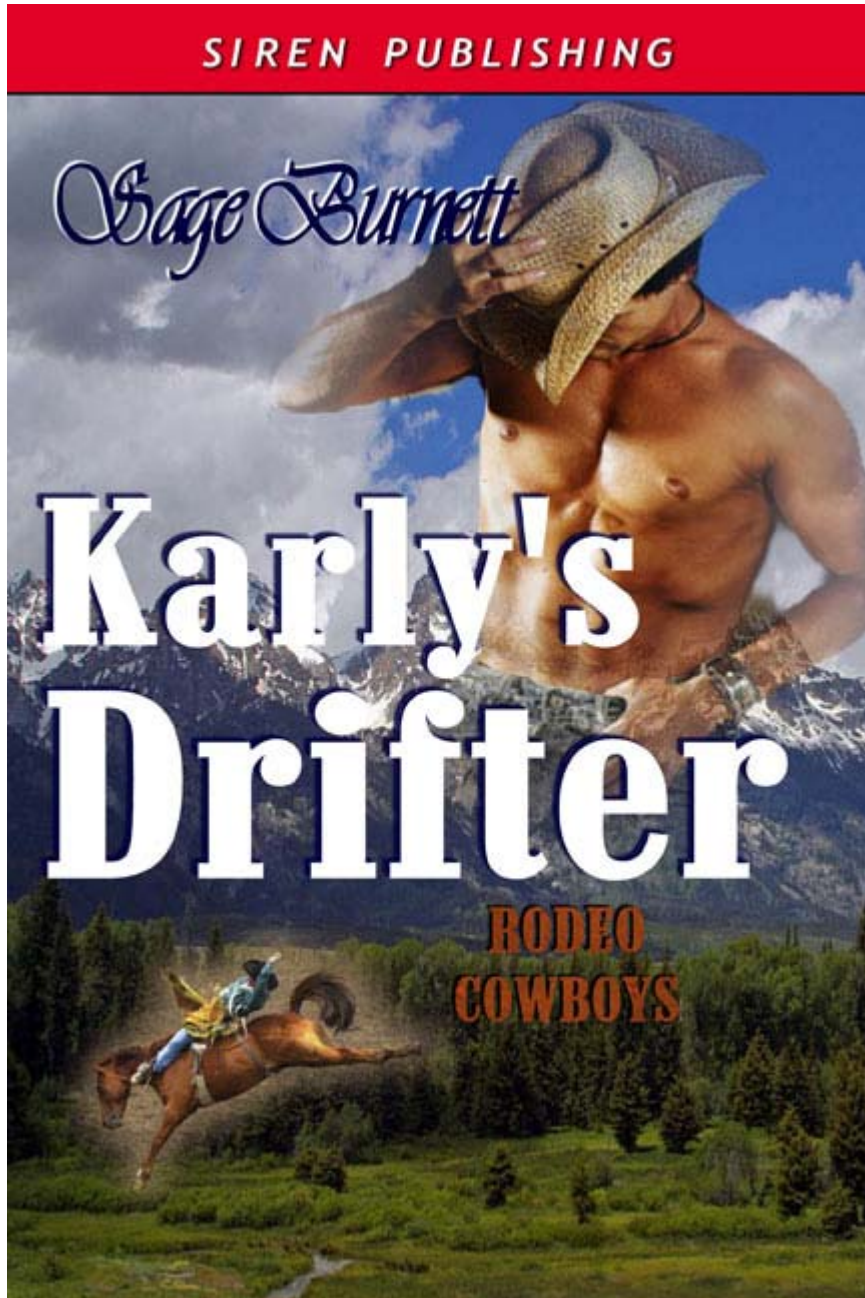


SIREN PUBLISHING

Sage Burnett

Karly's Drifter

RODEO
COWBOYS



KARLY'S DRIFTER
Rodeo Cowboys: The Series, Book 2

SAGE BURNETT

SEX RATING: SIZZLING

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SIREN SEX Rating

SENSUAL: Sensual romance with love scenes comparative to most romance novels published today

STEAMY: Heavy sexual tension; graphic details; may contain coarse language

SIZZLING: Erotic, graphic sex; explicit sexual language; may offend delicate readers

SCORCHING: Erotica; contains many sexual encounters; may contain unconventional sex; will offend delicate readers

SEXTREME: Excessiveness; many instances of unconventional sex; may be hardcore; not for the faint-hearted

Sage Burnett

Rodeo Cowboys: The Series, Book 2

Karly's Drifter

In spite of Hawk Rivers' refusal to share in her book, Karly yearns to know the real man who guards a secret with his life.

Hawk insists he's bad for her even while at the same time expresses his desire for her in no uncertain terms. Attracted to him beyond reason, Karly willingly tumbles in bed with him, knowing in her heart she will definitely get hurt.

As Karly follows the rodeo circuit, snapping photos of cowboys, her focus remains zeroed in on one particular, mysterious, sexy cowboy--the cowboy who already has the power to break her heart.

KARLY'S DRIFTER

Rodeo Cowboys: The Series, Book 2

Sage Burnett



Siren Publishing, Inc.

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Karly's Drifter

Rodeo Cowboys: The Series, Book 2

By Sage Burnett

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Chapter One

Through the viewfinder of her 35mm camera, Karly watched the tall, lean cowboy striding out of the rodeo arena. When the cowboy yanked off his dusty, black hat, she focused the telephoto lens with a swift turn of her wrist. As he swiped the sweat from raven-colored brows, Karly freeze-framed his image.

The bare back-riding event was officially over. Number sixteen, Hawk Rivers, the last cowboy to leave the arena, glanced at her, his acorn-brown eyes narrowing in suspicion. Now would be a good time to ask him to sign the release form for his photographs that she planned to use in her upcoming book.

Karly shouldered her way through the crowd of people attending the rodeo and caught up with Hawk Rivers as he walked out from under the grandstands.

Her pulse bucked like the horse he'd leaped off just minutes ago when she looked at him. Part Native American, his dark tawny skin glistened with sweat. "Hi."

Mistrustful brown eyes stared at her as his gaze took in her camera and photography equipment slung over both of her shoulders.

“No comment.”

“Excuse me.”

“I don’t like the press.”

His rough voice matched his demeanor. Karly cleared her throat. The blazing hot August sun or Hawk Rivers or possibly the combination of both increased her body temperature. “I’m not the press. My name is Karly Jackson and I’m a freelance photographer.”

“Same difference.” He brushed past her.

Wheeling around, her collection of telephoto lenses smacking her chest and back, Karly hurried to catch up with him. His stride was long and masculine, while his firm butt, the only part of his lower anatomy not covered by his well-worn leather chaps, poured more sweat over her body.

“Wait.” Hawk Rivers ignored her as she jogged toward him. The scorching day was not the ideal jogging weather. “I need you to sign a release form.”

Hawk Rivers kept walking. Karly, dragging under the weight of her photographic equipment, struggled to keep up with his long strides. “I’m doing a book on rodeos. I need you to sign a release form.”

He stopped so abruptly, she stumbled ahead of him, but he grabbed her arm, bringing her to an abrupt stop. His touch escalated her already over-heated body. Looking down at his hand, she noticed scarred knuckles, plus a crooked scar across the back of his hand.

“I’m not signing anything, lady.”

Karly raised her eyes, seeing the sparks of anger flickering in his gaze now. From under the brim of his black cowboy hat, he scowled at her. His expression was so severe that she swallowed, more like gulped. “It’s just a simple form. Look at this way. You’ll be famous when my book hits number one in coffee table books.”

“Delete me out of your damn book.” He dropped his hand and strode off again.

Karly charged through the crowd after him. He must have sensed her following him because he circled around. This time she slammed straight into his chest. Glancing at him, she saw his expression had now turned deadly. Deep lines fanned out from his eyes. She noticed another scar about a half inch in length on his left cheek near his hairline.

Her nipples responded to smacking into his wall of chest. She hoped like hell he didn't notice, but the thin cotton of her light blue tank top probably didn't do anything to disguise her reaction to him.

"Are you hard of hearing?"

"No, I am not hard of hearing. I can still use your photos. I like to let the cowboys know they'll be included in my book." She paused. "So far I haven't been sued."

Karly watched in fascination as his dark eyes lowered to her breasts, and she fought to ignore the whirlwind of excitement twisting through her body. She cleared her throat again. The damn dust caused her scratchy throat, not this man. "You're a very interesting subject, Mr. Rivers."

Hawk brought his gaze back to her. "How do you know my damn name?"

Karly tugged the folded up rodeo program from her back jeans pocket and waved it under his nose. "It's public record."

He stopped her waving of the program by grabbing her wrist. Heat pooled low in her tummy at his second touch. Of all the cowboys she'd photographed during the past month of crisscrossing Montana, Hawk Rivers was the one who made her blood run hot and her pulse soar. Not that she'd been searching for a man. This was her job, taking photographs. He hadn't participated in the other rodeos because she definitely would have remembered this man. And she'd been propositioned every which way the last month by all the single, horny cowboys, including a few married ones.

Hawk's middle finger rubbed the beat of her pulse while his gaze burned her with its heat.

He dropped her hand. "I don't want to be in your damn book. You got that, lady?"

"My name is *Karly*. I've told you in person, so that is that."

He might be a fugitive from justice, drug dealer, or criminal on the wrong side of the law. She'd guess his age at about forty, but from the looks of him, he might have crammed an extra five or ten years of living into his life. His tough, rugged face showed the life of a hard living man. Something deep inside of her yearned to be with him. Hawk spun around so fast, a small dust cloud billowed at his boot heels. Karly took after him again.

This wasn't like her. It was more than getting him to sign her release forms. It was...

This time when Hawk Rivers wheeled around to face her, murder gleamed in his dark, fathomless eyes. Uh...oh. Maybe she'd gone a tad too far.

"I'm parked over there." She stood on tiptoes and pointed over his shoulder. "You must be, too. What a coincidence."

Before he could say anything, she breezed past him, flipping her shoulder length hair with one hand.

Sensing his masculine heat following her, she wrestled back the urge to spin around and go another round with him, since she wasn't sure who'd won the first two.

When she reached her small motor home, with the Toyota chassis, she dug her keys out of her jeans pocket. Karly knew Hawk Rivers was still behind her because she felt his presence like a dozen people crowded together on a packed city bus. After she unlocked the door, she stepped into her rolling home on wheels.

She dumped her camera, two extra telephoto lenses, and the leather tote that held extra film and equipment on the small kitchen table. "Care for something cold to drink?" Karly glanced over her shoulder at him. He stood outside, hands planted on his hips, the chaps emphasizing his groin. "Well?"

Lifting one shoulder with a casualness she didn't feel, she angled over to the small refrigerator and grabbed two bottles of water. She walked back to the door and held the bottle out to him. When he snatched it from her hand, she figured he might crush it inside his palm instead of drinking it. Fascinated, Karly watched as he twisted off the cap and guzzled down the twelve-ounce bottle in one long swallow. "Feel better?"

Hawk replaced the cap. "No pictures."

Rolling her eyes, she looked up at the ceiling. "Why the hell not? You're the epitome of a cowboy."

"I'll buy the film from you. What do you want for it?"

Karly was starting to believe he could possibly be on the wrong side of the law, but if he was a fugitive from justice, he wouldn't be flaunting himself in front of three hundred people at a public event. "It's not for sale."

"Now if you'll excuse me." She started to shut the door, but his hand blocked it.

"I don't want my pictures in a damn book." Anger burned in his eyes, like the scorching late afternoon heat.

"I'll take that into consideration." He was the first person, man or woman, who had no desire to be immortalized in a book. She spun around and dug a business card out of her purse sitting on the table.

Spinning around, she bumped into him. "Oh." He'd entered her little motor home without her realizing it. Feeling the electricity zapping between the two of them, she held up business card. Her intuition told her she wasn't the only one consumed with heat. "Here's my card." As he sneered down his nose at it, Karly tucked it in the front pocket of his plaid western shirt. Then she patted it to be sure it would stay put. The feel of his firm chest added to her already agitated state.

Hawk's jaw line turned rigid. "Has anybody ever told you, you're a royal pain in the butt?"

Karly lifted a brow, pretending to be surprised. "*Moi?*" To get good photographs, it was sometimes necessary to be pesky. Went with the territory.

"Better lock your door tonight." Hawk skewered her with a look before he wheeled around and disappeared out of her motor home. Reeling from the encounter with him, she watched him stride through the rows of parked cars and trucks.

Better lock your door tonight. Those words circled in her head like one of the bulls at the rodeo today. Karly honestly didn't know if she'd just been threatened or not. Snagging her water bottle off the table, she unscrewed the cap. She drank half the bottle, hoping to cool herself down.

Tonight was the final event of the rodeo. Hawk had one of the highest scores in the bareback competition today. Karly tugged the program out of her back pocket, scanning through it. He wouldn't be riding tonight because today had been his third and final ride, but he wouldn't leave until he collected his purse, unless of course the evening riders outscored him.

He sure as hell wasn't getting her damn film. If he came looking for something else... Well that was an entirely different story.

Chapter Two

Hawk, anger surging through him, peeled off his dusty clothes and turned on the shower in the small bathroom of his fifth-wheel trailer. The home he lived in three hundred and sixty five days a year. Always on the move, following the jobs across the state.

Before he got into the shower, he snagged his shirt off the floor and pulled out that woman's business card. *Karly Jackson, freelance photographer. Missoula, Montana.* She'd driven halfway across the state of Montana for the two-day rodeo in Livingston. He didn't recall seeing her yesterday shooting pictures. If he'd spotted her, he would've remembered her.

Hawk tossed the business card on the floor by his pile of clothes and moved under the warm spray of water. He scrubbed away the dirt, sweat and smell of horses off his body. If he could hold his position, he would win a good-sized purse and be rolling down the highway again in the morning.

He was getting too damn old for riding bucking horses.

The woman might be good-looking and sexually desirable, but she was infuriating as hell. Her nipples under the thin shirt had been hard the whole damn time he'd been around her. Hawk felt his cock swelling, remembering her nipples and small breasts. She was all tight and compact and on the tall side. He wouldn't mind sifting his fingers through the rich brown hair that grazed her shoulders and gazing into her hazel eyes as he fucked her.

Yeah. He wanted to fuck her and bad. Hawk's hand wrapped around his cock. Too many months had passed since his last woman. Working his hand up and down, he increased the

pressure. Closing his eyes, he struggled to fantasize about any woman other than Karly Jackson. But in the end, she was the one that made him come. Images of her naked and sweaty beneath him.

As he towed himself dry, he cursed himself for making that goddamn threat to her. Stealing wasn't one of his faults, so he wouldn't break into her Toyota motor home and take the film. He doubted any of his people would be buying a coffee table book in the near future. Since they were all in Browning on the Blackfeet Reservation, he knew they wouldn't read the sports section of the newspaper.

His father had disappeared when he was boy, never to be seen again. A white man with a penchant for Indian women. His mother was still alive, leaving the bottle behind her ten years ago. His family would always blame him for the accident. Hell, he blamed himself. Bitterness crackled through his body as he dressed in clean jeans and white t-shirt.

Hawk plucked a bottle of orange juice out of the fridge, drinking it down in two long swallows. The juice turned to acid in his gut as the agonizing memories swamped through him.

* * * *

At ten o'clock that evening, Hawk picked up his second-place winnings. A twenty-year-old, half his age, had taken first place in the bareback competition. He stuffed the cash into his wallet as he strolled the rodeo grounds. He'd watched Karly from the stands, shooting her photos of the cowboys. During the break, he'd seen her talking with the cowboys, handing them a pen to sign her release forms.

Heading toward the parking area, Hawk figured he should take off tonight. There was a campground fifty miles east. No, he didn't need a campground because his trailer was self-contained so he could park it anywhere. Instead, he switched directions and walked towards Karly Jackson's motor home.

It was still parked in the same spot, with the door open. The arena was well lit. There would be no fireworks tonight because of the extreme dry conditions. Hawk sidled up to the door. When Karly spotted him, she dropped the canister of film she was holding. Reaching inside the motor home, he snagged it off the floor.

"Wrong one. I put in a fresh roll of film in for tonight's rodeo."

Without an invitation, Hawk stepped into her motor home and set the film canister on the small table.

“Are you going to hold me at gunpoint for my film?”

Hawk didn’t miss the sarcasm laced in her words.

She glanced down as she loaded a fresh roll of film into her camera. “You’re not much of a talker, are you?”

“I figure you’re too damn stubborn. Holding you at gunpoint would be useless.”

She grinned, causing the breath to hitch inside his chest. “Move to the head of the class.”

Along with her sexy body and interesting eyes came an attitude. He wasn’t about to beg her not to use his pictures.

She pointed across the table. “Sit down. Maybe we could chitchat for awhile.”

Scowling at her, Hawk plowed a hand through his short hair.

“Okay, stand. If you’re thirsty, there’s a few things in the fridge.” After she finished loading the film, she picked up a cleaning tissue and polished a telephoto lens.

Every once in a while, she would glance up at him, locking her eyes with his.

Hawk was itching to get naked with her. “Let’s go to bed.”

She laid the telephoto lens on the table before looking up at him. Shock intertwined with heat floated in her hazel-toned eyes.

“My, my,” Karly clucked her teeth together. “If that’s your best line, then I would say you need to do some work on your seduction techniques.”

“All that damn stuff before is a waste time. If a man and a woman want each other, why not cut to the chase.”

Karly tilted her head, tapping her forefinger on her lips. “Let’s see now. I guess us weak-kneed females need some foreplay before hopping into the sack.”

“I’ll guarantee you I’m good at foreplay.”

“You’re pretty damn cocky.”

Her eyes lowered to his groin. His desire was apparent under his jeans. Karly wore some slinky little black top and her nipples were erect again. “Why don’t you see for yourself?”

Karly laughed. “Buy me a drink, dinner. Bring me flowers, then we’ll talk.”

“Talking’s not necessary, Karly.” Hawk saw the appreciation in her eyes when he called her by her name.

"So you did read my business card."

"You wanted me to read your business card. That's why you stuck it in my pocket."

She shrugged. "I hand out my cards to everyone. Good advertising."

Hawk moved closer to her, drinking in her womanly essence. "What were you advertising to me?" A touch of pink colored her cheeks, which aroused him even more.

Her eyes widened. "I gave you my business card in case you changed your mind about letting me use photos of you in my book."

She sounded breathless to him. Hawk watched the rise and fall of her chest, her hard nipples tempting him. "Stand up, Karly. Or would you rather I dragged you to your feet?"

She wiped her palms on her thighs, gazing up at him, the invitation showing in her eyes.

He bent down, took her hands, and slowly pulled her to her feet.

"Hawk."

"We both want this, Karly." He moved his hands to her hair, smoothing it back from her face. "If you want to waste more time protesting..." He lowered his head as her hands splayed across his chest.

His intention had been to take her rough and hard, knowing in his gut she would've responded in kind. Instead, as his mouth touched her soft, supple lips tasting of Coca Cola and the saltiness of popcorn, he slowly moved his lips over her. Surprise shot through him that he wanted to be gentle with her. Some unnamed emotion inside of him needed to be gentle with her. Karly sighed, opening her lips. He slid his tongue inside of her, enticing her tongue with his own.

Her hands slipped down his chest, her palms pushing against his nipples. Ending the kiss, he leaned back and looked down into her eyes.

"You tell me to get the hell out of here now or else I stay. I'll let it be your call, Karly." His cock was throbbing to be inside of her pussy.

She stared at him for what seemed like forever. "Stay," she whispered.

He backed away from her, reaching for the door to close it. Karly turned, gave him a sultry look over her shoulder, and walked the short distance to the bed over the cab of the truck. Hawk caught up with her, taking her arm, and swinging her around to face him.

Sliding his hands under her skimpy top, he skimmed the black top over her head. A strapless black bra barely covered her small breasts. A groan rumbled from the back of his throat

as he reached behind her and unhooked her bra, freeing her breasts. He stared at her hard, rosy nipples, his lust mounting as he covered her breasts with his hands.

Hawk took his time stripping off her clothes, hearing her sighs of pleasure. He tugged her faded jeans over her slim hips, discovering black bikini panties. Gritting his teeth, he took her out of her jeans and tucked his fingers inside her panties. His fingers brushed the rich brown curls at her crotch as he peeled off her panties until she stood naked in front of him. From his crouched position, his eyes traveled upward until his gaze clashed with hers. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were...Hawk wasn't sure.

He forced himself to stand because what he really wanted was to bury his face between her legs. After he yanked off his t-shirt, he tossed it behind him. Once he unzipped his jeans, Karly took over from there. Hawk kicked off his boots as she pushed his jeans and briefs down to his ankles. With his foot, he shoved his clothes aside. Her hands circled around his cock. As her hands worked up and down over his shaft, she caught his eye. For a few moments, he let her fondle him, knowing it wouldn't take much to get him off. Grabbing her hips, he hoisted her up to the bed. He loved the sound of her little squeal. For him, tonight was about sex, giving pleasure and getting it in return.

As she scooted over, he crawled up beside her. Enough torture, Hawk decided, as he dragged her on top of him. The heat from her soft, silky body fused with his own. Twining her arms around his neck, Karly kissed him, pushing her sweet, salty tongue inside of his mouth. He cupped her tight little ass and grinded her crotch against his aching cock.

Karly slithered up and down and back and forth over his cock, increasing his lust and need. He raised her up over his head until her breasts touched his cheeks and tugged one nipple into his mouth. He heard himself groan like a thirsty man finally discovering the watering hole in the desert. He moved his lips to her other nipple as she rubbed her wet pussy over his stomach. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. Fondling her breasts, he listened to her breathy moans above him.

In one quick sweep, Hawk rolled her over and plunged his cock inside her slick pussy. Karly gasped for breath as she opened herself for him. The sounds of the rodeo crowd faded into the background as he fingered her clit, needing her to come for him. Hawk drove himself harder and deeper into her tight pussy as her slim legs wrapped around his hips.

He struggled to find her lips. A ravenous need drove him to fuck her harder and faster. Moaning together and sucking on each other's tongues, they grinded their bodies together. He continued to fondle her clit until Karly cried out, her hot body surrendering to her orgasm.

Hawk thrust as deep into her slick pussy as he could go before a feral groan rumbled from his lips. His mind went blank, feeling only Karly.

Chapter Three

Rousing herself from a deep, satisfying sleep, Karly opened her eyes. Tendrils of morning sunlight slipped through the small windows of her motor home. She instantly sensed that she was alone, feeling the emptiness of her bed. Turning, she saw the indentation of Hawk's head on the pillow next to her.

"Bastard."

Karly sat up and raked her fingers through her hair. Any signs of him were gone. Her clothes were folded neatly at the foot of her bed. "Damn him." She swung her legs over the side of the bed and jumped down to the floor.

Panic burst inside of her as she rushed over the table and started ransacking her camera equipment until she found the box that held her film. Fumbling with the lid, she opened it. A loud sigh of relief escaped her lips when she saw that the film hadn't been disturbed.

Oh, wasn't that noble of him! Hawk hadn't ripped her off. Not her film, which constituted her livelihood. The bastard had stolen something of hers, though. Her peace of mind.

Karly dressed, gathering up a towel and her toiletries to take to the public showers with her. Part of her wanted to lay rubber out of the parking lot and get the hell away, while another part of her needed to wash his scent and his mark off her.

Stomping through the nearly empty parking lot, littered with paper cups, candy wrappers and popcorn boxes, she scanned the area looking for any sign of him. The cowboys were packing up their gear and loading up their horses, ready to head home.

Karly didn't know what kind of truck Hawk owned. Camper? Camp trailer? Some of the cowboys stayed in local motels if they didn't need to bring a horse to the rodeo with them.

Clenching her teeth, she marched into the public showers, desperate to bathe, desperate to scrub the leftovers of Hawk Rivers off her body.

* * * *

The following Saturday evening, Karly jostled through the crowd at the Helena rodeo. Her press pass allowed her special privileges as she made her way toward the chutes. Her book would also include the cowboys mounting the horses and bulls in the chutes. She'd gotten some unforgettable close ups of men gritting their teeth as they lowered their bodies down around a thousand pound bull.

Her heart hammered like a pesky woodpecker at a tree, wondering if she would bump into *him*. Hawk was on the roster for tonight's bareback competition. She'd hardly slept for the past six days. She'd rushed home the week before for a full schedule of family photos, a couple of pampered canine shots, and an outdoor wedding. When she developed the film from last week's rodeo, a sharp pain jabbed in her heart as she stared at the photographs of Hawk.

Karly snapped a picture of a young man draping his wiry, compact body over a bull's back, then hurried to the arena area to get photos of the young man before he and the bull rocketed out of the chute. She made it in the nick of time and managed to get several shots of him. Unfortunately for the young cowboy, he didn't stay on the twisting animal for the required eight seconds.

The humidity hung thick and heavy. Dark clouds loomed over the horizon, promising a whopper of a thunderstorm later.

With the bull riding competition nearing the end, Karly wrestled with the anticipation of seeing Hawk again. He'd turned her body into hot, liquid fire that night in her motor home. She intended to confront him about sneaking off in the dead of night. Not that he'd made any promises, but that incredible coming together was damned hard to forget.

Weaving her way through the throng of people, she walked back to the chutes again. Hawk was first rider up tonight. She spotted him as he climbed up the wooden railing, his sky

blue western shirt bringing out the color of his tawny skin. His black cowboy hat pulled low over his brow. She hurried to get in position, her camera poised and ready.

Just as he swung one long leg over the horse's back, he spotted her. Karly hit the shutter button on her camera, immortalizing the expression on his face. Surprise, annoyance, and regret would be preserved on the thin sheet of film forever.

Heart thundering, she spun around, moving quickly through the maze of cowboys to get back to the arena. When the horse Hawk rode bucked itself out of the chute, she started clicking pictures, remembering him riding her last week. As she watched him through her telephoto lens, she wondered why he rode bareback broncs. That was usually a young man's sport. Hawk stayed on the horse the required time, his left arm held in the air above his head. Once the buzzer sounded, he leaped off the roan-colored horse.

He caught sight of her again as he strode out of the arena to the sounds of loud clapping and cheers. Good ride for him. Should put him up there for prize money. She watched him as he unwound the leather strap securing his leather glove in place. When he walked straight at her, her breathing flat out stopped for a few seconds.

Hawk bullied his way through the cowboys on his way over to her. She lowered the camera, letting it hang around her neck.

"You don't give up, do you?" he gritted through clenched teeth.

Karly grappled for nonchalance, a casualness she didn't feel. His tall, muscled body so close to hers made small volcanoes of lust erupt inside of her.

She leaned toward him so the people close to the two of them couldn't hear. "Did you think fucking me last week would have me tossing your photos out the windows as I cruised down the freeway?" she paused, drawing in a calming breath as their gazes snagged and held. "You did believe that, didn't you? Fuck the photographer and the pictures will be history."

Grabbing her arm, Hawk's eyes turned stormy and dark. "Stop it, Karly. You were a willing participant. And you damn well know it."

His fingers dug into her upper arm, but she didn't complain. Heat built between the two of them as they glared at each other, oblivious to the crowd of people around them.

"Hey, I'm parked in section C, if you want to try again at seducing these latest pictures out of me."

Hawk dropped her arm like it was on fire. "Shit." He wheeled around, disappearing into the crowd.

As Karly lifted her camera, she realized her hands were shaking. Another bronc rider and horse bounced into the arena. She took her photos, knowing they would be blurry and out of focus because of her trembling hands.

* * * *

Hawk shadowed Karly throughout the evening. Once the rodeo was over, the crowd and cowboys poured into the three beer gardens set up around the area. Not happy that he'd placed third in the event, Hawk went to collect his money. Once he pocketed his cash, he headed back to the party going on in the beer garden Karly was attending.

Sipping on a Coke, Hawk stood on the outer perimeter of the tables and benches spread across a large area. A country western band tuned up their guitars on the stage. Karly seemed intent on flirting with every single cowboy that sauntered into the beer garden, no matter what his age.

Hawk didn't know old she was. Younger than he was by several years. A twenty something cowboy he remembered from the saddle bronc competition was now putting the moves on her. An unexpected streak of jealousy slashed through him. Hawk gripped the Coca Cola can so tight he half expected it to burst inside his hand.

Last week, when Karly had drifted off into a deep sleep, he'd climbed out of her bed and dressed. He wasn't sure why he'd picked up her clothes and folded them for her. Driving away from the rodeo grounds that night, regret and guilt had collided together inside of his guts.

He saw Karly throw back her head and laugh at something the young stud whispered in her ear. Burning with unexpected and unwanted jealousy, he watched her flirt. When the husky cowboy wrapped his hand around Karly's neck and started kissing her, Hawk threw down the soda can and stormed through the crowd of partygoers.

As he approached them, he watched Karly shove at the cowboy's chest. Hawk grabbed the back of the young cowboy's collar, twisting him around to face him. "Keep your goddamn hands off the lady."

"Just who in the hell do you think you are?"

“None of your business.” Hawk locked his gaze on Karly’s.

“Hey, honey, you know this S.O.B?” The cowboy craned his neck to see Karly.

Eyes wide with surprise, she nodded, never taking her eyes from Hawk’s.

The cowboy wrestled himself from Hawk’s grip and wheeled around to face her. “You told me you were footloose and fancy free.”

She lifted her chin. “I *am* footloose and fancy free.”

Anger charging through him, Hawk muscled the man aside and reached for Karly’s wrist. He dragged her away from the cowboy.

“You coming back later, honey?” the guy yelled after her.

Karly glanced over her shoulder. “Maybe, sugar.”

Hawk led her outside of the beer gardens, where she yanked free of his hold.

“Just what the hell were you doing in there? You don’t have any claims on me.” Karly poked him in the chest. “You disappeared in the middle of the night. Slam bam, and not even a thank you, ma’am.”

While the anger steamed and hissed inside of his body, he watched her back up a couple of steps. Hawk fought back the urge to reach for her again.

Karly fisted her hands and planted them on her hips. “I don’t like being left high and dry.”

“It was for the best.”

“Hah! You made the decision to leave without even a good-bye kiss.”

“How do you know I didn’t kiss you before I left?” Hawk had kissed her cheek, her forehead, and brushed his lips over hers before he’d run out on her.

She opened her mouth to say something but stopped. Karly glanced away for a moment before she brought her gaze back to him. “Whatever.” Squaring her shoulders, she said, “I’m afraid you’ll have to excuse me. There’s a young, randy cowboy in there that has the hots for me.”

She spun around, but Hawk caught her arm. His jealousy roaring to life again, he leaned close to her. “This isn’t your style, Karly.”

Wrenching her arm from his grip, she faced him. “You don’t know what my style is, Mr. Rivers. You didn’t take the time to find out.”

Battling to keep his emotions under control, Hawk hated admitting she was right. His gut told him Karly didn't sleep around, but then he really didn't know her. The one sure thing was she had kept him awake every damn night for the last week. She'd dredged up emotions buried for years inside his heart.

"Don't sleep with the cowboy, Karly. You'll regret it."

Hawk burned her with a look before he pushed past her and strode away.

Chapter Four

Her breathing erratic, Karly watched as Hawk's rigid back faded into the crowd. Combing a hand through her hair, she wasn't sure what had just happened. While he'd been dragging her away from the young stud, she'd been positive Hawk would drag her somewhere with a bed.

Annoyance grating on her nerves, she took off after him, wondering why in the hell she was chasing after Hawk Rivers. Did he think she was drunk and willing to jump into bed with any cowboy that made a move on her? And if that was the case, why had he saved her? Besides, she wasn't drunk.

Karly snaked her way through the throng of people, her heart pounding more than it should. She figured she was certifiably nuts when she started jogging. As she trotted by the grandstands, suddenly two hands grabbed her from behind. Karly swallowed a scream as a hand covered her mouth.

"Don't scream, Karly. It's me." He backed her up under a small awning, jutting from the back of the grandstands.

Hawk dropped his hand, pressed it low over her tummy, low enough to spike lust in her. Leaning back against him, she waited for her breathing to settle down. She doubted it would as his arm slid around her neck.

"Why were you running?" His voice rumbled into her ear. "Is someone chasing you?"

A giddy laugh gurgled from her lips. "I was chasing after you."

"I thought you were smarter than that. Chasing after a man who's bad for you."

His warm breath feathered across her temple. She dropped her head on his shoulder as Hawk kissed her neck. She closed her eyes as he sucked at a sensitive place on her neck. She flattened her back tighter against him, feeling his erection against her bottom. "Why are you bad for me, Hawk?"

He lowered his lips, now kissing her bare shoulder. "I left you high and dry last week."

They were standing in the shadows of the grandstands. A few people wandered by, but Karly didn't care. His hand on her tummy dipped down, palming her pubic mound. Her panties and faded jeans couldn't fend off the heat of his large hand. His hand rubbed her slowly, squeezing between her legs. "Will you do it again?"

"I can't make any promises."

Hawk's hand, stroking her sex harder and faster, was rapidly bringing her near an orgasm. If he didn't stop, she wouldn't be able to control herself. He nipped at her shoulder as his other hand cupped her breast and fondled it. Her nipples ached with need. She was rewarded when his fingers pinched her nipple.

"Hawk." Her breathing slowed, caught in her throat as he found her clit through her jeans and panties. With his fingers, he massaged hard circles across and around it.

Karly turned her head, seeking out his lips. He thrust his tongue inside her mouth, and she felt herself slipping over the edge of lust's need, not caring that someone might see them. He worked his hand over her clit until she cried out in pleasure and her knees buckled. Wrapping his arms around her, he held her up against him until sanity slowed returned to her muddled brain.

As she drifted out of her sexual haze, she felt his lips trailing kisses across her cheek. "Come with me," she whispered.

His answer was part groan and growl against her cheek.

She circled in his arms and took his hands. She walked backwards, tugging him along with her.

"Karly."

"You can't do this, Hawk. You just pleased me in a public place. God knows how many people saw us." Her voice and every fiber in her being pleaded with him. "You can't just walk away."

Night had set in, shadowing his dark eyes, but she sensed his indecision. It was clear that Hawk wanted her as much as she wanted him. She'd felt his bulging hard-on jammed against her as he'd pleasured her.

"Jesus, Karly. I should stay away from you. For your sake."

She didn't understand why Hawk believed he wasn't good for her because she didn't know him. She only knew she wanted him. "Just come with me."

She tugged at his hand. After a time, he draped his arm around her shoulder, squeezing her tight against him. Karly heard the first rumble of thunder off in the distance. The atmosphere around them sparked with their sexual heat, mixing with the electricity charged air of the impending storm.

A heavy silence weighted down with unspoken words and feelings wedged between the two of them. When they reached her Toyota, she tugged her key out of her jeans pocket. As she fumbled with the lock, Hawk draped his hand over hers, steadying her hands so she could get the door unlocked.

Hawk barely got the door closed when Karly twined her arms around his neck. A pale glow from the outdoor arena lights bathed the two of them in soft, wispy shadows.

Their lips came together hard and fast. Hawk's tongue assaulted her mouth. Karly mashed her body against him, loving the feel of his erection digging into her hip. Breaking their kiss, she pulled her tank top over her head, then unhooked her strapless bra, letting it slide from her fingers to the floor.

Hawk's large hands sheathed her breasts as he bent his head to draw one of her nipples into his mouth. Karly arched her back as he sucked and fondled her breasts.

Need mushrooming inside of her, she unbuckled his belt, then unzipped his jeans. Groaning, Hawk freed her nipple so he could rip off his t-shirt. With fumbling hands and choking breaths, they stripped each other of their clothes.

The air inside her motor home was thick with the scent of lust. Heady excitement shot through her as Hawk knelt down in front of her and buried his head between her legs. Digging her hands into his hair, she pressed his face closer to her pussy. His tongue laved her clit with slow deliberate strokes. When his middle finger pushed inside of her, Karly gasped.

Her hips gyrated as Hawk's tongue and finger drove her closer and closer to release. Moments later, her orgasm erupted inside her body. Her legs threatened to give away, but Hawk grasped her hips.

His tongue roamed up her body, lingering at her breasts. He kissed the tip of each of her hard nipples as he squeezed her breasts. When he reached her lips, Karly drew him in, welcoming him.

He turned her around so she faced the table. He nipped the side of her neck and clutched her bottom, squeezing one cheek. "I'm taking you from behind."

The raspy sound of his masculine voice sizzled inside her veins. "Yes."

His hands fastened on her hips as she bent over the table and splayed her hands on top of it, her heart racing madly in eager anticipation.

Panting, she spread her legs wider as his cock plunged deep into her. Hawk's strokes were hard and fast. The sound of their bodies slapping against each other echoed in her little motor home. If Karly could've dug her fingernails into the Formica top of her table, she would have. Hungry to have it all from him, she pushed her butt tight against him, struggling to pull him in as far as he could go.

Hawk's fingers tugged at one nipple, spiking the heat inside of her to the near breaking point. His strong, swift thrusts built up a need so severe she bit her lip to stop herself from screaming. Behind her, Hawk's groans grew louder, each carnal thrust bringing her closer to raw and exquisite ecstasy.

"Hawk, oh, God, Hawk." Karly's body trembled and convulsed as she came.

Hawk's hard thrusts accelerated until he spilled himself into her. She felt his body shuddering behind her, feeling him come not just in her body but also in her heart.

* * * *

As Hawk's labored breathing evened out, he pulled Karly up against him. Her slim body was hot and dewy with sweat. The scent of their lovemaking mingled with the dampness in the air as thunder roared overhead. Backing up, he plopped down on the semi-circle of the booth surrounding the small table. He nuzzled her neck when she leaned back against his chest.

"Promise me you'll stay the night."

Karly asked too much of him because he couldn't promise her anything. He didn't even have a permanent residence. Working odd jobs provided him with enough money to get by. An outcast from his own people, he traveled around the state and never stayed more than a few months at a time in one place.

"Hawk."

The slight tremor in her voice wrenched at his heart. "I can't make promises to you, Karly."

"I think you can. You just don't want to."

His jaw tightening, he raised his head. "It doesn't have to do with want." He just didn't want to stay the night with her—he needed to stay the night with her. "One night. I can't give you any more than that."

The sound of Karly's resigned sigh clawed at his guts.

"Are you signed up for the last two rodeos of the season?"

Don't ask me for more than I can give you. If they came together during the last two rodeos of the season, it would be damned hard to let go of her.

"Answer me, please."

"Yeah."

Another boom of thunder crashed overhead, following by a streak of lightning flashing inside the motor home. Karly shifted around so she could face him.

"We could be together two more times." She laid her hand on his cheek. "Then we go our separate ways."

"That's a damned bad idea."

"It's not. It'll be our rodeo fling. Unless there's another woman waiting down the road at the next rodeo."

Years had passed since his last relationship. "There isn't a woman in my life."

She titled her head. "That's reassuring."

Hawk threaded his fingers through her hair and pulled her close for a kiss. Hearing her sigh and feeling her lips part for him sliced at his heart. The kiss was long and liquid. When he drew back, her eyes were dreamy looking. "Karly," he cautioned.

"What?"

"Take it easy."

Her brows knitted together. "Why are you warning me? I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

He was a big boy, too. Uneasiness washed through him because his brittle heart might be the one to get busted in half.

"Let's go to bed," Karly whispered at his lips.

Hawk kissed her again, knowing he would stay the night with her. Scooting off his lap, Karly took his hand as he stood. Another slash of lightning lit up her motor home as he led her to the bed. He hoisted her up onto it, just like he'd done the week before.

As she moved over to give him room, she said, "You know I can climb up here all by my lonesome."

Hawk climbed into bed beside her and gathered her into his arms. "I like fondling your pretty ass when I help you into bed."

Karly snuggled up to him. "That's the first flirtatious thing you've ever said to me."

This was the hard part. The time after sex, when a woman needed to be cuddled and reassured that her man cared about her. It was the time when a man and a woman exchanged sexy talk with each other. Hawk remembered as a young man, he'd been damn good at it. Anything to get a woman in bed and keep her there as long as he wanted or needed.

"A slip of the tongue." He kissed the top of her head.

"Uh...huh."

Karly skimmed her fingers down his chest, letting them rest directly above his groin. If she moved her fingers lower, he would be hard again. He laid his hand on hers, pushing her hand until it closed around his cock. "Make me hard again."

* * * *

The next morning, with bright sunlight streaming through the thin curtains, Karly watched Hawk sleep. On her side facing him, hands stacked under her head, she simply drank him in. This was what she'd wanted so badly last week. He lay on his back, the sheet shoved down around his navel so that his broad chest was exposed to her in the daylight.

Suddenly, he turned his head on the pillow, his dark eyes alert and full of warning. "Don't fall for me, Karly."

Furrowing her brows together in surprise, she wasn't sure how to answer. Damn, he'd sensed her watching him. "I can fall for anybody I want." Her heart would be crushed if she was the only one falling. More than likely, that was the case.

Hawk shifted to his side. "I don't want to hurt you."

He was a man that said little, but he packed so much meaning into his blunt statements.

Struggling to be objective, she said, "Point taken." Karly wondered if he was itchy to get up and hightail it out of her motor home. She slithered up on top of him, wanting to keep him with her as long as possible. "How about we start over? Good morning, Hawk."

His gaze bored into her before he slid his arms around her. Hawk rolled her onto her back and parted her legs with his knee as his mouth found her nipple.

Two more weeks and their brief, torrid affair would be history. Karly opened her legs wider for him, inviting him in. Her intention was to savor every single minute with Hawk. She'd worry about her heart later.

* * * *

Hawk glanced over his shoulder one last time at Karly standing in the doorway of her motor home. A skimpy, little yellow robe barely covered her as pushed a hand through her tangled hair. She smiled and waved at him, but he could see that it was forced. Flexing his hands, he kept walking, burying the need to turn around and stride back to her motor home. He'd offered to buy her breakfast, but she'd declined. Probably for the best and he wasn't sure why.

If they sat across a breakfast table from each other, they would be forced into talking and sharing experiences about their lives. Hawk couldn't handle Karly knowing his past. She'd turn and run faster than a deer fleeing a hungry mountain lion. So far, she'd respected his privacy by not poking or prodding him about his life.

Angling around his truck to the driver's door, Hawk unlocked it, climbed inside and drove away from the rodeo grounds. Struggling to get his feelings for Karly into perspective, he considered skipping the last two rodeos of the season, but Karly was expecting him.

He doubted he could stay away from her if he tried.

Chapter Five

Heart pounding, Karly grabbed her cell phone off the coffee table, knowing it wasn't Hawk, but hoping against hope anyway. Her telephone numbers were listed on her business cards.

"Hello."

"Hi, honey."

Karly fell back against the couch. "Hi, Mom. How's it going?"

"I'm fine. How's the rodeo book coming?"

Since meeting Hawk, she viewed her upcoming book in an entirely different way.

"Karly, is something wrong?"

"Sorry, Mom. Everything is great. The book is coming along just fine. Two more rodeos and I'm finished."

"Meet any interesting cowboys along the way?"

Only one. "I've met lots of cowboys, all kinds of cowboys."

"Cowboys make good husbands."

"Please give me a break. Stop trying to marry me off to the first available man."

"You're not getting any younger, honey. Your ovaries will be over the hill before you know it."

Sighing, Karly stared down at her bare feet. She liked her independence too much to settle down. At least she had until slamming head first into Hawk. "I'm not that old yet."

Anything to appease her mother.

“Why don’t you come over for dinner tonight?”

“Um...sorry, Mom. I need to develop some pictures. I’m waiting for it to cool down before I go into that oven I call a darkroom.”

“If I don’t talk to you before this weekend, have a safe trip to your next rodeo.”

“Thanks, Mom, and I’ll be extra careful.”

After she turned off her phone, she dumped it on a stack of magazines on the coffee table. Four more days until she saw Hawk again. What if he didn’t show? In the brief amount of time they’d spent together, she’d never asked him where he lived. For all she knew, he could be from Billings on the opposite of the state.

Karly got up and padded into the kitchen for a glass of water. She knew absolutely nothing about him. Where he was from, how old he was, if he was divorced. The glass halfway to her mouth, she paused. Ohmigod...what if he was married?

Hawk wanted her. He made love to her like she was the only woman in the world for him. He’d told her he didn’t have another woman, but he could’ve been lying. A feeling of desperation expanded inside of her chest.

He was secretive and mysterious. What was he hiding from her? If he didn’t show at the next two rodeos, she would never know.

Karly finished drinking her water, hoping the odds were in her favor where Hawk was concerned.

* * * *

Karly paced back and forth by the arena, the sounds of the crowd a distant back noise to her. Hawk was on the roster and scheduled to ride the next bucking horse. She’d stayed away from the chutes, her nerves too frayed that he wouldn’t show. Apprehension gripped her at the thought of never seeing him again. If she didn’t pull herself together, she was afraid she might start hyperventilating. The temperature had dropped twenty degrees over the past few days. A hint of autumn rode the air inside the dusty arena. When the announcer said Hawk’s name, her heart leaped into her throat. She readied her camera and focused her telephoto lens.

Hawk burst out of the chute dressed in a sky blue western shirt, his black cowboy hat nearly covering his eyes. The horse he'd drawn was a real buckner, seeming to enjoy the possibility of throwing Hawk off before the buzzer sounded. She snapped pictures of him as her heart thundered in her chest. Karly silently rooted for him that he would ride the horse to the finish.

A couple of seconds later, the buzzer beeped and Hawk leaped off the horse to the arena floor. As he walked out of the arena, his eyes locked on hers. Karly lowered her camera, smiling at him. Hawk's lips curved up at the corners, making her heart soar.

Fighting back the urge to run to him and throw her arms around his neck, she forced herself to stay put. He needed to come to her. A few minutes later, she felt Hawk behind her. She recognized his scent, his essence.

Karly circled around to face him. "Hi. Great ride."

Hawk lifted a shoulder while his eyes remained fixated on her. "It could have been better. We'll see what happens."

Her heart drumming with excitement and desire, she nodded. Needing to touch him, she took his hand, feeling his fingers wrap around hers. "I'll see you later?" Trying not to sound desperate, she dropped his hand. "I have work to do."

"I'll catch up with you." Hawk leaned toward her, barely touching his lips to hers.

Her heart on her sleeve, Karly watched Hawk as he strode in the direction of the chutes.

When she turned back to the arena she realized, she'd missed the last rider. The cowboy picked himself up off the ground to a round of applause.

Concentrating on her work was a colossal effort as the various competitions took place. She had enjoyed following the rodeo circuit and losing herself in her work at each rodeo. She'd also enjoyed meeting and talking with the cowboys after the events. Since encountering Hawk, her focus had shifted to him instead of her work.

She'd snapped hundreds of pictures over the past month, and only the best of the best would be represented in her book. Karly lifted her camera as the first steer wrestler busted out of the chute, his horse hot on the tail of a yearling calf.

* * * *

Hawk didn't bother watching the rest of the bareback competition. His ride was over. He'd either win or lose. After showering, he spent the remainder of the afternoon wandering the rodeo grounds. He shot the bull with a couple of other cowboys to kill time. Impatience clawed at him, waiting for Karly to finish photographing the rodeo.

Spotting her after his ride, his emotions had burst wide open inside of him. He'd kept busy the past week doing odd jobs around town. Hearing the announcer thanking everyone for attending the rodeo, he strode through the crowd with a single purpose—to find Karly.

Hawk spotted her talking with two cowboys. He hung back while they signed her forms. As soon as they wandered off, he walked over to her. She didn't notice him at first because she was stuffing the forms into a small pouch she carried over her shoulder.

He placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Oh." She looked up at him and a smile spread across her face.

His heart tightened. It was all in her eyes. The emotions. Hawk cleared his throat. "Are you all done?"

She nodded, still smiling at him. "I need to get rid of my gear."

"Where are you parked?"

"I'm at the back of the lot. I was running late today."

They reached for each other's hands at the same time. As he firmed his grip around her soft hand, heat shot straight to his groin. That's all it took from Karly. A simple touch and a ravenous need raged inside of him.

"How was your week?" she asked as they sidestepped a family with three small children.

At some point down the road, Karly would ask him what he did for a living and where he lived. "It was okay. How about yours?"

She stopped and turned to face him. "I've been working on my book. Developing my pictures and deciding which ones I want to use. If you don't want me to use your pictures, I won't."

This woman standing before him was slowly dredging a hole into his heart. Hawk shrugged. "I'll leave it up to you."

"You were so adamant about me not using them."

His family and friends didn't buy coffee table books. "It's not that big of a deal."

Karly didn't seem convinced. "We'll talk about it later. There's no real hurry."

He started walking again, pulling Karly along with him.

"Hawk."

He slanted a look at her. "Yeah."

"Do you think we could talk for awhile before we jump into bed?"

Tension knotted in his muscles as he noticed her motor home up ahead. It was inevitable.

"Sure." As they approached her motor home, he felt her eyes on him.

He took the key from her and unlocked the door. She dumped her photo equipment on the middle of the table.

"Would you like something to drink?" She headed over to the small refrigerator.

"Water will be fine."

Karly plucked two bottles off the shelf. Hawk leaned a shoulder against the wall near the door.

After she handed the water to him, she plopped down on the booth. "You can sit down." She smiled at him, uncertainty straining her expression.

Hawk's jaw worked as he slid into the booth across from her and busied himself with unscrewing the cap.

"Is talking a bad thing?"

He took a swallow of water. "For most people it isn't."

Sipping from her water bottle, she studied him. "But for us it is?"

He took off his cowboy hat and dropped it on the seat next to him, then plowed both hands through his hair, uncomfortable because of Karly's curious gaze. "I think you'll be disappointed if you know too much about me."

Leaning back against the booth, Karly took another drink of water. "How so?"

It was too damned hard to look into her eyes, eyes full of questions. He glanced out the window as his grip tightened around the water bottle.

She sighed. "I'm sorry for being nosy. I understand now. No questions. You're just here to fuck me."

Hawk's gaze shot back to her. "Dammit, Karly. Don't say things like that."

"It's true. I'm the one who suggested a summer fling, which, by the way, ends next weekend."

The pain in her eyes punched him in his heart. "I warned you not to fall for me."

“Who says I’m falling for you? Maybe I’m just curious about the man that I’ve been hopping into bed with the past two weekends.”

Every muscle in his body tensed. It was easy to sidestep questions with a one-night stand. Pick up woman up in a bar, bed her, then get the hell out of there. He had let himself get too involved with Karly. “I’m a drifter, Karly. I live in my fifth-wheel trailer. I go where the jobs are.” And where his family and people weren’t.

“So you’re a gypsy? I can understand that. Not everyone likes to put down roots.”

“You don’t need to sugar coat it.”

Karly fussed with her hair. “I’m not. It was merely an observation.”

The only sounds were the various noises outside of Karly’s motor home. People laughing and talking, kids yelling, and car motors running. The tense silence stretched out between them.

“I was afraid you might be married.” Karly paused. “It’s one thing to have a fling, but not with a married man.”

Hawk downed the last of his water. “I was. A long time ago.”

She nodded. “So when do you want to go to bed?”

“Stop it, Karly.”

Blowing out a frustrated breath, she tipped her head back. “I could tell you all about me since you don’t want to talk about you. Ask me anything?”

“I’m not going to play games.”

“It’s not a game. Aren’t you even the tiniest bit interested in my life?”

Hawk was more than interested. He wanted to know everything about her. The more they shared, the harder it would be to walk away. “Why aren’t you married?”

Karly tilted her head. “Ah...so you are interested.” When Hawk scowled at her, she paused for a moment. “I promise. No more sarcasm. Let’s see now. When I was younger, I didn’t want to get married. As I got older, I realized all the good men were taken. At least, I never met Mr. Right. So I keep getting older.” She lifted a shoulder. “I’ve resigned myself to being an old maid. Not a word to Mother about that. She keeps trying to marry me off. She even sets me up on blind dates.”

At least Karly’s mother cared enough about her to want to see her happy. “If your mother is persistent enough, she might find Mr. Right for you.”

Annoyance flashed in her eyes. “I want to pick my own Mr. Right.”

He was as far from right as a man could get. "I'm not your Mr. Right."

Karly lowered her eyes for a moment before she looked over at him. "What if I said, I thought you were?"

Hawk shook his head. "You're wrong, Karly."

She stood up and sidled over to him. Straddling his legs, she sat down on his lap and twined her arms around his neck. "I think you want more than sex from me." She leaned close to him. "Feel free to correct me if I'm wrong."

Hawk was instantly hard, with an ache so powerful it threw him off balance. "All I want is sex."

"Liar."

Hawk wrapped his hand around her neck and pulled her lips to his. His kiss was hard as he struggled to take everything she had. His other hand slid between her legs and spread out across her pussy.

Karly traced his bottom lip with the tip of her tongue.

"Tell me to get the hell out of here." Hawk's voice was rough with emotion.

Tilting her head, she looked him straight in the eye. "I'm not kicking you out. If you want to leave, you know where the door is."

"Dammit, Karly." He crushed his lips against hers, feeling her opening for him. He cursed himself for falling deeper into the hole he knew he wouldn't be able to climb out.

A burning need to make her come for him, Hawk stood Karly up and stripped off her jeans and panties. Before she could kick her clothes aside, he tugged her hips to him and closed his lips around her clit. He felt her nails scratching at his shoulders under his shirt as he licked her wet pussy. Each sweep of his tongue over her clit spiked his need to a higher level. Hearing her rapid breathing, moans and sighs made it damn near impossible to control himself. His hands gripped her soft butt as he pressed her pussy hard against his mouth.

Karly gasped loudly as she writhed against his face and came for him. Hawk stood up and fumbled with the zipper of his jeans. Her eyes were droopy with the after glow of her orgasm as she watched him. Pushing his jeans around his ankles, he grabbed her hips and sat back down. Dragging her onto his lap, he rammed his cock inside her.

He thrust hard and fast. Karly rode him just as hard, her arms tight around his neck. She arched her back as he fondled her breasts roughly through her clothes. She leaned her head down

and slid her tongue into his mouth. Groaning, he sucked on her tongue hungrily as their hard, fast rhythm intensified.

Fighting for his breath, he tore his lips from hers and bit her neck. “Jesus, Karly.” And when she came for him again, with loud, breathy moans, Hawk’s control busted into a thousand pieces.

His final thrust gave him the release he so desperately needed.

Chapter Six

“Coward.”

One leg in his jeans, Hawk’s head whipped in her direction, his brown eyes loaded with guilt.

Raking her hands through her tangled hair, she sat up. The sheet slipped, exposing her breasts to him. Anger shot through her like the bulls out of the chutes. “You were going to do it again. Just sneak away while I’m sleeping.”

Tugging his jeans over his hips, he avoided her eyes. “It’s better this way.”

She was a first class fool for getting involved with Hawk Rivers. “Why is it better this way?”

She slid off the bed, landing less than a foot from him. His eyes raked her naked body. Not that it mattered. He’d seen every inch of body. His hands and mouth had also explored all those inches. “For you.”

Hawk bent down and gathered up Karly’s clothes. Their clothes always ended up on the floor. He handed them to her, but she refused to take them from him. “What if I feel like standing here naked?”

He tossed her clothes up on the bed. “You’re asking for trouble. I warned you about getting involved with me.”

“Yeah, yeah, I remember.”

His eyes sparked with anger, too. Karly balled her hands into fists and jammed them on her bare hips. “Is this your profile? Screw ’em, and then leave ’em?”

Catching her upper arms, Hawk’s looked at her pleadingly. “Stop saying things like that. I know it’s not you.”

“You don’t know me because you don’t want to. I had to force feed you information about me yesterday. If you don’t know me, it’s easier to walk away. By now, you know my body like the back of your hand. Hell, you might know it better than I do.”

Hawk moved his hands to her face and cupped her cheeks. “You’re a damn good woman. Find a man that’ll treat you good. You deserve it.”

Unexpected and unwanted tears gathered in her eyes. “Hawk,” she whispered.

“Karly, let me go.”

His face betrayed his emotions. She saw the anguish in his eyes and in the hard line of his jaw.

“I don’t want to.”

He hauled her up against his chest and wrapped his arms around her. A hug so tight and overflowing with emotions, tears spilled from her eyes. Karly burrowed her head against his shoulder.

He kissed the top of her head as his hands rubbed her back as if to comfort her. This was a different Hawk than the lusty, rough, passionate lover she had grown to know over the past few weeks. Karly clung to him, not wanting the moment to end.

* * * *

Disappointment threaded through Hawk’s body as he walked out of the arena the following weekend. No sign of Karly. The photographers from the local papers were shooting pictures, but not the woman that had haunted his days and nights the past week. The desperation mounted inside him as he brushed past other cowboys waiting for their turn in the arena. The need to see Karly overwhelmed him. He hadn’t expected a reaction like this, and he didn’t blame her for not showing after their last time together.

Why the hell should she? She was the first woman in too many years that had splintered the wall he’d erected around himself after the accident.

He doubted he would place in the top three. Karly not being there distracted him. Weaving his way through the parked cars and trucks in the crowded lot, he reached his fifth wheeler. He didn't feel like sticking around. If he did place, he'd contact the rodeo association later.

Deciding it was time, Hawk climbed inside his truck.

* * * *

Karly picked at her dinner of sautéed shrimp and rice pilaf. Her mother, as always, chatted away. The restaurant was crowded. Glancing around the room, her gaze lingered on couples chatting and laughing together.

"Where are you tonight, Karly? It's not like you to be so inattentive. Are you coming down with something?"

"No, Mom. I'm fine."

"Are you sorry you decided to skip the last rodeo of the season? I was surprised you cancelled."

She couldn't have handled seeing Hawk. And if he didn't show, she couldn't have handled that, either. "I have plenty of photos. Tons. I can do my book with no problem." Dealing with her aching heart was the hardest part of all. She refused to look at Hawk's photographs, so to solve the problem, she'd stuffed them into a drawer in her desk.

"Marge and Joe are having a little get together next week. Their son, Jason, is recently divorced."

Rolling her eyes, Karly groaned out loud. "No way, no how. Scratch me off the guest list."

"I know Jason. He's very nice. And he has a good job with the power company."

Stuffing a shrimp into her mouth, she shook her head. "It's not happening, Mom."

Her mother dabbed her lips with a napkin. "I hate seeing you alone. A woman shouldn't be alone."

"You are."

"That's different and you know it. Your father was the love of my life. I had forty wonderful years with him before he died. A woman couldn't ask for more."

Karly reached across the table, taking her mother's hand. "I'm sorry, Mom. I shouldn't have said that. But you have to accept that your daughter's a washout when it comes to men."

"You are not a washout, as you put it. There's a man out there for you. I guarantee it."

Oh, there was a man all right. A man that moved the stars and the moon when he loved her. A man that left an aching, black void in her heart when he left her.

"Maybe."

* * * *

Hawk drove all night to reach Browning. When he slowed to a stop in front of his mother's house, an avalanche of memories came tumbling down around him. Three years had passed since he'd walked out of his mother's house. After he killed the ignition, he scrubbed a hand down his face. He stared at the small house, the white paint chipped and peeling. Garbage was strewn across the yard. Not necessarily his mother's garbage. The constant, high winds east of the Rockies carried anything and everything away from its original home, unless it was securely tied down.

Muscling back the apprehension rushing through him, Hawk opened his truck door and got out. He angled around his truck, kicking aside a flattened Coca Cola box. At the front door, he hesitated before knocking.

After seven. Tapping his knuckles on the door, he pulled in a deep breath. His mother should be up, unless she'd started drinking again.

When the door opened, Hawk wasn't prepared for the emotions that washed through him at the sight of his mother.

Shock, bitterness and anger flashed in her eyes. "Hawk?"

"Yeah, Mom, it's me."

Suddenly he felt like the rabble-rousing teenager he'd been all those years ago. He could tell she'd stayed away from the bottle. Her eyes were clear but sleepy looking. Her skin was darker than his because she was a full-blooded Blackfeet. She was a tall and lean woman. "Can I come in.?"

Helen Rivers hesitated before she allowed her son inside. The house was clean and neat. A big orange cat bathed himself on the couch. His mother had always loved cats.

"I could use some coffee, Mom." And hopefully some understanding.

His mother circled around and marched toward the kitchen. Hawk followed her into the boxy, little room, feeling his palms sweating. Seeing her house was the same, he sat down at the table.

As she prepared the coffee, Hawk noticed the stiff line of her back. He'd at least made it through the front door of his mother's home.

When the coffee was ready, she carried two mugs over to the table, handing one to him. "Thanks."

"What are you doing here? No one has seen or heard from you in years. If you need money, I can't spare any."

Hawk grinded his back molars together. "I don't need money, Mom. That's not why I'm here."

She lowered her eyes as she spooned sugar into her coffee from the glass sugar bowl on the table. As she stirred her coffee, she studied him with suspicion. "Why are you here?"

He tightened his grip around the heavy mug handle. "To set the record straight."

"There's no record to set straight. You killed your sister."

She might as well have stabbed a knife into his guts because it couldn't have hurt any worse than her words. "No." He shook his head. "I didn't kill Susan."

The anger and bitterness returned to his mother's gaze in full force. "You were driving the damn truck."

Hawk took a drink of coffee to steady his emotions. "Susan was driving."

Helen Rivers eyes widened in disbelief. "What? After three years, you're telling lies about your sister. God rest her soul. You killed her and now you're lying about her." Her voice rose, bordering on hysteria.

Hawk had expected this reaction from his mother. His sister had always been her favorite. Even in death, she was still his mother's favorite. "Susan was driving that night," he repeated.

"You were drunk."

"I was barely over the limit. I wasn't shit faced. Susan was." Hawk swallowed back the rancid memories crawling up the back of his throat. "I jumped into the truck with her when she left the bar that night. I tried to reason with her. She sped through town. I told her to put on her

damn seat belt, to slow down.” Hawk paused, plowing a hand through his hair. “I swear to God, Mom, I’m telling the truth.”

“Why after three years are you saying these things? If you’re speaking the truth, why didn’t you speak it three years ago?”

“Susan was thrown from the truck. I wasn’t because I had my seat belt on. I managed to get out, crawl on my hands and knees to find her. She was already dead.”

Helen Rivers stood up so abruptly she knocked her chair over backwards. Her hand clutched her throat. “No. No. I don’t believe you.”

Despair and bitterness rampaged through him. He’d been a fool to think his mother would believe him. Susan would always remain his mother’s favorite.

“Get out.” His mother pointed at the door. “You came back to hurt me because you were always jealous of Susan.”

A strong feeling of impotence merged with his fatigue, leaving him drained and empty. “I spent a year and a half in prison for manslaughter to protect you.” Hawk hated seeing the denial in her eyes and on her face. “I knew you couldn’t handle it. When the cops got there, they figured I was driving. They knew my history with the bottle.” Hawk lifted a shoulder. “It didn’t matter at that point. My little sister was dead. I tried to save her, but I couldn’t.”

Tears slid down his mother’s face. Knowing it would be pointless to try comfort her, Hawk pushed back from the table and stood up. “If you ever find it in your heart to believe me, here’s my number.” He dug a folded piece of paper out of his shirt pocket and tossed it on the table. “Thanks for the coffee, Mom.”

Chapter Seven

The soft knock on her door surprised Karly as she looked up from the daily newspaper she was reading. It was Saturday night and close to ten o'clock. Wondering if *he* was out there, she folded the newspaper and dropped it on the couch. She got up and walked to the front door, opening it. Shock rumbled through her.

"Hawk."

He stared at her, his face gaunt, his eyes carrying a haunted look. She remembered too well he was all muscle and bone, but now he looked as if he'd lost weight.

"Can you put a drifter up for the night?"

The sight of him and the fatigue and resignation in his tone ripped at her heart. Words failed her. This man had broken her heart. She'd given up hope she'd ever see him again. "How did you know where I lived?"

Hawk pulled a wrinkled and frayed business card from his denim jacket. "Your business card."

Watching him stuff it back into his pocket, emotions erupted inside of her. Hawk had kept her card. A simple thing, but for her...Without a word, he walked into her house. After she closed the door, she leaned against it, her emotions reeling out of control.

Hawk turned and faced her.

"I thought I would never see you again," she whispered.

"You didn't show for the last rodeo."

Had he really expected her to be there? “I didn’t see the point. I had enough photos for my book.”

Their eyes caught, making Karly uncomfortable. “Hawk, are you okay?”

“I don’t know. I’ve been driving for twenty hours straight to get here.”

He was obviously punch drunk. She considered offering him a cup of coffee, but by the looks of him, it was clear sleep was something he needed more. “You can spend the night here. I have a spare bedroom.”

Disappointment pooled in his eyes. “Okay.”

Did he expect her to share her bed with him after a month with no word from him? Karly hurried through her small living room, feeling Hawk following her. Just like the first day she’d met him, his presence reached out to her, to hidden places in her heart and soul. When she reached her spare bedroom, she pushed open the door.

After she turned on the overhead light, she walked over to the bed to fluff the pillows, to give her hands something to do. Without looking at him, she said, “The bathroom is across the hall.” Scorching memories of the two of them together pummeled her senses as she continued to fluff the pillow. She circled around to face him. Hawk leaned a shoulder against the doorframe, his hands deep in the front pockets of his jeans.

Her breath caught in her throat at the look in his eyes as he stared at her. She didn’t know why he’d driven to her place because he didn’t act like he wanted sex. He acted like a beaten man. “Need anything else?”

“No.”

“Okay, then.” She angled to the door, trying to squeeze past him, but he turned so that they were face to face. Inches separated their bodies.

Hawk skimmed his fingertips down her cheek. “Thank you.” He dropped his hand to his side.

Karly nodded. Emotions barreled through her at breakneck speed as she walked back to the living room. She busied herself with locking up for the night. It was late September, so she set the heat on low. The Montana nights were cool this time of year. Standing at the living room window, she saw Hawk’s truck and fifth wheeler trailer parked on the street in front of her house.

His home on wheels.

She still wanted Hawk like she'd never wanted another man. Her feelings hadn't changed over the past month. If anything, her need for him had grown stronger, more desperate. Karly closed the curtains and finished turning off the lights. Stopping near her spare room, she saw that the door was closed.

Not hearing any sounds from the room, Karly padded down the hallway to her bedroom, wondering if she'd even be able to sleep with Hawk in her house.

* * * *

Feeling the bed shifting and the blankets being lifted, Karly struggled to drag herself from a restless sleep. Cool air swept over her body, followed by strong arms hauling her back against a solid chest.

Slightly disoriented, she wondered if she was dreaming. His scent and the feel of his chest brought back smoldering memories. "Hawk?" If he didn't answer, she'd know for sure it was a dream.

He nuzzled her neck. "I'm sorry for hurting you, Karly."

She closed her eyes and fought back unexpected tears. Hawk held her so tight it was hard to breathe. Squirming out of his embrace, she rolled over to face him and skimmed her fingers over his bare chest, seeking his lips in the darkness. He groaned as she pressed her lips against his.

Seconds later, she was flat on her back with Hawk's body covering hers. She ran her hand down his back and discovered he only had on his briefs.

He pushed up her nightshirt, exposing her breasts. A month of agony washed away from her like the tide receding from the shoreline as his mouth closed around her nipple, showering heat over her body. Holding the back of his head, she drew him closer. He groaned and moved to her other nipple. Karly wrapped her legs around his thighs, knowing she was wet beyond reason, damning her nightclothes and his underwear.

And then Hawk was kissing her with a ferocious need, his tongue plunging inside her mouth. She mated hers with his as his cock rubbed against her sex. The friction of him rubbing himself against her fired her dormant passion for him with each passing second. She tore her lips from his, shoved down his briefs, and wrapped her hand around his hard-on, loving the feel of

his smooth, hard penis. Mere seconds later, Hawk's hands fumbled with her flannel pajama bottoms.

As she struggled to kick them over her feet, his cock drove deep inside her body.

The long days of loneliness and longing vanished. She spread her legs as wide as they could go, giving him full access to her.

Like a man possessed, he rammed his cock hard into her. Their desperate moans filled her dark bedroom as their hot, slick bodies thrashed against each other. Karly's fingers dug into Hawk's back as he rode her while she raked his back with her nails like an alley cat. Her bruised lips searched desperately for his again.

"Karly."

Hawk pushed his tongue inside of her mouth, stealing her breath and her soul. His big hands cupped her butt, his fingers pinching into her cheeks as he pounded his cock hard and fast into the deepest part of her.

Lowering his head, he licked down her breast until his teeth closed around one nipple, tugging it deep into his mouth. Arching her back, she held his head in place, not wanting him to stop. The burning heat between her legs grew unbearable, her body desperate for release. Gyrating her hips, she pulled him into her.

She needed everything he could give. "Fuck me harder."

A growl rumbled from him as he raised his head. "Goddammit. I'll love you harder, but..."

His mouth covered hers so swift and rough that she stopped breathing for a moment.

She felt his hand slide between their bodies and then his fingers started rubbing her clit. As Hawk roughly stroked her while he pounded her body, blessed relief exploded inside her.

She clung to him, her heart filling with love as she absorbed his rough and violent orgasm.

Chapter Eight

On his side, his hand on Karly's hip, Hawk watched her sleep. He wanted to smooth the tangles out of her hair, but he didn't want to wake her. In a moment of desperation, he'd driven to her house.

Needing to be near her and to feel her soft, womanly body close to his, he walked to her room and crawled into her bed last night. Once Karly kissed him, it was all over for him. His insatiable need for her caused him to lose his cool.

His mother had never picked up her phone and called him on his cell. Swallowing back the raw, biting pain, he knew he should have told the truth three years ago. For the past year and a half, he'd led a nomadic lifestyle, knowing he wasn't welcome in his own hometown.

Karly had filled his thoughts and dreams the past month. He didn't know if she would forgive him. It was damn clear she still wanted him as much as he wanted her, by the way she'd brought him into her home and welcomed him into her body.

Karly opened her eyes and blinked a couple of times before finally focusing on him. She simply stared back at him. He searched her face for anything resembling regret for last night.

His heart drumming inside of his chest, he reached over to comb his fingers through her hair.

"I was so afraid you'd be gone when I woke up." Karly's voice was husky with sleep.

She didn't trust him and he didn't blame her. "You deserve an explanation."

Her eyes widened in surprise.

He was taking a damned big gamble if he told her the truth about his past because she might kick his ass out the door, but Karly deserved the truth. It would be up to her what she did with it.

The sound of her tiny sigh stirred the blood in his groin as he kissed her.

Karly placed her hand on his chest. "Why don't we shower, eat breakfast and then talk? I," she hesitated. "I mean, you caught me off guard last night."

The sense of disappointment was devastating, knowing damn well she didn't trust him. "Fair enough." He doubted she would invite him to shower with her. "You shower first."

"Okay." Karly scrambled out of bed, throwing on her robe as she hurried out of the room.

Flopping onto his back, he blew out a frustrated breath. His cock throbbed for Karly. Only for Karly. Other women were now history for him.

Bone weary and fed up with leading a gypsy life, Hawk decided he needed to put down roots. Whether or not they would be here in Missoula or somewhere else was up to Karly.

Less than ten minutes later, she sashayed back into the room wearing her robe and a towel wrapped around her head turban style. "I put out everything you need for a shower. Towels and shampoo."

Hawk sat up, and when he saw Karly staring at his bare chest, heat throbbed inside him again. "Thanks. I need to get clean clothes out of my trailer."

Nodding, she turned and walked to her closet.

The polite talk between the two of them had Hawk wanting to bust his fist through her bedroom door. He got out of bed and strode out of her bedroom.

* * * *

Karly prepared scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast. She didn't know what Hawk liked since this would be their first official breakfast together. Nerves fluttering, she poured two small glasses of orange juice. Memories of the night before tumbled through her. When it came to Hawk Rivers, she was easy. All it took was his touch and she eager and ready. As she set the glasses on the table, he walked into the kitchen.

Her breath hitched inside her chest at the sight of him. His expression was guarded, but she figured hers was, too. His raven hair was wet and slicked back from his face. He was dressed in clean, faded jeans and a pale blue button down shirt. Her blood raced just looking at him.

"Breakfast is ready."

"I could have helped."

If Hawk had been in the kitchen when she was making breakfast, the eggs would have turned out soggy and the bacon burned beyond recognition. "Nothing fancy." She spun back around. "Sit down." As she dished up their breakfast, she kept her back to him, but she still felt his eyes on her.

Then he was behind her, within inches, because she smelled his fresh clean scent and felt the heat emanating from him. Squaring her shoulders, she turned to face him, a plate in each hand.

He took one from her. "Thanks."

"Sure. No problem."

They sat down at the table. Hawk polished his breakfast off in record speed.

"Are you still hungry?"

"This will do. It was good and filling."

She stared into his eyes. His expression was neutral, but his eyes were a firestorm of emotions.

He hooked his finger around the hand of the mug. "Did you publish your book yet?"

Karly paused from eating. "Not yet. I'm still deciding on the photos. I took tons of pictures." The photos of Hawk were still hidden in her desk drawer because her enthusiasm for her book had waned over the past month.

A heavy silence hung in the room as he pushed her plate away and picked up her mug. They watched each other across the table. "Well...I guess now is as good a time as any..." She didn't finish the sentence, left it hanging between them.

He pushed his chair back and got to his feet. "I need more coffee. How about you?"

Nothing like skirting around the issue. "Yeah, I could use a refill."

He carried the glass carafe over to the table, filling her mug first, then his. When he returned to the table, he sat down slowly, avoiding her eyes.

Heart sinking, like an anchor tossed from a boat, she figured this was the brush off. He'd driven how many damn miles to be in her bed and say he was sorry? That she wasn't his type. That he didn't do interracial relationships. That he craved her body, but not her heart.

Hawk took several sips of coffee, appeared to be mulling things over in his mind. Finally, he looked directly into her eyes. "I spent eighteen months in prison for manslaughter."

Karly nearly choked on her coffee. "You—you killed someone?"

His eyes stayed locked on hers. "No."

"But, but you said manslaughter."

"My younger sister Susan and I were in a car accident three years ago."

Oh, dear God...he'd killed his sister in an accident. She watched him fist his left hand and drop it on the table.

"Susan was driving and she was drunk. I'd had a few drinks at the local bar. Back then, I had a drinking problem. When I saw her leaving the bar, I took after her. She had a spare key to my truck. Before she could drive off, I jumped into the truck with her." Hawk stopped and stared past Karly's shoulder.

"I don't understand, Hawk. If your sister was driving, why were you charged with manslaughter?"

He looked back at her. "I let everyone believe that. The Tribal Cops, highway patrol."

Karly struggled to grasp what he was trying to tell her. It was apparent that it pained him by the expression on his face and the anguish in his eyes. "Why?"

"Susan was my mother's favorite. My mother had two men in her life. First, my father that she married. My father was a white man who took off when I was three. About six years later, she got involved with an Indian, Susan's father. She really loved Robert. She was only sixteen when she got pregnant with me. From what I understood, my father was a loser."

Her heart ached as Hawk told his story. She wanted to reach for him and hug him tight.

"My whole family had a problem with the bottle. My mother sobered up about ten years ago. Susan started drinking in her teens, just like I did. But my mother always made excuses for her. Susan did rehab once and managed to stay sober about a year."

"You took the blame so you wouldn't hurt your mother?"

Hawk's hand shook as he lifted the mug. "Yes. It wasn't hard to do because I already had one DUI under my belt."

"Are you ever going to tell your mother the truth?"

"I did." His tone was flat and devoid of emotion. "A month ago. When you didn't show at the last rodeo, I left and drove all night to Browning. The next morning, I told her the truth."

A sick feeling formed in Karly's stomach. "She didn't believe you?"

Hawk shook his head.

There wasn't a doubt in her mind of the truth in his words. "Oh, Hawk, I'm so sorry."

"Don't pity me, Karly. I made the decision knowing the consequences."

Tears blurred her vision. "I don't pity you. How could I? It was a brave thing to do."

"I figured it was the first noble thing I'd ever done in my life. I didn't expect to be blacklisted from my home."

"You must've known your mother would hold it against you."

"I knew that from the beginning. What I didn't expect was for the rest of my family and friends to hold it against me. Once I was out of prison, I roamed the state."

"And now you're tired of roaming."

"Yes."

Karly stared down at her half empty mug. This wasn't what she'd expected from him. "You've told me enough, Hawk. No more talking for now. You can stay with me for as long as you want or need to."

"Karly."

Fiddling with the handle of her mug, a few seconds passed before she looked at him.

"You're too damn good of a woman to be involved with me."

Unexpected anger charged through her. Why did he keep saying that? What was his motive? "Then why are you here? Did you just stop by to fuck me?"

Hawk's hand shot across the table and grabbed hers. "Don't you ever say that word again when it's about us." His jaw turned to steel as anger gleamed in his eyes.

Taken back by the force behind his words, Karly opened her mouth to speak then closed it without saying a word.

Hawk pushed away from the table, walked over to the window above the sink, and stared outside. "I can't forget about you." He circled around to face her. "No matter how damned hard I try. No matter how many different places I go."

A ray of hope shined inside of her, but she warned herself to tread lightly. The Hawk she knew always disappeared before the morning sun rose in the sky. Just because he was still here this morning didn't necessarily mean he would be here every morning. Karly folded her hands together on her lap. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

Watching her, his gaze turned wary. "I expected you to kick me out after I told you about my past."

Part of what constituted Hawk was his past. She admired him for taking the blame for his sister's death to protect his mother. It may not have been the smartest decision on his part, but it was definitely noble. No way. That would never happen because she was so desperately in love with him. She stood up and went to him.

Stuffing her hands into the front pocket of her jeans, she looked away for a moment, trying to find the right words. "I think you know I would never kick you out. I thought it was fairly obvious how I felt about you, that I wanted more than you were willing to give. And the truth is..." She paused. "I still want more. I can't have you disappearing on me if you get the urge to roam the countryside again."

Hawk clenched then unclenched his hands. "What about my sister and what happened?"

She grabbed his hand and swallowed back a lump forming in her throat. "I'm so sorry about Susan. I'm sorry that you went to prison when you were innocent. And I'm sorry your mother hasn't forgiven you."

Hawk pulled her into his arms. "I don't have a job. I don't have a lot of money. I get work where I can find it."

Karly leaned back so she could look at him. "There's lots of jobs in town."

Hawk kissed her. The most gentle, precious kiss she had ever felt in her life. "You have to promise me you won't run off on me. Because." Her lower lip trembled. "Because if I get used to having you with me, it would break my heart."

"Ah...Karly. You've made me feel human again. You also made me realize I could have a better future."

"You can. We can have a future together."

His eyes searched her face. "You can live with my past?"

She nodded. "I can. You're the one that has to come to terms with it."

"I've already started." Hawk hugged her and held her close against him for a long, long time.

KARLY'S DRIFTER
Rodeo Cowboys: The Series, Book 2

THE END

AUTHOR'S BIO

Sage Burnett has been composing stories since childhood. Short stories, school plays, and poetry. She now writes contemporary romance set in Montana. Romantic suspense and comedy. And she loves a happy ending.

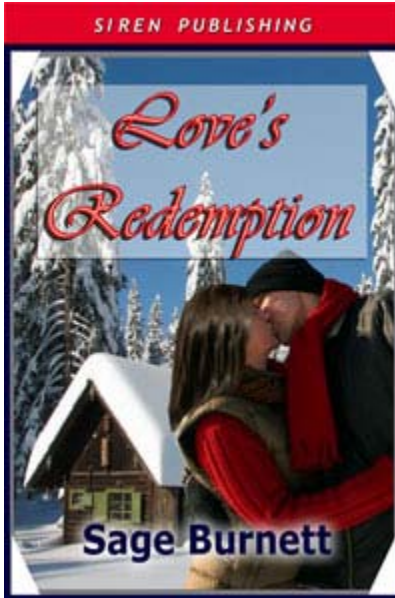
Sage once had a face-to-face encounter with a grizzly sow and her two cubs. It's clear she lived to tell about it. She survived a one-hundred-year storm on the eastern side of the state, another nail-biting incident she lived to tell about. She loves hiking in the Montana wilderness, wondering what wild animal might be around the next bend.

Sage eats a bowl of Cream of Wheat every morning and is a chocolate addict. She also drinks tons of green tea.

Her roomies are a rowdy girl black lab, Madison, and two spoiled, lazy, temperamental girl kitties, Runt and Cody.

Some of her favorite authors are Dana Stabenow, John Sanford, Tami Hoag and Dr. Seuss.

Check out Sage's latest books at
www.sirenpub.com/sageburnett



Love's Redemption by Sage Burnett

When a fatal mistake ends Jake Ramsey's career as a big city cop, he travels the country struggling to come to terms with his past. Jake ends up in Mountaintop, Montana where, one day, while drowning his sorrows at the local bar, he discovers a young couple has gone missing but left their dog behind, so Jake adopts the stray.

When he meets Lily Baker, it's instant attraction for him. As he gets to know her, Jake realizes Lily could crack the brittle pieces inside his heart.

Lily, a widow, is just as attracted to Jake, but she's afraid he might not stick around long, and she doesn't want her heart broken again.

Jake gets snagged in the web of deceit surrounding the young couple's disappearance as his heart begins opening up to a woman who holds the power to free him from his past.

Available at
www.sirenpub.com/sageburnett

Love's Redemption by Sage Burnett

Story Excerpt

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“Oh, Jake...”

He dumped the glass on the small table next to the couch so he didn't crush it in his hands. “A few days after Lawson died, Wellington's wife, Lisa, came forward. Said she had lied about her husband being with her that night. She knew about the affair. He cheated on her half a dozen times in their marriage, but she always forgave him because she didn't want to lose him.” Jake dragged in a shallow breath. “You hear it on the news all the time. A cop thinks a suspect is reaching for a weapon, so he shoots.”

Lily remained quiet for a time before she asked. “Were you fired?”

“No. After a thorough investigation, I was reinstated to the force.”

“So you quit?”

He nodded.

“You've exiled yourself.”

Jake stood and walked over to the window. He jammed his hands into the front pockets of his jeans and stared outside at the black night, not seeing anything.

“You've also inflicted your very own punishment,” she said behind him.

Jake didn't answer her. He expected her to leave. Why would she want anything to do with him now? He killed an innocent man, took his life away.

Suddenly, Lily stood next to him. She laid her hand on his arm. He forced himself to look at her. Her eyes were clear and unwavering.

“Hold me.”

That was the last thing he had expected to hear from her. Was she asking for his embrace so she could comfort him? “I don't need your pity. I have no one to blame but myself.”

Hurt shadowed her eyes. He cursed himself.

“You're wrong. It's not pity.” Her voice trembled. “I think we both need comfort.”

Jake didn't respond, his hands still stuffed in his pockets. He ached to hold her, but he held back. He'd wanted her since first meeting her.

“I haven’t been held by a man since John died,” she whispered. A moment later, she dropped her hand and turned away from him.

He caught her before she got far. He wrapped his arms around her. When her arms twined around his back, something cracked loose inside his heart. He buried his head in her soft, sweet-smelling hair. Jake heard her sigh and gathered her closer.

“Lily...” He found her lips and kissed her. A slow, gentle, exploring kiss. The taste of her bewitched him. He lifted his head and gazed into her eyes.

She blinked, then whispered. “Kiss me again.”

“Are you sure?”

Lily nodded.

The invitation in her eyes was unmistakable. Desire and need shimmered in her gaze. A carnal need swelled inside him as he smashed his lips against hers and parted her lips. His tongue pushed inside her, tasting her sultry flavor. Their tongues mated, danced, and seduced each other.

He broke the kiss abruptly. “Lily.” His voice sounded rusty to his own ears. “Kiss me like that again, and I’ll be carting you off to bed.”

“I can walk.” She untangled herself from him and grabbed his hand.

“You have to be sure.”

She laid his hand on her cheek. “There are no guarantees. I’m as sure as I can be.”

Lily’s word struck a chord deep inside of him. There might not be a tomorrow.

Love's Redemption by Sage Burnett

Adult Excerpt

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He saw the doubt in her eyes, so she surprised him the hell out of him when she pressed herself against him and twined her arms around his neck. She coaxed his mouth open and slipped her tongue inside.

He ground his hips against hers so she could feel his hard cock. So she could know what she did to him. Jake backed her toward the couch. The bedroom was too damn far.

He laid her down on the couch and peeled off every inch of her clothing and boots. She gazed up at him with unabashed desire, her nipples hard and her legs slightly spread, showing her pussy to him. Jake kept his gaze locked on hers as he stripped. Her beautiful eyes flooded with desire.-

He lowered himself on top of her. When his body wrapped around hers, need and passion burned in his veins. He kissed her long and thoroughly before his lips trailed down to her breasts, where he suckled each of her nipples. Then, he tugged on them gently with his teeth. He didn't stop until she moaned and gyrated beneath his body. Jake continued his descent down her flushed body until his lips closed around her clit. He moved off the couch and knelt in front of her. He shifted her hips to bring her closer to him.

"Jake," she moaned. Her hands tangled in his hair.

He licked her clit, slow and easy at first. As the fire built inside of him, he licked her harder and faster. The movement of Lily's shapely hips against his face and her wanton moans drove his desire for this woman to a new level. Her musky, womanly scent floated around him like a sultry cloud. When her body shuddered with her orgasm, he continued licking her until she stilled.

He scrambled up and climbed on top of her, then plunged his throbbing cock deep inside her dewy moistness.

Lily dragged his head down for a kiss. Now, he tasted all of her. Moans fell from her lips as her body thrashed against his. Her ragged breaths filled his ears.

Jake didn't know how much longer he could control himself. "Lily, come again for me. Please," he ground out through clenched teeth.

Rodeo Cowboys: The Series

Complete Collection

by Sage Burnett

Melanie's Protector
Karly's Drifter
Josie's Heartbreaker

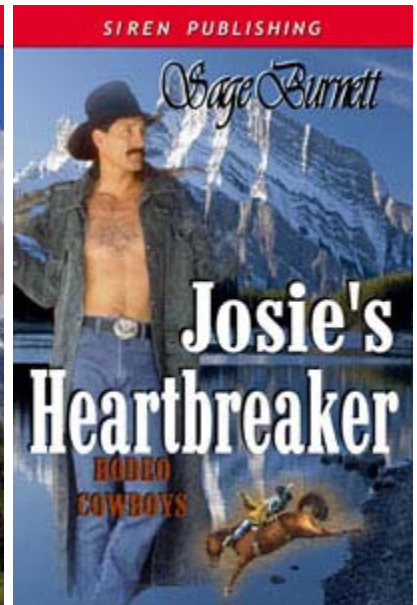
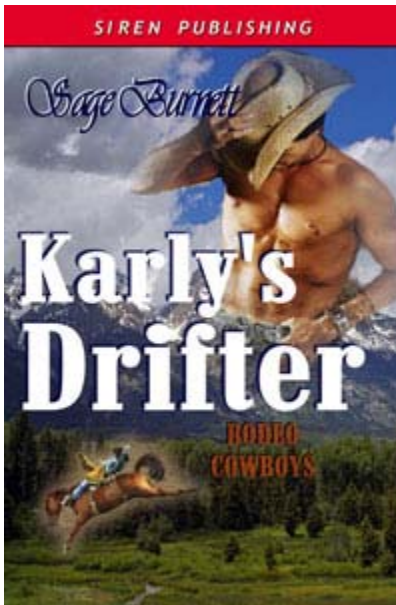
Melanie Blake needs protection so she picks Steve McCall to help her escape the people in hot pursuit of her. Steve has no idea the woman stowed away in his camper is smoldering with passion.

Karly Jackson follows the Montana rodeo circuit shooting photos of the cowboys for her book. Hawk Rivers is opposed to being featured in her book. Karly wants to know what he is hiding. On the other hand, Hawk is eager to share her bed and midnight pleasures after the rodeo ends.

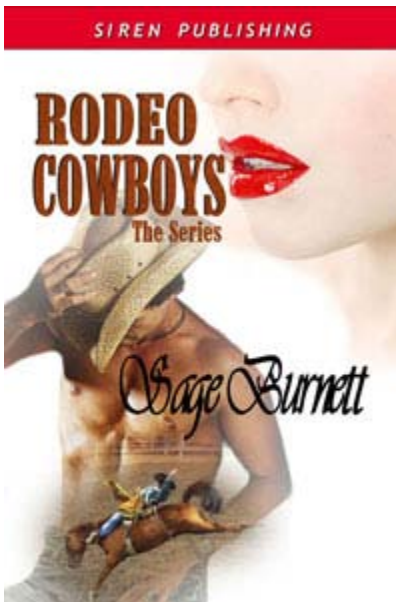
Josie Landford sets out to fulfill a life long fantasy--a hot, sizzling, no-strings-attached affair with a rugged and rough cowboy. Rex West isn't quite sure what to think of the breezy, sexy Josie Landford. He gives her a call and finds himself on a seductive wild ride.

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Melanie's Protector by Sage Burnett

Story Excerpt

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Steve dragged his tired butt into his camper, took one step, and tripped over something in the sooty darkness. Losing his balance, he smacked his forehead on the handle of the refrigerator door. "Shit! What the hell is that?" He fumbled for the light over the sink.

As the light flickered to life, he saw a black leather tote bag on the floor.

"Don't move."

His gaze shot to the bed over the cab of his truck. The redhead from the rodeo stands held a pistol pointed directly at his chest. He'd been too cranky after losing the competition to fantasize about what color eyes she had. Turned out they were a vivid shade of green. She knelt on his bed with her arms stretched in front of her, gripping the .22 in both hands.

"What the hell?" Steve rubbed his forehead, knowing he'd probably sprout a goose egg. "How did you get back here? And why are you in my camper? I don't recall inviting you."

"You left it unlocked. And...I want you to take me to Bozeman. Now."

His crankiness twisted into anger. "Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yes. I have to be there by six this morning."

"If you want to rob me, I'll give you the few bucks in my wallet. Then you can get the hell out of my camper."

She shook her head, causing her long, silky hair to sway back and forth. "I have no intention of robbing you. I need to get to Bozeman."

"Ever hear of driving, bus, airplane, lady?"

She shook her head again. "I want you to drive me."

"Now, wait a minute." Steve held up his hands. "I'm not a damn taxi service. If you want to shoot me, do it. I'm already dead on my feet."

"I don't want to shoot you. I want you to drive me to Bozeman."

"Sorry, no can do. I'm almost out of gas. The next town is thirty miles up the road, and the gas station doesn't open 'til six."

The redhead's brows knitted together into a frown. "This is a big truck. It has to have dual tanks."

Tank number two was filled but he wasn't about to tell her that. "Forgot to fill it."

Still frowning, she watched him with a skeptical glint in her eyes. Steve rubbed his forehead again, avoiding her eyes. He hated being dishonest, even to a wacky redhead with a gun pointed at him.

She let out a long, frustrated breath, then stared down at the gun for several moments.

"Why don't you put the gun away?" Steve suggested. "We'll forget this ever happened."

Her gaze collided with his. "No. I have to get to Bozeman."

"It's a long walk. And a lady can't be hitchhiking at night on this lonely road. So, it looks like you have to spend the night on the side of the road with me." He wasn't sure if he relished that idea. Sure, she was attractive, with that flaming head of hair, but the fact that she had a gun pointed at him tended to put a damper on things.

She shook her head. "No, no, no."

"What's so important about getting to Bozeman by six?"

"I need..." She pressed her lips together in a tight line for a moment. "I need to catch a plane." Fear swirled in her eyes.

"Listen, why don't you put the gun away?" He held up his hands again. "I'm an honest guy. You can trust me."

"That's why I picked you."

Steve laid his hand on his chest, eyes widening. "You picked me to drive you to Bozeman?"

She nodded.

So much for honesty. If he looked like a low-down rat, he probably wouldn't be standing in his camper with a gun pointed at him. "What's your name?" When she didn't answer, he said, "I'm Steve McCall. Now, you tell me yours." She still didn't volunteer her name. "Okay. I guess it's Red."

She frowned at him, clearly not liking the nickname.

"How about I make some coffee?"

What he really wanted was sleep, not caffeine. Since Red was in his bed, he didn't have much choice. If she didn't have a pistol sighted in on him, he'd crawl up there with her.

He kicked her tote bag out of the way and grabbed the small container of coffee off the cupboard shelf. After he measured the coffee, he glanced over at her. "Your legs will go to sleep kneeling like that." He turned on the propane burner. "Your arms have to be getting tired."

Red lifted her chin and raised the gun a notch.

Steve shrugged as he pulled a couple of mugs from the cupboard. "If you picked me to be your chauffeur because I look honest, then you don't need to be pointing that gun at me."

"I said you looked honest. I didn't say you were."

Melanie's Protector by Sage Burnett

Adult Excerpt

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Steve looked into her eyes as his hands cupped her soft, plump breasts. “No one will hurt you. I’ll see to that, Red.” Her eyes, already simmering with heat, flooded with gratitude.

She lowered her head, nipped his upper lip while he gently pinched her nipples.

“You have beautiful breasts,” he whispered before he kissed her again.

Her tongue invaded his mouth and Steve groaned as she rubbed her pubic mound against him. Lifting her forward so her breasts were at eye level, he suckled her nipple like a starving man. Her hips moved seductively up and down over his erection. He needed her bare flesh rubbing against his. Steve reached for the button on her jeans, but she stopped him by pushing his tee shirt up and over his head. Then she bent, her thick hair spreading across his chest as she licked his nipple. She licked her way over to his other nipple and his desire for her ripened with each rake of her tongue. While the exotic scent of her hair drifted around him, Steve palmed her crotch, hearing her breathy moan. Moments later they were both struggling with each other’s jeans. When the clothes were off, Red kissed him again, her hot, naked body draped over his.

Slipping his finger into her wet pussy, he couldn’t stop the groan that rumbled from his lips. She raised her butt slightly, moving her hips up and down. His other hand sought out her breast, where he rubbed his thumb over her hard nipple, the sound of her husky, womanly moans driving his lust higher and hotter.

When she came, Steve gritted his teeth as fiery lust exploded inside of him. He didn’t give her a chance to recover before he plunged his cock deep into her pussy.

Red sat up, moving with him as he thrust hard and fast inside her. Through hooded eyes, he watched her breasts jiggle before he covered them with his hands. Red laid her hands on top of his and worked them against her. The feel of her soft palms had him clenching his back teeth together to hold onto his control.

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