lick him off and satisfy my thirst that way.

"There's some in the packsack on Voodoo."

I moved a couple more feet and crouched. Water lapped at my buttocks and the soaking cooled the heat between my legs. "Any particular reason for choosing that name for your horse?"

"He casts spells on people." Both of his nipples were drawn into puckers. Delicate and pink, blond halos of hair around each. "Just like you."

The muck at the creek bottom claimed my toes and I burrowed them deeper upon reaching Jack. He grabbed my hips and pulled me closer.

"Take off your clothes, Kim. No one will see you."

"No one but you."

"Damned straight." And then he turned that sexy smile on me.

"Just like something else." I snuggled closer and his cock stabbed against my belly. Raising my t-shirt brought the erection against my bare skin.

"C'mon. Or are you afraid?"

"If I were, would I have agreed to let you teach me how to ride a horse? Or spread pancake batter over my bare ass and pussy this morning?"

Strong fingertips kneaded my back. As they climbed up my spine, the late day sun



highlighted the faint growth of blond whiskers on his cheeks and chin.

“You’d have more fun riding me.” His mouth lowered to mine, sucking and molding my lips to his sexual will.

Hot, cornbread-scented breath struck my lips. One lick and I tasted the edge of his smile. A hint of lime lingered there from the margaritas we’d enjoyed an hour ago, before coming to the creek. Chills chased throughout my body and our mouths deepened their connection. I opened wide and his tongue thrust past my teeth. We sucked and tasted and his cock grew against me. I pinched his nipple between my fingers and his moan melted inside my mouth. Breathless from his kiss I clawed my way down his belly until reaching his crotch.

As my fingers closed over his cock, he sucked my tongue harder and squeezed my left buttock. Up and over the swollen head, I brought my thumb. He was so damned hard. My pussy grew sorer at the pressure from the tight denim and the swelling from my own arousal.

I pumped his cock and then backed away. “I’ll be right back.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” His wink went straight to my heart.

My leaden legs finally turned me away from heaven on earth and he swatted my ass. Water slapped and swirled around me as I headed toward the shallowest part of the creek, where it kissed the bank. I stopped and so did my pursuer.

“I can take my clothes off without any help.”

He tickled my sides. “Someone has to chase off any snakes.”

“There aren’t any sna —”

Throaty laughter and the whisper of water moving. Small bubbles frothed to my left. A bite landed on my ankle and I yelled.

Several droplets struck my calves and Jack stood up. His laugh whistled overhead. “What were you saying about snakes?”

I spun around and pushed against his muscular chest. “If you bite me again I’ll bite

back.”

“I’ll have to keep that in mind when you’re sucking me off.”

Those baby blues eroded the last of my resolve. He was too sexy for his own good.

High time a woman tried curbing his wild ways. I turned around and headed toward the water’s edge. “You’re wilder than any of those bulls you rode.”

My sexual fantasy and splashing followed. “Think so? You’ve never seen me at my best.”

I shucked off the wet t-shirt and shorts, passed them back to him and then rubbed my almost-bare ass against his belly. The clothes hurtled past me and landed on the dry grass.

He pulled me backward in the water. Hot kisses alternated with bites over my left shoulder. His cock plastered against my spine. I melted against him. Hot. Wet. Ready to be ridden raw by sexy Jack Dawson. Roping champion. Bachelor. The man I’d dreamed about since his ass-bearing antics interrupted Gloria’s ladies’ tea. He’d given us all a proper look before covering up his crotch with a cowboy hat and streaking away from the window.

A nudge from my fingers popped the front clasp on the pink lace bra and a roll of my shoulders bared both breasts. His hand thrust under the waistband of my panties and his thumb teased my navel.

He twisted my wet hair off my back and shoulder. I ground against him. The devil-guided hand moved lower until reaching my pussy. Breath gasped from between my half-open lips.

“I want my fingers and cock inside your ass and pussy.” The words skittered over my scalp and made their way to my ear.

“Then put them there... *Now.*”

Several fingers parted and squeezed my pussy lips. He let my hair drop. His free hand worked with mine at shoving the panties down my legs. As I opened my mouth

to speak, several fingers thrust deep in my heat while he thumbed my clit. Gentle, then harder, using the blunt tip of his fingernail. During his hand job, we both moved forward until water slapped at the back of my calves.

“You feel so damned good. Want me to come against your back?”

Standing on tiptoe, I wiggled my hips and his fingers popped free. “Come in my mouth. Let me taste you.”

I broke loose of the embrace and raced him to where the Aztec-print towel lay. Our bodies struck the knit barrier and he pulled my body onto his. Each heartbeat rose higher in my throat. Tingles came all over my body. His fingers tucked into and probed the crease of my ass while his tongue plumbed my mouth.

One strong leg slung over my hip and rolled me onto my side. One of his fingerpads pressed and rimmed my tender anus. Though I was surrounded by the most beautiful proof of nature at its best, his eyes held my attention. I couldn’t look away from this handsome beast, no matter what. He had me in his hold and I didn’t give a damn what the rest of the afternoon brought.

As long as I could have him deep inside me, nothing else mattered.

Voodoo snorted and his front hooves trampled the grass not too far from the edge of our blanket. Jack disentangled himself and winked. “Such a tight hole back there. Sorry to make you flinch.” He rolled onto his back. His cock pointed toward heaven, full-blooded and so damned tempting I squirted on my hand.

“Let me taste you, Jack. Let me suck you dry.”

Before I swallowed the mouthful of spit, he was on his feet and reaching for the clothes he’d cast aside. “That horse is restless and wants to hit the trail. If we don’t go now it’ll be hell riding him.”

Every profanity in my vocabulary lay on my tongue but I kept my lips closed. Fine and damned dandy. If he was after keeping things friendly between us, if a silly horse could interrupt a hot session of sex he’d initiated, to hell with this cowboy stud.

I'd take out one of my toys later or use my fingers. Who needed him or his thick cock?

The zipper on his jeans played stubborn and he rearranged his hardness several times before getting it closed. Served him right. May that saddle play hell with his hard-on all the way home.

## Chapter Six

I nudged Jack's hand but he kept firm hold of the reins. The horse started down a gentle slope and pitched me forward. My teeth impacted my tongue. Without a doubt, this heaving beast was as wild as the man smack behind me. No matter how many times I tried talking Jack into staying creekside until dark, he claimed he had a better place for us to explore things we wouldn't dare back at the farmhouse.

"This isn't the way we came." Another bump landed my crotch against the polished saddle. My clit ached, my ass burned and each bump from the hard body behind me set everything throbbing harder.

At each uneven patch on the path, Voodoo made sure I bore the worst of the ride. By now the crotch panel of the cutoffs pressed so close to my pussy a fleck of dust couldn't come between my skin, the cotton panties and denim.

Jack passed me the reins and pointed at a grove of pines ahead. Dried needles crunched under Voodoo's hooves. I tightened my grip on the reins and guided the beast in the new direction.

"Not so close." Jack tapped the tops of my hands. "Give him a little more slack. He knows where he's going."

"If only I did."

Who else had Voodoo delivered to this spooky section of woods along with Jack?

A flying insect flirted with my bare right thigh. Jack noticed my wiggling and landed a meaty palm over the target spot. The splayed fingers curled and clutched my damp skin. *Stop with the temptation. If you're not going to do me, it's hands off until we reach the ranch.*

The touch moved and tugged at the frayed edges of my shorts. "You had a pair like these when you were in high school."

"How do you know?"

"You wore them to the ranch while visiting one summer. Steve Gantry got all hot and bothered watching you pick up change at the Lyles' station."

"Pick up change?"

"You'd forgotten to zip your wallet and tripped coming out the door. The contents spilled out and you dropped your Fudgsicle. We watched your nice butt from inside the garage."

A bolt of heat flashed from my belly to my knees. "True confession time?"

"Only because I suspect you're up to checking out more than me while you're back. And speaking of backs, you know I've always got yours." He muttered something that the breeze carried away. "We'll stop here for a couple."

Very savvy man, sexy Jack.

At my bodily command, Voodoo halted. Jack's heat left my back and he climbed from the saddle. I tossed down the reins, stretched to a standing position and grabbed the pommel. Even if this beast suddenly took off, maybe breaking my neck was better than risking the same with my heart.

My blood-pumping organ had taken too many hits in the past six years.

I leaned forward and swung my right leg off the horse's hide. From behind, Jack's hands caught my waist and pulled me down.

His tongue teased the cascade of gold circles dangling from my earring. Gingerlime cologne wafted my way. "Voodoo's close to getting lathered."

At each breath my insides attempted bursting through to the outside. But I was only jumpy when around Jack. If I didn't find more water to soak in soon, I'd implode. *Figures he'd guide us away from the creek.* I fumbled in the packsack and produced my almost-empty bottle of spring water.

"He's welcome to share this but it's not much." A single twist and the cap fell away in my hand.

His fingers claimed the plastic sealer and container. He reunited the cap with the bottle and shoved them back into the sack. "Not necessary. I have a spare bottle. Voodoo'll be fine."

"What's your reason for stopping? We can't be that far from Circle Red."

A warm breeze rushed past my face, followed by Jack's hot breath on the side of my neck. "In an awful hurry aren't you?"

Yes, to find my peppermint lube and ribbed latex vibe. If he wasn't going to please my pussy, artificial stimulation was my only other alternative. An artificial something still beat a real, live nothing.

"Cut the crap, Jack. I'm sore from those riding lessons." *And Dan's initiation.*

His fingers popped open the button on my cutoffs and worked the zipper down. As the hissing of the metal slide ceased, his hands shoved the shorts to my ankles. "Couldn't help but notice the way you kept clean forward in the saddle." He cupped his right hand over my crotch and squeezed. "Your clit must be rubbed raw."

I wiggled free of the shorts and turned around to face my sexiest tormentor. Behind him the stout trunk of a Ponderosa pine thrust skyward. Flexing my fingers, I raised my arms slowly. Jack's breathing became raspy and he peeled away the damp crotch panel of my panties. I drew in a deep breath, smacked my palms against his chest and drove forward. He backpedaled several paces. At stopping, his body rested less than an inch from the gnarled wood of the forest giant. The smile vanished from his mouth.

"You're so damned good when you're bad." As he crouched near nature's debris several fallen branches crackled underneath his boot heel. His gaze burned going down my half-naked body. Shivers crawled underneath my skin as his hand closed over a slim switch.

"I want to suck your cock, Jack."

Both rows of his white teeth appeared. A squirrel scampered past. "First things first. Pull down those panties and let me spank that sexy ass of yours."

With a branch? That would sting like hell and probably break skin.

"Don't worry, honey. I won't make a mark that will last longer than our ride back to the ranch."

I stepped free of the panties, returned to our mount and placed them over the saddle. Voodoo cast me a backward glance and nodded several times, his lush black mane tousled by the summer wind. At reaching Jack I turned away, opened my legs wide, laid my hands on the tops of my feet and thrust my bare ass toward the man holding the slim wooden weapon.

"Lick my pussy first. It's so wet."

Something sang as it sliced through the air and struck his leg. The stick. He really meant what he said about tanning my hide.

"Back up here and bend over my knee." Another smack, this one coming louder against cloth.

Adrenaline flashed through my system and culminated in my fingertips. Grit crackled with each step backward of my riding boots. The soles of my feet burned but not as much as the void deep within my body. The void I wanted Jack's thick cock to fill before we rode another foot on his grass-munching beast.

Each inch I eased toward him, more woodland creatures chattered and shrieked. Too late for warnings now. Jack wanted to have his wicked way and I was powerless to deny him.

The faded toe of his dun brown boot came into view on my left. I took a couple more steps. Two hands clamped around my knees and a soft scuffling almost made me squirt.

One kiss, then another and still another landed on my buttocks. A hot tongue traced from the top of my crease to the curve of my cheeks, leaving only a slight wetness in its wake.

"You taste better than any Texas barbecue. Remember the barbecue Daddy had on



my sixteenth birthday?"

"When you received the 1970 black Mustang and drove it around the lower paddock in circles. You tore up so much grassland the dust took until sunset to settle."

A rough tip grated against the curve of my ass. "Over my knee, beautiful lady. Let me get a good look at your ass opened wide." The branch snaked up to the lower part of my spine and stopped.

With my feet parted and planted, I bent at the waist and eased my belly and crotch onto his thigh. The top half of my body dangled. My fingertips grazed a pile of dirt and dried needles. A rotted log lay dead ahead. I fixed my gaze on its peeling bark.

*Thhhhhwwacckkkkk.*

A spark lit in my belly and a second strike of the pine branch built it to a white-hot flame. Twice more on the left and once on the right the switch impacted my tender flesh. His right hand dropped beside my face, still wielding the sexual weapon. In another swallow the stick lofted forward, struck the gnarled log's surface and skittered over the far side.

Where the stick had flailed my skin, his tongue now licked. So rough and delicious. I clawed the dirt and a good portion of it embedded under my nails. A lift of my hips brought his tongue back into my crease and a couple fingers into my pussy. But as quickly as they thrust inside they sneaked back out. Blood rushed to my brain.

He swatted my ass. "Sit on my lap and face me. Let me look at the woman who I dream about almost every night. The woman who's hell to pay when she's after sex."

I clambered to my feet and Jack sank to the ground, his back against the tree. Staring into his pale blue eyes, I straddled his straight legs and worked my way onto his lap. His work-roughened hands pulled me so close our crotches touched, and my insteps rested on either side of the hefty trunk.

"You've had your fun, handsome. Now it's my turn. Tie me to the tree and let's take this to another level."

\* \* \* \* \*

*No sense in glancing at my watch. At least fifteen minutes had to have passed since my butt made contact with this tree and Jack tied me.*

And patience was not a virtue I possessed when it came to sex.

"You never used to take your time doing things when we were kids. Every time Gloria and Mike were set to take us somewhere for a ride, you were the first one in the truck bed."

"Only one reason you were never first. You took so long combing your hair and figuring out what to wear." He glanced my way. His lips parted and he huffed out a quick breath. "Hell, even at ten you coordinated your outfits and shoes. All to ride into town and have a burger at Open Pit. No one there could have cared less." He winked. "Don't mess with my methods. With some things it's best to take my time."

Naked except for a blue bandana cinched at his neck and battered boots on his wide-stepping feet, Jack folded the orange, red and dark-green blanket into a precise rectangle and laid it over Voodoo's saddle. A soft snort came from the languishing stallion but he moved hardly a muscle.

From the packsack, Jack removed a length of rope and approached me. "Are you sure you want it this way?"

"Yes." The word hissed from between my dry lips.

He paused, cocked one hip, and his balls swayed. "Let me get those hands secured."

I raised my arms overhead and close to the tree. He wrapped the bandana around a section of the coarse, fraying cattle rope, fashioned a weird type of twisted knot and looped his handiwork around my wrists.

A couple more steps took him out of view, but as I breathed out my wrists came to rest against the pine's trunk. Twice more he twisted and worked the rope over and around my wrists. A tug sent my wrists higher and cum trickled down my leg. He came around in front of me, gave a jerk on my bonds and my hands drooped.

"There. That'll give you a bit of play until I make one last adjustment."

Adjustment? What else did he have in mind? From the saddle he claimed the folded blanket and placed it between my body and the peeling wood. Another section of rope secured the blanket to the tree's trunk. With his guidance, I brought my ass against the woven fabric and relaxed. His cock strained against my belly and our mouths began sating some of the hunger from which our bodies screamed.

I captured his tongue between my teeth and sucked. The fire still lingered there from the hot peppers he'd eaten with his margarita. He played his hands along my flanks and massaged the fleshiest part of my hips. A bird flapped above us and took Jack's mouth from mine. Again his body heat vanished and he ducked behind the tree. The rope bore harder upon my wrists and my pulse flared with another yank of Jack's capable hands.

He peeped around my left shoulder and landed a bite just above one of my largest moles. Fingertips scented with pine and moss fluttered over my cheek and landed on my mouth. I kissed him and the touch faded.

"If you scream, no one will hear you."

"What makes you think I'll scream? Are you that good, Jack?"

"So fucking good you'll ask for seconds...and thirds."

While I stomped and stewed, Jack took his damned sweet time patting Voodoo's nose and rearranging the contents of the packsack. I cursed him and the ground on which he walked, none of which brought the slightest rise in anything but his cock.

"Roping cattle and bulls was far easier than holding a hell-raising woman like you." He spun around, sweat and the gold hairs on his chest glistening in the late afternoon sun.

"I don't raise hell. I raise Cain."

"And you sure as hell are able."

"Very funny. Put your mouth to better use."

He swaggered to where I stood lashed to the tree. Those lean hips promised one hard ride. So many thick inches would bury deep in my pussy. I'd give him a ride he'd never forget.

At reaching me, he licked his lips. Faint furrows tracked beside his squinting eyes. Lush blond lashes hid the blues I adored. Both of his index fingers snaked down my sides and I shook with laughing spasms.

A gasp belched from my gaping mouth as he gripped my hips and hauled the lower half of my body upward. Bent at the knees, my legs fitted against his sides before I wrapped them around his damp back.

"Ready to ride something other than horseflesh? If so, hold on tight, honey."

I nodded. "Fuck me hard. I don't bruise that easily."

He winked. "Only that stubborn pride of yours."

I ground my pussy against his belly and soaked him some more. "My pride has been wounded more times than my heart, but we won't go there now."

"No." He shifted my weight so that my body left his by about an inch. "Only pleasant memories are allowed to be made today."

Each degree we separated, I tightened my leg muscles and regained the lost ground. Wild laughter burst from between his lips and drove deep into my soul. I wiggled and shifted and he dragged the tip of his cock between my pussy lips.

"Now to make up for all those sleepless nights." The words growled up from his gut.

As the cock head penetrated me I rocked my hips and consumed several more inches. His sigh spurred me onward and I slammed my heels against his ass and drove him in deep.

"Ride me, cowgirl."

And I did, grinding my crotch so hard against his the friction brought an intense burn inside my sex and belly and in my hands. His hands slipped around to my ass and

found the crease. All of his fingers bit into my flesh and he parted my ass wide. My wrists throbbed and the rope knots proved unyielding. As we moved, the old woolen blanket provided a buffer for my back and with each collision of our hips, dead wood crackled underneath the cover's folds.

I sucked in a deep breath and blew it out in his face. Moss. Pine. Summer grasses. Weeds. Wildflowers.

But the smell of his sweat and citrus-sweet cologne came the heaviest with each breath and lay upon my tongue. Another collision brought a current of warm air between us and I canted my body toward his.

"You are so damned special. If I'd have thought it would..." A gurgling commenced in his throat. "Ahhhh...ooh fuck. Y-y-yeah..."

His body blows slowed and then stopped. Another ball of heat worked its way down my legs, churning toward the ultimate explosion. Spasms caught my legs. I jerked against him like a puppet whose master had suddenly dropped the strings. My toes curled tight against the bases of my feet and a clattering rose inside my skull.

"Oh...I...Jack." I fitted my face against his shoulder and caught him in a hands-free bear hug.

"Ssssh." He cuddled me close. His lips and fingers lavished my face and tucked the damp and shorter strands of hair behind my ears. "No need for words right now. They'd only get us into more trouble. Besides, we need to get back so you can get some rest and I can talk to Mama."

\* \* \* \* \*

Sue stood on the farmhouse porch and waved us in. That woman worked harder than any dozen. She flapped the front doormat over the porch railing. Dirt never got a hold in that household. Not with Sue, the dirt-and-dust-busting dynamo.

Jack guided Voodoo into the stable, climbed down and helped me off. If Gloria saw me in this sorry state I could claim sunstroke. The giggles I tried swallowing came out

and filled the space surrounding us.

His blue eyes still blazed. "What are you laughing about?"

"About what we just did. How wild we are. Only a shower will improve the way I must look."

"You look damned good to me." He walked Voodoo to his stall and provided a bucket of water and feed for the beast. Loud slurps soon came from the place our mount called home.

"Maybe the Arentsons would let me dive into their pool with my clothes on?"

He emerged with the saddle and hung it on the tack rack "You're so hot that pool water would only boil. I can't believe you didn't mind being tied up like that."

*If only he knew what I'd been through and witnessed earlier today.*

After wiping his hands on an old plaid shirt turned rag, he snatched my hands and turned them palm up. His tongue licked over both pulse points. "Only a faint redness. No welts."

"Thanks for rigging things so I wouldn't get rope burn."

He gripped his crotch and winked. "Too bad my ingenuity didn't prevent cock burn from that hot pussy of yours. If you get turned loose in Mesa Junction, hell will have to claim any men you meet. Heaven won't have them."

I spun around, stuck out my ass and smacked it hard. "And don't you forget it." Giggling, I straightened and faced the man who gave me the ultimate in sexual satisfaction.

"Care for a soda?" Dust swirled upward as he scuffed toward the makeshift area he used for storage. After a minute he emerged with a liter bottle of cola. "This stuff is warm." He twisted off the cap and vapor curled from the spout.

Accepting the refreshment, I tipped back a mouthful and swallowed. I worked my tongue over my upper row of teeth and smacked my lips. "Too bad we didn't have time to visit Circle Red."

"There'll be another time."

One of the thoroughbreds whinnied but Jack's blue gaze remained on me. His fingers closed around mine and brought the bottle to his mouth. A tip of my hand dispensed his drink. He pulled away and some splashed down his chin and onto the dirt flooring. After a couple seconds, the sizzling subsided.

With the toe of his boot he covered the stain. "That hit the spot."

"Do me a favor, Jack. Something I've thought about for a good many years but was afraid to ask."

"If you want me to do you on the dining room table, you'll have to take that fancy lace tablecloth off first. One wrinkle or rip and Mama will have my balls in boiling oil."

"That isn't what I want."

"Then what?"

I sprinted into his packrat space and emerged with a red marker. Pulling down my cutoffs and panties, I handed him the liquid crayon, turned and thrust my ass toward him. "Write your name back there."

"Okay." He knelt behind and traced the letters in slow motion. J. A. C. K. And then the marker did a funny squiggle. When the felt tip left my flesh he snapped the cap back on and swatted me. "All done."

"Can I look to see what else you put back there?"

"Nope. Wait until after you've showered."

"C'mon. Let me see and I'll try making some of those special pecan pancakes you love. I'm no gourmet chef but I think I can get them to turn out right."

"Bribery will get you nowhere."

"Once you find out where I've been today and what I've seen, you'll give me what I want." I showed him my tongue.

His mock frown curved upward. "Okay, but no tricks."

The slap of his boots against the packed earth faded after a couple heartbeats. As I

studied the hay bales dead ahead, his return and whistling skittered up and past the naked spot on my lower spine not covered by the belly-baring tee. "Don't make me drop this. I sure don't need seven more years of bad luck."

*Jack, superstitious?*

The flash of a mirror caught in my peripheral vision. I turned to accommodate the level of his hand. A backward glance brought a heartbeat into my throat. While his name sprawled across the lowest curve of my cheek in red ink, a small heart lay in the center. He'd even shaded it in so no flesh tone peeped through.

"You mean more to me than you think, Kim. Just hope you haven't stuck your nose somewhere it'll get pinched pretty hard. Let me know what you're up to."

Tell him about the man his mother thinks she knows and loves. "Promise you'll believe me when I tell you what I witnessed?"

"Absolutely. Shoot." His right arm caught my waist. He pulled me upright and drew me close. "Cross my heart and hope to be trampled by a bull."

I swallowed hard, stable grit and dust mixing with my saliva. "Paul Westcott is involved in a sex-slave ring."



## Chapter Seven

The porch swing creaked underneath our combined weight. The setting sun cast a coral glow over the August sky. Jack laid his hand over mine. Between the two of us we'd figure out a way to bring Paul to justice and get him out of Gloria's life forever.

All five of Jack's fingers squeezed. "You sure as hell are messing with the devil going over there."

"You've heard about that place?"

"There aren't too many places I haven't heard about. Not that I'd go near that one. Rather jerk myself off. Heard talk Paul might be involved but he's damned good at damage control."

"Don't the local authorities know about what goes on there?"

"No money changes hands during those men's visits. They pay for those services at another time. Sex between consenting adults isn't against the law, no matter how many people are around. Watching or participating. And they're not disturbing anyone's peace. As long as no one complains about getting injured, life there will go on as usual."

"But Paul gave Anneke your mother's favorite necklace."

Jack leaped off the swing and smacked his hand against the peeling porch banister. "Son of a bitch. Westcott should be skinned alive."

"While you're here figuring out the proper punishment, he's taking Gloria for a sucker and getting away with a crime. Those women are slaves. Ter told me about how they're brought in from all over the place. Some from Mexico. Some even from Europe. Anneke is from Sweden."

"So he's importing pussy? Is this Ter willing to turn witness?"

"He didn't say. But at least he took me there so I could see for myself what goes

on.”

“And you didn’t get caught up in the games?”

“I only played enough to get the information I needed. Then we got out.”

“Another man had sex with you today, didn’t he?” The blocked boot heels scraped against the porch planks as Jack wheeled on me. “I don’t want you getting hurt. Not for anything or anyone.”

*Jack, the jealous type? No man ever cared enough about me to become jealous.*

“If you count a man putting his fingers in my pussy and ass sex, then yes. Or the fact he did me with a glass dildo...”

“Glass dildo? How thick?”

“Not as thick as you.”

That brought the flicker of a smile but one that faded faster than frost at sunlight. “Figures. Those assholes don’t know what it takes to make a woman happy.”

“And Jack Dodson does?”

He knelt and laid his unshaven cheek against my knee. “I promise no one will ever harm you. Not while I’m living or breathing. Once I haul Voodoo over to the Circle Red tomorrow I’ll be back to pick you up. We’ll find this Terencio guy and see if he’ll cooperate.”

“Cooperate as in going with us to the authorities?”

“Yeah. And telling me what he knows of Paul Westcott’s dirty business. Since my daddy’s death, Mama hasn’t been thinking straight. Such a waste of a smart woman. She got involved with Westcott while I was riding high on the rodeo circuit.”

“But it’s not your fault she acted with her heart instead of her head.”

“She’s lost all sense of reasoning since hooking up with Westcott. Can’t get over the change in her. I shoulda been around more. Those trophies and buckles are shiny but they only collect dust. Family is always there. Doesn’t need polishing to stay pretty and mean something special.”

"What if Ter doesn't want any part of talking to you or the police?"

"I'll bring that Westcott down somehow. Foxes always seek their dens. I'll flush him out of his sooner or later. Even the smartest men make mistakes and he's already made a fucking huge one."

"Which is?"

"Messing with two women who mean the world to me."

"Spend the night with me, Jack." I finger-combed his damp spikes. "Park your truck up the road a bit or over on the Morgans' property. No one will know. You can crawl out my window before dawn."

He nipped my knee. "Crawl out your window? Damn, girl. I haven't done that in a good many years."

"What?" I closed my fist over a section of his hair. "You've been caught in the middle of doing someone you shouldn't?"

"I don't screw someone else's woman." Rough fingertips tickled my outer thigh. "Only did that window bit once in high school. Marybeth Polk."

"Marybeth? I remember her from the barbecues. Always walked around like she had a board up her ass."

He grinned and shook his head. "Yeah, she was kinda prissy. Had no clue what a man really wanted. Couldn't hold a candle to you."

I cupped a hand over my mouth until the laughter crawled back down to my belly. "She wouldn't even touch something someone else had without washing her hands afterward." But she evidently touched Jack at least once. "You went out her window?"

He picked up my hands and kissed both palms. After nipping my index fingertip he let go. "Yeah. Ruined my best pair of jeans. Mama had a fit. I told her I ripped them jumping a fence."

My belly churned. "Who caught you with Marybeth?"

Jack sat down on the porch and batted my dangling legs. "Her daddy and mama

came home early from the movies. I heard the front door open and I went out the window. Landed on my feet.”

“Lucky you.” I scooted to the edge of the swing, opened my legs, grabbed his shoulders and pulled him into the space made.

“Not yet. But I think my luck might be changing.” Straightening, he nestled against me and rested his head on my shoulder.

With each glide of my fingers through his hair, my pussy grew wetter. At this late hour when the day crawled toward the darkness, only clothes separated us. And nothing mattered when it came to doing what was right for us and for the people who mattered most in our lives. The time may have come for me to turn my weary body in for the day. But I’d never turn my back on friends or family. Or on a man who was a friend I wanted to fuck—and get to know so much better.

\* \* \* \* \*

For hours I punched the feather pillow and stared at the digital clock’s scarlet letters. Jack’s deep breathing did little to calm the stirrings within my body. Caught in a shaft of moonlight, Jack’s bare chest rose and fell. The white cotton sheet rested below his navel. From the radio on the floor beside the nightstand, the latest news from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration came across the airwaves.

I reached out and lifted the sheet away from his crotch. Golden hairs shone almost silver. My hand lifted higher and revealed more of his magnificent lower body, hardened and lean-muscled from years of ranch work and rodeo antics.

What a waste. Here I lay, next to a naked man, and all he did was sleep while I stewed about my sexual fantasies and knowledge of Paul Westcott’s dirty business.

Jack’s right arm shot up and his fingers fused around my wrist. “Didn’t think you’d sleep with me around.” He let go, wrested the sheet from my grasp and tossed it toward the foot end of the brass bed.

As he turned toward me, the lumpy mattress shifted and brought our bodies

together. Warm hands stroked the small of my back. I tossed my right leg over his hip. His nipples, already hard, poked against the swell of my breasts.

"I can't shut my mind off." *Or my body.*

"Neither can I. Between your pillow-punching and my conscience making a rare appearance..."

I played my heel against his buttocks. "Those are the only things keeping you awake?"

"No." He reached up and stroked my neck where it met my shoulder. "You're all tense. Want me to work out the stiffness?"

Reaching between us, I grabbed his stiffening cock. "I'm game for anything you have in mind. Will you tie me up again sometime?"

"Only if you get some sleep. You've been through more than any dozen women today."

I flopped onto my stomach. "Go ahead. Massage away. Work out all the badness."

He landed a swat to my buttocks and then straddled me. "I can help but I can't work miracles."

Hands that held reins and brought bulls down kneaded and smoothed over my shoulders and back. With each pass of his palms, tension beat a hasty retreat from my muscles. I shifted my face on the pillow and blew out a held breath.

What would a life with Jack be like? Waking next to him every morning. Fixing those pecan pancakes he loved. Kissing him until neither of us could see straight.

*Forget it. Wild men rarely settle down.* The things for which I longed only happened in fairy tales anymore. My life was about as far from a romance novel as it got. The happily-ever-after fairy had found me a waste of her time and took her magic wand elsewhere.

The hands came faster and harder. "You're tensing up again. Relax and think about our ride on Voodoo. Think about going with me to Luxaloosa tomorrow."

"Mmmmm." And thinking about bouncing up and down on that saddle with a hard clit only tempted me to toss Jack off and tackle him on these damp sheets.

"Patience isn't one of your virtues, is it?" His touch fanned over my flanks and down to my hips. Several squeezes of his hands stoked the fire in my belly.

"Never has been. Especially not when I'm within fifty feet of you."

The pressure from his legs against my sides eased and the caresses ceased. "Want me to leave?"

I reached back and clawed his knee. "Not on your life."

"Good. Then lie there and behave."

Eyes closed, I played out several scenarios in my mind. Jack doing me in Broadmann's Creek. Him tying my legs and arms to a large bed, pouring champagne all over my body and licking me dry.

He cleared his throat, his body heat left mine and the mattress shifted again. Feet thumped against the hardwood floor. Planks creaked. The hinges on the medicine cabinet squeaked. More slapping of his feet against bare wood.

I turned over. Jack wore moonlight well. So damned well.

He waved the container of lubricant at me, climbed over me to reach his side of the bed and urged me onto my right side, facing away from him. "Lie still. Enjoy the rest of our time together.

*Our time together. Our time together.*

The sweetest sentence ever spoken.

Butterfly kisses came over my shoulders and down my spine. A couple times his tongue came out to play and deposited the most delicious wetness where it touched.

This man could make the worst day turn fabulous. "Someday I want to measure you."

"What?"

"When I return to Mariana I'm going to design you a leather vest, fancy studded

shirt and matching leather pants. The finest grade of calfskin. Soft as butter."

"Hush now, honey." He finger-combed the hair away from my face and kissed my earlobe. As he settled behind me the feather pillow sank underneath the combined weight of our skulls.

A faint click reached me along with the ooze of lubricant from the mouth of the plastic tube. My heart thumped into my throat. Sweat seeped under my arms.

He lifted my top leg over his hip and shifted himself again. Slick fingers worked the gel along my tender pussy lips before departing. More gel squeaked out and the fingers returned, this time tucking into my heat.

"Ooooooh, yes. Feels so good."

"That's what I want for you."

They worked in and out, not hard like he'd done before but slower. Taking their time.

He pulled them out and snapped the cap into place. The white tube hit the floor on my side of the antique bed. "Keep that leg still and close your eyes."

I shoved my hands underneath the pancake-flat pillow and shut my eyes. The head of his cock probed my opening for a heartbeat before slipping inside. He fed his hardness deeper into me and I burrowed against his belly.

So damned delicious. "Aren't you afraid I'll unseat you, roughrider?"

"If I can remain on Lost Cause I can ride you. No bull I ever rode sucked back like him."

Now he was trotting out rodeo terminology on me. As if I didn't already know what "sucked back" meant. Jack sure had an interesting take on pillow talk.

But he was right. Lost Cause was a bull that loved tossing even the roughest riders.

"I remember reading about your ride. You were lucky. He sent lots of riders to the hospital."

"Not me. Damned arm jerker messed up my shoulder a little bit but I got even by

staying on him.”

Another kiss came on my shoulder and he started rocking me. We were together. Sharing the most intimate of connections. Just like those people in the sexy novels I sneaked into my school satchels so many times. Only Jack’s face remained emblazoned against the otherwise blackness of my closed lids.

Hard and deep inside me, he bundled me close. “Sweet dreams. I want you to be sound asleep when I crawl out that window soon.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration broadcast the latest report. That hurricane was heading right for Corpus Christi. I squeezed my eyelids closed. Better to focus on getting a little sleep. At least in dreams I could continue the bliss and bonding with Jack.

Even if a skewed one, and only for a couple hours, romance could be mine.



## **Chapter Eight**

Another morning, another empty place beside me in bed. I stifled a yawn. Jack sure knew how to keep a woman awake and lull her to sleep. Each stretch of my arm and leg brought only a cool, dry sheet. Not a trace of body heat. I forced open my bleary eyes and looked around the room. Jack had long since gone and taken his radio. At bringing my legs together, only a trace of wetness remained.

Less than three hours ago I'd drifted off connected physically and emotionally to a man for the first time in my life. My latest ex-boyfriend, Galen, had always pushed me to my side of the bed. Told me I got too hot and kept him from resting.

And that lying, cheating bastard had kept me from exploring my truest passion for two years. Can't run a business to save my life? Since kicking his ass to the curb I'd opened a second boutique featuring The Cowboy's Connection's brand of Western wear. Profits were up at both boutiques.

The gnawing in my stomach intensified. Skipping meals or eating like a bird could lose me a couple pounds of excess body fat but I couldn't hope to make it through another day only on reserves.

The red numbers bored into my brain. Six thirteen. At this ungodly hour I craved two things—Jack's cock and a tall glass of orange juice.

I sank onto the pillow. Orange juice or another hour's sleep? Orange juice to wash down one of those crisp pastries Sue fried up and placed in the cow's head canister. More rumbling. Damn. Why wouldn't my body let me alone for a change?

From the cedar chest, I claimed the sleep shirt that never made it past my head last night. I tossed it back down. No. That thing was as sheer as the lacy curtains in the front room. Instead I slipped into a pair of jeans and grabbed the pink, clingy t-shirt from the chest of drawers. No bra was necessary for breakfast alone. Shame on me maybe, but if

anyone hadn't ever seen hard nipples beneath cotton they didn't get out much in the world.

Or eat at The Lone Star.

The lime green flip-flops stayed in hiding so I padded barefoot toward the bedroom door. A turn of the key gained me access to the hallway and I plodded ahead, one foot in front of the half-numb other.

Voices carried up from the lower level. A man's tone came louder and harsh enough to strip lacquer from every floor in this farmhouse.

"You don't know where she went yesterday? Well I have a pretty damned good idea, Gloria."

"Stop shouting or you'll waken her." Each word came out as though wrung from Gloria's throat.

"I'll do more than wake her when I find her. She has no right prying into other people's business." A masculine cough.

My heartbeat lodged in my throat. Paul Westcott. A cupboard door slammed. I hurried into my room, closed the door and locked it. Reaching the window, I shoved it the rest of the way open and worked myself out, feet first. A gust of warm wind slapped my face and upper body.

No doubt about it. Mesa Junction was at least a target for a tropical storm with that hurricane closing in on Corpus Christi as I fell asleep this morning.

The gray dawn barely lit anything beyond the sill. I prayed hard and pushed off. Bent at the knees, I made contact with the grassy patch not far from my second-story window. A million pins might have been jammed through my knees and hands upon impact. Raindrops pelted my bare arms. One glance revealed only grazes on my hands and I dashed toward the stable. Jack would be there, getting Voodoo ready. He wouldn't let anyone harm me. And there wasn't time for pain or second thoughts.

By now Paul was likely banging at my bedroom door. Grit jabbed the bottoms of

my feet and my legs pumped harder. Breath rushed from my body. The early morning downpour mixed with the sweat already on my skin. Around the side of the stable, the horse trailer was parked and hooked up to Jack's lipstick-red truck.

I rushed around the far side, putting a solid barrier between anyone pursuing and myself. Stilling my steps, I leaned against the trailer and listened. The stomp of hooves and a loud snort sounded. Voodoo was already in here.

I yanked open the escape door, climbed inside and pulled the panel closed. If the horse carried on, I'd have no choice but to head back out the way I came in. The gleaming beast snorted again and tossed his head. His front rested against the padded breast bar. After sucking in several deep breaths and blowing them out, I reached up and patted his nose.

"Sweet beast. Don't give me away."

Underneath my stroking hand, he bobbed his head and unseated my touch. I delivered a quick kiss above his nose. He gave another stomp and then quieted. Just like his owner – fond of the ladies.

As I crouched in the narrow area between the horse and the front wall, my hand met with a woolen blanket. Sitting down, I drew up my knees and opened the folded bundle. The sweetness of hay filled my nostrils and tickled my tongue. I scooted against the cold trailer wall. Hard to tell how much manure and dirt the blanket would deposit on my body and clothes, but water and soap would wash that away.

*When in deep shit otherwise in life, don't worry about horseshit.*

A couple more inches brought me flush against the sidewall. A bit of dried grass and hay clung to the woolen fibers and transferred to my damp skin. I lay down and Voodoo remained well in front of my blanket-covered body.

Paul wouldn't dare cross paths with Jack's champion stallion again. But where was Jack? My pulse picked up the pace and a howling ensued in my skull. Sourness similar to what I'd tasted and swallowed yesterday filled my mouth.

*Sweet and just Jesus, bring Jack to get his horse soon. May he not be sleeping but wide*

*awake and on his way back here. Only he had the key to relock the escape door. Until then anyone could get to me.*

Muffled banging and hollering traveled underneath my sweat-inducing camouflage. *Please, dear God. Don't let Paul find me. He'll probably whip me within an inch of my life.*

*If he doesn't kill me.*

*Get a damned grip.* I swallowed some bile along with a mouthful of spit. If I stayed quiet, he wouldn't come in here. Even if he did open up those doors, one look at Voodoo would drive him away.

Paul had probably found the barrette I'd lost at the whorehouse. He sure was pissed off that Gloria didn't know where I'd gone yesterday. Seemed he had his own strong suspicions. And said he wanted to do more than wake me. First thing I'd do on returning to Mariana would be to cut my unruly mane short.

From all signs, the argument between Gloria and Paul had been well underway before I opened the bedroom door. If Paul also suspected the owner of the hair jewelry and showed it to Gloria, she would have blurted it belonged to me. Slim chance of this happening, but with the way my luck was running of late... Of all the fools for love, she was the biggest. And it wasn't even love but the attention of a man who only used her as an outlet for his cum and his bullshit.

Something thumped against the loading ramp. I moved my head and the upper portion of the blanket fell away. Two men were arguing. A half-cry. Paul cursing. More scuffling. Light poured into the trailer from the rear. Blood pounded in my brain. I drew up my cover and flattened myself against the floor. Hopefully Voodoo's hefty body would block me from view.

"I don't give a damn what you say or think, Westcott. Kim isn't back here. No one with any sense would get in this trailer with my horse. He'd kick and bite the hell out of 'em."

"You're hiding her somewhere. I'll find her."

"Please, Paul. Come back in the house and have some breakfast." Gloria half cried, half pleaded her request.

The ramp struck the ground. Footsteps clomped on the trailer floor.

Boot heels struck the rubber matting. "Find her? What if you do? If she has half the brains she was born with she won't come near you." Jack was probably standing at the back of the trailer section that usually housed another horse.

Westcott coughed. "I want to talk with her. Find out why she's trying to make trouble for me. If she goes too far I'll take care of her. She won't run far with a storm settling in."

"She's not making any trouble for you. But I damned well will if you don't get away from my property." Jack's voice rose with each word spoken. More boot thumps, but they faded with each step taken. "There's nothing in there but Voodoo."

Blood spilled onto my tongue and my cheek throbbed. I unclenched my teeth and blew out some of the breath I held. The loading ramp slapped into place and blotted out the light. Beyond the windows the argument continued.

"Mama doesn't need a no-good bastard like you causing her more heartache."

"As though you haven't brought her enough grief with your wild ways." Paul coughed, this time longer and louder.

"Wild ways are better than whoring ways any day. I'm not proud of everything I've done. But at least I haven't done anyone else wrong in the process."

Sweat trickled between my breasts and I jerked the blanket down. What sounded like a fist meeting flesh came beyond the trailer's window. Eyes heavy, I swallowed another yawn.

Paul let loose with a string of profanities that would have made Gloria run for her bible. "If I lose that damned tooth I'll make you pay. Cocky little punk."

"You'll lose more than your tooth if you don't let my mama and Kim alone."

The scent of horse manure and hay came in with my next breath. Things grew silent

beyond the trailer. I stared at the blocks of Aztec designs on the blanket and counted them from the center outward. Where had Jack gone? What about Paul? The truck's engine turned over, growling almost as much as my stomach. A door slammed.

Who was up there? Worse yet, whoever it was they were back on the outside and maybe coming back here.

The escape door opened and someone's weight landed against the matted trailer floor. I drew in shallow steadying breaths. No way would I lie on the floor like a whipped pup if it were Paul Westcott coming in here after me. I'd look him in the eye, summon every bit of strength and spit in his ugly pockmarked and pinched face. Then I'd kick or knee him in the balls. I stared in the direction of the footsteps, which now stilled.

Jack stood in the entrance of the escape door. "Thought I'd find you back here. Damned bastard Westcott put me behind this morning."

"Who smacked whom?"

A devilish grin curved the line of Jack's lips. "I punched him in the jaw. Almost knocked him off his feet. All before my first cup of coffee. He went back in the house."

"What about your mama? Is she okay?"

"Yeah. She went inside before I hammered Paul. Probably in there nursing him right now. She's worried about my making this trip up to Luxaloosa and Circle Red. On some things she's logical. On others...that woman is acting dumber than dirt anymore. But don't worry about her. She can shoot pretty straight if need be. Picked off some wild animals in her time, especially if they got after her chickens."

"She keeps a loaded gun handy?"

He accepted the blanket and dropped it beside his feet. "Lady Smith and Wesson. Daddy taught her everything she knows about firearms and protecting her property. She's better with a shotgun though."

Just beyond the wall to my left, the truck's idling smoothed. A silver belt buckle,

inlaid with turquoise, rested above Jack's lean hips. Voodoo snorted and stuck his nose into the feedbag. After a bit of munching and crunching his breakfast the black beast's head rose and he eyed me.

"I think he's come to like you." Jack whistled softly. "Can't for the life of me figure what you're doing out here. I promised I'd come upstairs and wake you."

A piece of hay clung to my lower lip and I puffed it away. "Guess I saved you the trip and the time."

He nodded and adjusted the weather-worn Stetson. "Getting damned hard to stand up out here with those winds picking up. Gotta make tracks up to Circle Red with Voodoo. If we get going, time will be on our side, according to the latest weather reports."

"Paul knows I was at his place in Aloma. I was heading downstairs to get my breakfast when I heard him yelling at Gloria."

"If he knows what's good for him he'll take his ass somewhere else." Jack braced his right palm against the trailer wall. "Rance's farmhouse is only about a mile from Circle Red. After the storm calms we'll see about contacting the police. At least you can file a complaint against Paul Westcott for threatening you. I'm a witness. Came at me like a wild bull but I set him straight."

"Be careful."

"He doesn't worry me. But the damned bad weather is getting under my hide. I'll have my cell phone for making emergency calls and checking on Mama. Hold on..." He left the trailer and came back inside. "Looks like I got my wish. Westcott just left."

I forced myself to my feet and approached the man who smelled like a summer morning and was sexier than any man in Hollywood—even at the butt crack of dawn. "Now you aren't the only one climbing out of bedroom windows."

He tipped my chin and kissed my nose. Caramel candy lingered on his breath. "Once we get to Rance's you can tell me all about what happened. For now work is waiting but the damned storm won't. This mushy business is getting in the way."

I stepped back several paces. *Well good morning to you too, handsome, blond and in a very serious mood.*

At my sudden maneuvering he got toe to toe and claimed my mouth in a hard, hot kiss. His lips trapped and teased mine before stilling. "Did you hurt yourself jumpin' out that window? Want me to take a look?"

"No, I'm fine. Once we get a chance I'll show you my knees and hands."

"Just those?" He reached out and tousled Voodoo's lush mane. "I'd rather look at this horse if that's all you're offering up." His thumb and forefinger pinched a section of my hair and tugged. "Meantime let's get you aired out so you can ride up there with me."

"No!" The word struck between the second and third button of his gray-and-white-striped twill shirt. "I want to keep Paul on the defensive. He might be out there in the lane watching for me. If he doesn't know where I am and who I'm with it'll keep him busy."

"And hopefully off our asses." Jack turned away from me and headed through the escape door. "Stay in there then." His feet made contact with the trampled grass beside the trailer. "But when it comes to *your ass*, all promises are off when this bad weather passes."



## Chapter Nine

Rance Holliday's farmhouse showed lots of promise as a hiding place but far less as a pictorial for a magazine advertising the proper ways of housekeeping. I swiped my finger beside an embroidered doily on the bedside table. Rich cherry wood grain appeared.

A puff of breath cleaned off the tip of my index finger. "That last hour we spent on the road dragged on forever."

"Always does when danger's on the back bumper." Jack propped the NOAA-frequency radio on his lap. "We need the rain. But damn the destruction that often comes with it this time of year."

"Want me to fix you something to eat? Those greasy doughnuts were hardly a proper breakfast. Nor was that horrible burned toast."

"I'm fine." Jack set the radio on the bedside table. "Mama's okay. She and Sue were in the reinforced room Daddy had put in. Said the winds were over a hundred miles per hour. Probably be a pretty good mess to clean up, especially with the stables and outbuildings. Said she heard some glass shattering somewhere in the house."

Cross-legged and naked on the bed, I curled my toes toward the bottoms of my feet and the joints cracked. "According to that report the storm isn't weakening. You think this old place can withstand much of a hit?"

"Not nearly as well as Mama and Daddy's place." His long fingers stroked above his jean-covered knees. "Voodoo will be as safe up at Circle Red."

"Paul Westcott hates all three of us. His temper reminds me of —"

"A fucking loser who cheated on you? Close?"

I recoiled at his words. "I'd rather not discuss Galen and his girlfriend." Maybe I

was crazy from lack of sleep but I'd bet both my businesses Jack cared about me. "Are you sure you can get my stuff out of Gloria's house without interference?"

"I talked to Sue after I talked to Mama. She'll get Bo to take your things up to Circle Red."

"Won't be much. Just a garment bag and a small suitcase. Couple toiletries. I don't bring anything fancy when I visit. Jeans and some t-shirts are about it."

"Not much, huh? Like the white lace sundress in the closet. So pretty." His work-roughened fingers teased my inner thigh. "Just like you."

"If Westcott had caught up to me, hard to tell how well he would have worked me over."

Warm lips met mine and stilled their quivering. After a soft kiss he rose up. "It's time you told the police what you've seen and how he's acting. I'll back you. Jim over at Circle Red says he's heard talk of those women. They only stay in Aloma long enough to learn the ropes. Then they're farmed out to serve as cooks and housemaids all around."

"Maids who do more than sweep the floor."

"And how. Hell of a lot more. Talk has it that Paul runs the show. Sets everything up. Gets money from the men for whom those women are working." He opened his belt and let the ends lop over his legs. "Where we have him is that woman who hooked you up with Ter. Least from what she told you when you returned and picked up the loaner car. Some illegal immigrants at his whorehouse. I'm sure the law would be interested in Paul's personnel records for his orchards. Tax records too."

"Most everyone thinks Westcott's a saint. That's where our problem lies. His money does the talking in this area. Half of the congregation at the Baptist church hold him as close as they do God."

"That's going to change. I won't let anyone harm you. I'll do whatever it takes to keep you safe." He stood and gave me his best smile.

"And you need someone watching out for you."

"Not really. But if anyone's up to that task, I'd guess you're the best woman around." He scratched his nose but the grin remained. "Say, I got some paperwork waiting downstairs. And no matter how many times you ask, I'm not tying you up until this storm passes." His palm massaged my bare belly and his thumb poked into my navel. "Say the alphabet. Say each letter real plain and don't run 'em together. Front ways and backward. You'll be sleeping before you finish."

"Or else I get to tie you up?"

"Deal." Bending over me, he kissed both nipples before pulling away.

While I recited, Jack fastened his belt and swaggered toward the doorway.

"I'm hungry." Starving was more like it.

He pointed his right index finger at me. "Get yourself forty winks. You've lost enough sleep over me and a million other crazy things. We'll have plenty of time together later. And I'll scramble you some eggs."

The fan cooled my tongue before I tucked it back in my mouth. "Don't forget."

He rushed back to the bed and his kiss devoured my lips. "I won't. We waited long enough to act on what we got goin'."

Once he reached the hallway he paused and turned my way. A wink chased his goodbye wave.

"Get some sleep." He pointed toward the bedside table. "I've got a gun downstairs and left the knife up here for you. Just in case trouble comes calling. I won't be working on those files too long." Jack turned and stepped out of sight. "I'll keep listening to the weather report and come get you if necessary."

He laughed and said something I couldn't decipher. Boot heels clomped against the carpeted steps but soon faded.

I lay down and thrashed my head against the pillow. Strands of rain-wet hair clung to my cheeks. Hardly a sound came from inside the house. Outside was another matter

entirely. The wind banged against the bedroom window. How long before Jack would return and satisfy my body? But he was right. I hadn't slept more than a couple hours the past two nights. I heaved a sigh toward the ceiling and flexed my fingers.

In the bathroom to the left of the lumpy bed on which I lay, water from the showerhead or tap plinked against the tub drain. Another damned drippy faucet. I fanned my arms, making angel wings on the sheet. The next breath tickled my throat. Burned bread. Stubborn man wouldn't let me fiddle with the toaster earlier. Instead he ended up with those three charred but scraped squares of bread that belonged in the trashcan instead of his stomach.

And he wondered why I declined his makeshift meal.

If he couldn't scramble eggs any better than he made toast I'd resort to borrowing something from Rance's pantry.

I dragged my tongue around my mouth. Not a spare ounce of fat anywhere on Jack's body. Faint blond hairs springing from the pale skin. His cheeks scented with a woodsy skin bracer. His kisses flavored with charcoal and strong black coffee brewed in that battered percolator with the cracked glass spout downstairs. I burrowed my ass into the bedding. Where his cock had once rested against the small of my back in the wee hours of this Wednesday, a worn-out mattress and springs now prodded.

If Paul got wind of where we were, all hell would break loose. Gloria would have been far better off taking out a personal ad in some newspaper or online group. Sue was right. Westcott was a devil. True evil wearing a straw hat, navy-blue suspenders and khaki pants that dragged over the tops of his scuffed work boots. A stranger to this area would never suspect he had a couple dollars in his bank account. A couple million, that is. Swaggering along, wearing that shit-eating grin, that sorry excuse for a man was dirtier than any cattle driver after a long haul in the Texas sun.

My humming drowned out the dripping water. Jack had sung me to sleep last night. Hadn't known I was playing possum to his songbird.

Thunder clapped outside and the windows rattled back. My leg muscles tensed.

Rain hissed and gusty winds smacked against this side of the farmhouse.

A fly buzzed above my face and flitted toward the bedside lamp. Amber light flowed above and underneath the frosted green shade but never reached the glass belly. My long-absent bed partner, Morpheus, nudged me.

"Girl," he said in a voice laced with more dogma than Preacher Millett, "time for those eyes to close."

Shivers cascaded down my spine and I stilled against the clean sheet. I closed my eyes. *Stop with the lecture, you ancient tease.*

*I'll sleep when I'm good and ready.*

Drawing my knees up to my chest, I hugged them tight. *And right now I'm about as wide awake as a woman in love can get.*

Wild birds decorated the wall border. From a spot above the dresser drawers, I followed their rightward march. Before I reached the quail, or something that looked like a quail, footsteps tramped on the stairs.

I let go of my legs and stretched. "Finished already?"

Jack strode into the room and dropped a stack of manila folders onto the rust brown corduroy cushion tied to the rocking chair's seat. "Better I stay up here with you. You've been through a lot. Shouldn't go and leave you all alone. Paperwork won't take more than an hour to go over." Jack unfastened the button on his jeans and unzipped them. "And since you stayed up here and didn't follow me downstairs, I figure that deserves a little something. Then we'll head to the storm cellar. A couple minutes won't make any difference."

"That from the man who always made it to the truck ahead of everyone else each time we went into town."

He laughed and pulled a clown face. "Don't know why you didn't keep your clothes on."

The fly returned but another vigorous puff sent it away. "You like me better with

them off." I puckered my dry lips. "Give me a taste of what I've been missing."

Despite Jack's laid-back mood and NOAA's reports, the storm ripped and roared much like a barroom drunk who was bent on disturbing more than everyone's peace. Jack straddled my hips, his cock head pointing straight at my mouth.

"That's my plan. But we'll have the most fun once this storm settles." He leaned down and kissed my right nipple.

"Rance has some chocolate pudding down there in the kitchen cupboard. Used to take that kind in my lunch." I flicked my tongue at his hard-on. "But my mother never packed anything *that* interesting in my lunchbox."

He inched closer, drew a line of clear cum against my half-open lips and I licked it away. "I could feed for a while longer on you, sweet thing."

"No calories doing that but I might be hard on your heart."

He shook his head. "Not to worry about that, honey. Someday I'll settle down. The right woman will stick by me. And I'll sure stick by her."

I bucked my hips and my sexy rider keeled sideways a bit. "If after almost twenty-five years you haven't found her, what makes you think she exists?"

"Oh, she does." He winked.

"Still, it might be hard finding her." Even with sleep-bleary eyes there was no mistaking the gleam in his baby blues.

"Nah." He traced the outline of my earlobes. "Wouldn't surprise me if a tornado came along for the ride on this storm."

*That's right, handsome. Change the subject when cornered about your true feelings.*

He backed down my body and climbed between my legs. Steady hands parted me as easily as he would one of Sue's buttermilk biscuits. After kissing my belly, he pulled me closer with his left arm. His hard cock filled his right hand and he took aim at my wet lips. "You don't seem the kind of woman who'd want to ride a wild horse bareback."

I bucked and bumped my crotch against his hardness. "A woman's gotta have a first time for everything. You know, I've never been done in a storm cellar before."

"Makes two of us." He snickered and flashed me a grin.

Beyond the closed bedroom door, a muffled thump of wood meeting wood sounded. Was that the porch swing or... "Did you hear that?"

"Just the wind, honey. Get up and get dressed. Everything's creaking and squeaking in this place. It's time we got down to the cellar." He thumbed the hood of my clit. "Nothing's gonna hurt you with me around."

More squeaking resulted as we both shifted on the mattress. I backed toward the headboard and he crouched beside me. The feather pillow bounced onto the floor.

Another rasping noise. I reached for the knife on the bedside table.

Old farmhouses didn't have a smoker's cough.

A solid strike came against the bedroom door and sent it cracking against the wall. On the tail of the cooler rush of air, Paul Westcott barged in. He aimed a handgun at my head.

His thick pink tongue took its time traveling over his upper lip. "Can't have you telling any tales, bitch. Time to shut your mouth for good. Yours too, you bastard."

Jack lunged toward the headboard and blotted my view. The gun discharged. Jack's body slumped and stretched over mine.

"Aieeyyyyy...you sonofabitch."

Warm liquid dripped onto my belly. Jack toppled over the bed's edge and hit the floor. Letting loose with more profanities, Jack regained his footing and grabbed the spare rope I'd dragged in from the truck in case he changed his mind about tying me up. A single lunge brought every pound of my lover and friend crashing down upon Paul Westcott. The gun clattered to the floor and lay well out of the pinned louse's reach. A scream stalled in my throat. Jack's arm whipped up and down, looping the cattle rope over his captive. Blood oozed from his shoulder wound and continued

toward Jack's wrist.

"I'll teach you to use people and steal from them." Another section of rope wound from Jack's hand around Paul's wrists.

"You have nothing on me." The words came slower and softer from the beaten man.

"Think again, you sorry piece of shit."

"You and your family pride. You don't even know your daddy. Mike Dodson married your mother out of pity."

"You're a damned liar." Jack's tone rose with each word spoken.

Paul thrashed his legs and shoulders. "Ask her yourself. I'm done with the damned stinking lot of you."

As Jack switched position, Paul kicked out and crawled free, his hands bound. The length of rope Jack had wrapped around the intruder's upper body held the rest in place. He reached the door and Jack followed, attacking him from behind with a heel strike to the spine. They tumbled out the door. Boot heels clattered down the steps.

"No, Jack! Come back. My God."

Overhead the blades whipped faster. Fan blades turning black. Fuzzy. Snow. Blinding. *Can't see*. Scalding tears.

More thumping of boots against the steps. Someone entered the room, and I closed my eyes.

"Come on now." Jack lifted me off the bed. "Gotta get you to the cellar. Then I'll finish what I started with Westcott."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Buzzing filled my brain. Glass shattered. No sign of Jack or Paul. My throat muscles fought against the swallow that sent the heartbeat back to my heaving chest.*

*What time was it? Was Jack okay?*



*I called his name countless times but he never answered. Maybe Paul got loose and shot him again.*

*My pulse pounded hard enough to split my veins and skin.*

*A horrible rattling besieged the bedroom windows. Roaring. Ferocious. Like a freight train tearing through the front lawn. Heading straight to hell and likely taking me along. I strained against my bonds. Here I lay, tied to my deathbed. Underneath my head the remaining feather pillow was flat and sweat-soaked. The bedside table lamp and digital clock were off. I blinked and shook my head. More rattling of the windows and semi-darkness.*

*Tree branches scratching against glass. Debris pelting the panes. A hellish rumbling growing louder with each thump of my heart. Every muscle clenched, I blinked back tears. There was only one explanation for the commotion.*

*A tornado was heading straight for this farmhouse and there wasn't a place for me to hide.*

*Sweat tracked down my sides. Each flex of my toes brought more sensation and blood to my legs. Of all the foolish things. Tied up and Jack nowhere in sight.*

*Would he survive the storm? Would I? He had to get medical treatment for the gunshot wound. The wound he'd taken protecting me. I rocked into the mattress and the roaring intensified. It was closing fast. A bizarre countdown cycled in my brain.*

*There was no other explanation for the cacophony outside these walls. Only the moaning of restless souls that never reached heaven and were rising from hell. No storm cellar this time to protect me, only the bed I'd so damned foolishly made by putting my sexual needs before more sensible things such as my life.*

*A sharp crack sounded and the farmhouse moved on its foundation. Overhead more gnashing and grinding as part of the roof yielded. More wood splitting. Glass shattering. This whole place and everyone in it were tumbling toward the depths of hell.*

*A million ants skittered inside my skull. The walls absorbed my cries and moans. No way to keep track of seconds or minutes. Each time I started a count the din dragged me away from my task. At my next intake of breath the swaying stopped. Ceiling plaster pelted my body but I kept my eyes closed. As things settled, a few more crashes sounded inside whatever was left of this*

*property. My heartbeats lofted into my throat and I swallowed them whole. Sweat slicked my skin.*

*I said the Lord's Prayer, the twenty-third Psalm and the Apostle's Creed. When finished I stretched and stared at the split ceiling. Near the doorway, the wall had suffered a pronounced crack.*

Faint tickling tormented my cheek. I jerked upright. My breath came in snorts, much like Mrs. Denholm's old shepherd every time he ate or drank something.

I parted my legs and hugged myself. No rope.

I'd been dreaming.

Someone, probably Jack, had put a bath towel around me and tucked the ends into my cleavage. Another breath brought dust and a rotten tang onto my tongue. Sweat trickled down my sides.

A couple feet away from where I lay on a mattress, a camping lantern glowed. This was the storm cellar Jack mentioned. Where was he?

"Please, Jack. Please come back. Don't be dead." Each word came out barely above a whisper. Coughing spasms shook me. "I waited so damned long to tell you my true feelings. I love you." The words spread into the semi-darkness surrounding me.

No sign of life or footsteps. Only the damned calm after the calamity. Or maybe the storm was still smashing away up there. I drew in a dizzying breath and screamed it out.

Not a soul would hear me. I had to find out if Jack had succeeded in restraining Paul. If anything happened to Jack...

Doors squeaked on their hinges. Light poured in. Boot heels struck the cellar steps. "Kim!" Jack's shout split the near silence.

Despite the broken springs I picked my way to the far edge of the mattress. "Thank God you're okay. Get me out of this awful place and somewhere, anywhere, else."

Jack barreled into view. In his free arm he held a small lantern. He'd bandaged a

section of old sheet over the wound. A sheet now stained crimson. At least he'd kept the wounded arm somewhat elevated in his haste. "Worst of the storm's past. The front of the farmhouse took a hell of a hit. Paul's lying out in the open right now, on what's left of the porch, bawling like a baby. He ain't going nowhere."

So what I'd dreamed had actually been happening outside the dank hole serving as my shelter.

He helped me to my feet and walked me a short distance past a lawn chair. His fingertips bore down on my upper arm.

After a bit of wobbly pacing, I stopped, turned and pressed my cheek against his shirtfront. We were okay. Both alive. "Did you hear what Paul said about your real father?"

"Could be true, could be a lie. I'll find out from Mama." He shrugged. "If it is true there's nothing I can do to change anything. Maybe she and I can patch things up now. And she's always liked y —"

One look up and into those eyes kept the words in my mouth.

His jaw unclenched. "I'll call Rance in Albuquerque. Damned shame. Mama and Sue are still doing fine. They've weathered lots of storms in that old house. I'd helped Bo and Chuck load the horses before my run-in with Westcott. Those two took the horses away before the worst hit Mesa Junction."

I leaned into Jack as we staggered up the storm cellar's steps. Near the top he braced me against the railing and shoved the doors open. Light, sweet rain hit my face. Dirt-flavored water seeped between my lips and I spit it out. Jack helped me outside and followed. The slam of the heavy doors sent me tripping sideways but I remained standing. The hands on my watch had advanced almost an hour and a half since Paul's arrival. Jack hauled me into his arms and turned us toward the farmhouse.

My sharp intake of breath almost choked me. Ruin everywhere. The devil had reached out and ripped off some of the farmhouse's front. We stepped past a gagged Paul where he lay rolling around on the battered porch and entered the kitchen. Paul's

guttural wailing followed our footsteps. Once in the area that had a sizeable section of one wall and ceiling split, Jack kicked at a small stew pot aside and set me down. And if he called those toppled metal kitchen chairs one name, he must have called them a hundred.

He leaned against a connecting wall left intact. "Judas Priest! I don't know where to begin."

"This whole area is probably without electricity. What about your truck?"

He shrugged and pointed at me. "Messed up but still able to get us out of here. Look at you." Closing the distance between us, he kissed my forehead. "I'm so sorry you had to see me at my meanest."

I caught his ear between my teeth and licked the salty flap of skin. The towel loosened but the ends remained between my breasts. "Paul deserves much worse than you gave him. He shot you." Letting Jack go, I brushed some plaster from his blond spikes. "Good thing you didn't tie me to the bed upstairs. I've done some stupid things in my life but that would have trumped everything."

He kissed my forehead. "We all make mistakes. Mine was not letting you know my real feelings long before now. You can bet I'll head up to Mariana as soon as possible. It's only two hours north of me here in Luxaloosa. That'll make it pretty easy for us to see each other often. Might decide I like it up there better. You know, Mariana's ranches need co-managers and hired hands too."

I clutched his right hand. They sure did. "You need to have that shoulder looked at."

"And you need to get dressed." He kissed my nose. "I'll bring your clothes down. While you dress I'll take a better look at the truck. We got lucky there."

Good about the truck, not so good about the black-hearted bastard tied up on the porch. "What are we going to do about Paul? He can't get away with what he's done."

Jack lifted my hand and laid it above his left breast. "And you shouldn't get away with what you've done. My damned heart hasn't taken such a hit in forever. You hit me

harder than any storm."

"Serves you right for being so sexy." I kissed his cheek and stubble scratched my lips.

"First we'll drop Paul off for a visit with the Luxaloosa police. His ass can ride roughshod in the truck bed."

"All trussed up like that?"

"If I let him loose he might escape. Or he might try taking up where he and I left off." Jack stared me fast to where I stood.

"Don't forget to wrap his gun up and bring it along."

He heaved a held breath, some of which struck my cheek. "Already put it on the truck seat."

When he started moving the makeshift bandage I clamped his hand fast. "No. You'll disturb the clotting process and bullet. Just lay a dishtowel and some ice over top for good measure."

"I got the bullet out on my own."

Stubborn is as stubborn does. "Give me your truck keys. I'm driving."

He huffed warm coffee breath at me. "Nobody's ever driven that truck except me."

After a quick patdown of his pockets, I discovered the key ring in the rear. "There's always a first time for everything. Even me driving a pickup." A glance over my shoulder revealed the beat-up percolator remained undisturbed. "After a cup of that tarry coffee I'll be good to drive us anywhere. And remain awake for at least a day."

"Guess you'll still make me go to the hospital?" His blue eyes crossed then straightened.

"That's our second stop." I rattled the keys. "Once you get that arm healed I want one thing."

"What's that?"

Another kiss on his cheek left my lips and tongue tingling. "Make me think of

something other than today's madness for a little while. Show me you're glad I came here and fulfilled some fantasies with you."

"You know I am. Never been gladder." His kiss traveled from my lips over my chin and down my neck. "Anything else?"

My heartbeats climbed toward my tonsils. "Only that I hope we become more than friends. More than summer lovers."

"Guess time will tell if what I'm feeling, and what you're likely feeling, is really love." With his good arm, he dipped me even though we weren't dancing. He brought me upright with a wolfish howl. The towel floated to the floor. "But from the way I'm loving you and your company right this minute, I sure as hell hope time tells the truth."

## Chapter Ten

*Three months later*

Jack's bare toes drew a line at the edge of the braided rug. The same rug Grandma Libby had given me as a housewarming present my first day in this lovely two-story home on Archer Street. Nothing complemented the bedroom's polished hardwood floors or brought a smile better.

He stepped back a couple paces and squared his broad shoulders. "And don't you dare step past there."

Reaching behind, I grabbed one of the brocaded bolsters and flung it at him. "What if I do?"

His butternut suede shirt jacket accentuated his lean torso. He grabbed the bottom edges and pulled his hands several inches apart. "Then you'd better be a master escape artist to get out of the knots I'll tie."

One by one the pearly fastenings unsnapped and bared him from his tight belly to his neck. I scooted closer to the bed's edge, my gaze fixed on the fringed breeches fitted to his waist and legs. "I've waited long enough for this. After that two-hour meeting with my attorney, sex is the only thing that will get my mind off Paul Westcott."

"The wheels of justice just aren't turning fast enough for you, are they, Cactus Blossom?" A shrug of his shoulders sloughed off the jacket and he laid it beside the Western-outfitted stuffed black bear on the cedar chest. "Each day that passes, the law gets more against Westcott."

Half a glass of iced tea remained on the bedside table. I crushed the flexible straw against the wedge of lemon resting on the bottom. "After I quench my thirst, all I want is *more of you* against *me*."

Jack's hand closed around mine and guided the glass to my mouth. A slight tip sent

the spit-warm beverage down my throat. "Remind me never to challenge you to a chugging contest."

As the lemon wedge skidded toward my lips, I pushed his hand and the glass away.

Resuming my spread-eagled position in the center of the king-size bed, I closed my eyes. "If I haven't resorted to drinking or other dumb coping mechanisms by now, I never will. But I'll admit seeing Paul Westcott hanging by his balls would give me immense satisfaction."

A pinch of his fingers popped open the button on his waistband. "That the only thing that would give you satisfaction anymore?"

The hands that roped animals and held reins shucked the tailor-made trousers past his knees. Another touch sent them to his ankles and he stepped free. I closed my eyes and filled my nose and lungs with the tang of top-grade cowhide.

A wiggle against the sheets intensified the burning in my belly and between my legs. "You know you top the list. My 'A' list."

The mattress shifted at his added weight. His lips kissed a crooked pattern around my right breast. Then his teeth and tongue roused my nipple. "What does the 'A' stand for?"

"Always."

"Always?" He stopped sucking and glanced up, his far-from-a-baby blues doing their best to get a glimpse at my soul.

I nodded and pulled his mouth back where it belonged. "Always a friend. Always ready to do the right thing. Always..."

His potent kiss opened my lips wider and he swallowed my sigh. "Finish what you started, honey."

*Go on. Do as he says.*

A lift of my left arm located the spare set of bed pillows. I pulled one off the bed



and brought it down on his head. "Guess your driving here several nights a week to spend time with me deserves the truth."

"Only if you want to tell it." His thumb caressed my cheek before tweaking my nipple. "If you'd rather not say I won't hold anything but my body against you."

"Always on my mind." The words tumbled out faster than dice from the fist of a fever-struck gambler in Vegas. "A day hasn't gone by in such a long time that I haven't thought of you." My teeth trapped my tattletale tongue.

He reached beside the bed and held up the length of cattle rope wrapped in a section of old sheet. "I won't make it too tight. Don't want any ties that bind permanently. You'll be able to move your arms around a little bit. Legs too."

*Ties that bind permanently. Ties that bind permanently.*

Once a free spirit, always a free spirit. I had no better chance at holding him down, holding him to a romantic commitment, than I did of keeping my hands around one of Dicey Pittman's greased hogs.

And after fulfilling my fantasy I'd fare better kissing Jack and silly notions goodbye forever. "As long as we can both move on after messing up these sheets, that'll suit you best." I dug my heels into the soft bedding and thrust my hips toward the ceiling fan. Each swipe of the light brown wooden paddles brought cool air over my crotch.

His mouth remained open while he bound my right hand to the bedpost. "Move on? Who says I want to move on?" He had me there. My brain turned to mush every time my hormones surged. "You probably do. You're pretty busy over there at Circle Red. And you mentioned not wanting any ties that bind permanently."

"No ties in ropes, that is, honey." His body straddled mine, his cock resting only inches from my mouth as he wrapped my left arm to match my right. "I'm definitely not too busy to make time for people I care about. People I love. Especially a certain rough-riding woman."

"I..." Oh hell.

The hush of another knot cinching blended with the swish of the overhead fan. He maneuvered off the bed and stood to my left. "Never said I was too busy for you. Or for Mama. Not too busy to ask you to spend Thanksgiving with us either."

Starting with my little toe, he tugged his way to my biggest one. "But have it your way. Guess you won't hear what I'll have to say that day then."

My heartbeats echoed inside my head. "Can't you say it today?"

"Can't say grace when there's no meal on the table." Faster than with my arms, he bound my left leg to the foot-end post and walked over to the right.

"Grace? That's all you're going to say? What's so special about that?" Each jerk of my arms brought an aching in my wrists.

Whistling, he took his time attaching my right leg where it belonged. "Grace isn't all I'll say on the day we give thanks for certain things in our lives."

"True. But you can do that without me being there."

The remaining length of rope left his hands and slapped against the breeches where they lay on the cedar chest. "What's most important to say will come out along with the pumpkin pie." His lips closed tight over any remaining words.

Most important? "Put your tongue and fingers in my pussy."

He grinned, straddled me and fluttered his warm fingers over my wetness. "Not even buckwheat cakes taste better than you. I could eat you for every meal."

"Why don't you?" I bucked against his hand and met with a finger-fucking.

In and out the hot digits dipped and played. They sank so deep, well past the first two knuckles and calluses. Sluicing noises combined with the *chuff-chuff* of the fan and I clenched around him.

"Not a bad idea but a man cannot live on pussy alone." The hand job ceased and his fingers came from their hiding place. He licked them clean. "Yes ma'am. No telling what I might say when I get a taste of the pumpkin pie you help Mama make. Might even be sweeter than the whipped cream on top of it all."

"Sweet talk is fine. As long as you mean what you say." *And say that you want me to be yours forever.* Reaching out, I massaged his biceps. "You are one solid man. More muscle than most."

"Earned every damned bit on the circuit. Some of my best memories were receiving those trophies." He traced the outline of my hip. "And times we spent together. I might decide I want to spend a whole lot more time with you. Two hours isn't much driving distance but I'd rather spend that gas money and my savings on something special for a special woman."

My moan burst free and lofted toward the ceiling.

My Good-Luck-and-Good-Fuck fairy tapped her glass wand on my belly. *And that, girlfriend, is as close to a proposal as you're going to get before Thanksgiving,* she said before taking back her wand and vanishing.

While I couldn't always trust her and her fickle ways, I could always trust my instincts. And those instincts screamed at me to keep a rein on Jack Dodson. Not one too tight, but one that bound us together in a pretty sexy way. "Ride me like you did those bulls."

My wish was his wicked command.

Back and forth we traded body blows. My bent knees sometimes pummeled his hips and flanks. While his cock worked inside me, a finger plunged into my anus. Heat coiled inside my belly, a sexual serpent striking my most vulnerable spot.

"Riding those bulls I saw some daylight. Riding you I can't see straight."

My toes curled toward the bases of my feet. Spasms claimed my lower body and separated us. "Com...plaining?" Each syllable echoed inside my skull.

"Hell no." He reached up, grabbed the dangling ends of rope tethering my arms and tugged. The bonds loosened and fell free. Arms bundled underneath my quaking body, he pulled me upright.

On my knees facing my friend and lover, I braced my palms as best I could against

his sweat-slick shoulders. "I really make you see cross-eyed?"

"That and a whole lot more." Warm kisses covered my forehead. "But I'd rather be cross-eyed with you than sure-eyed without you."

I kissed his mouth closed. "Think it's too soon to start practicing on those pumpkin pies? You know what they say."

"They say practice makes perfect." His next hug pushed most of the breath out of my body. "But when it comes to you and me, there's no messing with our perfect."

## **About the Author**

Since childhood, Shawna Moore has delighted in creating fantasy worlds and fictional characters. After many years of working in the medical community, she traded clinical and clerical duties for a full-time career writing fiction.

When she's not writing, editing and researching, Shawna enjoys traveling, listening to the music of the Beatles, reading and spending time with her real-life hero. Of course, she also dares to be divalicious every day of the week.

Shawna welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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