



The Chance of a Lifetime

Maggie Casper

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Dedication

To the forum Mistresses, you know who you are. Thank you for the fun, the laughs and most of all, the support.

Chapter One

The tantalizing scent of lavender wafted through the air as Lacey Winslow readied the room for her next client. The day promised to be a busy one, if her appointment book was any indication.

The monotony of cleaning the padded yet firm surface of her massage table was comforting. She took extra special care around the face cutout, humming as she worked. When the rest of her life felt as if it were being turned upside down, knowing she was helping others through the stress of their everyday lives made her feel worth more than just what she could offer a man between the sheets.

To hear it from her soon-to-be-ex-husband, she had no value except for a quick tumble when he happened to have an erection to spare that hadn't been wasted on some gullible piece in the next town over.

Allowing her mind to wander to a time best forgotten, Lacey made her way to the hall closet where she stored her cleaning supplies. She didn't allow the feelings of inadequacy to linger long before ruthlessly squashing them.

If she allowed it to, the past would haunt her every waking hour just as it did her dreams, and that was something she wouldn't allow. Besides, knowing at one point in time she'd more than likely been the gullible woman in the next town was enough to make her see red. The fact she'd been gullible and stupid, stupid enough to marry the snake, made her blood boil.

The bell over the front door chimed, announcing her next client. Every time she looked around her home, Lacey couldn't help but feel proud. It wasn't large or fancy, but it was hers. She still didn't really understand why the bank had approved her loan, but she'd been desperate after leaving her marriage and wasn't about to question the good will of others.

Feeling lighter, Lacey made her way back up the hall. She opened the heavy door separating the front room from the rest of the house. She'd had it installed specifically for the purpose of keeping her business separate from her personal life.

Her wide smile shifted to a grimace of annoyance when she caught sight of who was perched on the threshold of her front door, half in and half out, as if he wasn't sure it was okay to fully enter.

He was definitely hard to miss. Tall, with a stocky build and shoulders that seemed to span the doorway, Chance Bodine was an intimidating presence. Especially to a woman who couldn't even claim to be five feet.

His wide grin and twinkling eyes always seemed to disappear while around her. Every time it happened Lacey tried to brush away the small bite of pain and hurt feelings the change caused. There were old hurts there, Lacey just couldn't manage to see past Chance's larger than life ego to find them.

"What do you need, Chance?" Lacey allowed the exasperation in her voice free rein as she walked toward him. She stopped at the small desk near the front door, too near him and his musky manly scent. With short angry movements, she snatched the appointment book from the desk.

"It doesn't feel right to just walk in someone's house. It can't be safe, Lacey. Not

with you here alone.”

The deep baritone of his voice had the power to peak her nipples and drench her panties in seconds flat. Eyes narrowed in both concentration and anger, anger at him and her traitorous body, Lacey turned to him and answered.

“It’s safe enough. Was there something you needed, Chance? I’m expecting a client.”

She couldn’t help the hint of victory as she rubbed the fact of her client in his face. She’d refused him so many times it wasn’t funny. She’d actually thought of getting a sign to hang on her front door stating the fact.

It had all started a while back when the idiot barged into her home right in the middle of a session, demanding her partially nude male client leave instantly. And if that wasn’t bad enough, the way he’d then gone on like a cowboy possessed to tell her how she belonged to him and had better keep her hands off the town’s male population.

It had taken her a few minutes to stop laughing and she’d only managed the feat because her anger had mounted at his audacity. Tired of being a doormat, Lacey had done the only thing she could think of, she’d taken the broom after him, then locked the door as soon as she knocked him through it.

And now he was back for round two.

Lacey watched as the corner of his mouth quirked up in utter male satisfaction. The small smile made her stomach flutter and her pulse fly. He should be outlawed and he damned well knew it.

When he began to slowly work the buttons of his shirt free of their moorings, she couldn’t even manage to squeak a protest. It wasn’t until the tanned expanse of his well-developed chest came into view that she realized what an easy target she made. The thought brought her mind scrambling back from its lust-induced stupor and her anger to an all time high.

“Dammit, Chance! What in the hell do you think you’re doing?” Her hands were fisted on her hips in anger but even standing rigidly at attention she still only came to the center of his chest.

His whiskey eyes bore into hers, their intensity making her shiver before retreating a step. A move she immediately cursed herself for when he moved forward soundlessly, as if he were an animal stalking its prey.

He continued to move forward, backing her across the room slowly but surely, even as he completely removed his shirt and allowed it to fall from his fingertips to the floor.

Lacey couldn’t help but stare at the broad expanse of his chest. Her fingers burned with the need to feel the coarse hair covering him. It was brown with a reddish tinge, just like his well-trimmed beard and moustache. His cleanly shaven head was a stark contrast to the rest of his body if the hair on his chest gave any indication.

He reached for the buckle of his belt at the same time Lacey’s backside hit the edge of the massage table. Her quick sidestep wasn’t quick enough to stop Chance from caging her where she was.

With his fly undone it was hard not to notice the generous swell of his cloth-covered erection beneath the white stretchy cotton of what she hoped were boxer briefs. Lacey silently chastised herself for her curiosity over what type of underwear the ogre was wearing.

Her mind screamed for her to fight, to run, but he was so close and he smelled so

damned good, she couldn't get her body to comprehend the severity of her dilemma. And when he leaned into her, causing her to lean back over the table, she was lost.

Her body all but melted against him as he kissed first her cheek and then her lips. Changing positions, Chance sat on the edge of the massage table, bringing her between his spread thighs. His hold on her hips was firm yet gentle. Every inch of his heated hands registered as sparks flew straight to her core, causing her depths to spasm with need.

He ended the kiss with a smile on his face, setting her away from him before he rolled over onto the bed facedown.

"I'm here for a massage." His voice was calm, cajoling almost, in its lack of urgency, considering how ready she was. Her panties were soaked and her breasts ached with need. It seemed hard to get enough air into her lungs and it felt as though her heart would pound its way right out of her chest.

It took her a moment to realize how close to the edge he'd brought her, with nothing more than his lips and the sound of his voice. She wanted to crack him over the head with her broom this time around but was afraid to go after him in haste and anger because if she did, it was going to take an army to get her off him.

A few deep breaths made Lacey feel composed enough to speak, even though she really wanted to scream and rant and rave. Chance had managed to turn her into nothing more than a piece of quivering flesh. She sure the hell wasn't going to let his manipulation of her body turn her into a puddle at his feet.

Back rigid, Lacey stalked across the room to once again grab the appointment book off the desk. "I don't know what in the hell you're trying to pull Chance but my ten o'clock is with..." Her words trailed off as she noticed the changes made to her schedule.

Ted Snider, the fireman who had a running ten o'clock on Tuesdays, had been scratched out and replaced with the initials CSB. The whole day's lineup looked the same, the only difference being a variation on the initials. Lacey felt the absurd need to give in to a bout of nervous laughter.

Looking over to where Chance lay on his stomach, propped up on an elbow, she asked, "What does the S stand for?"

He lifted a bushy brown brow but remained silent.

"CSB, your initials. What does the S stand for?"

* * * *

She looked like a woman on the edge, making Chance wonder if he'd pushed too hard too soon. He wanted nothing more than to pull her to him. To take her tiny body in his arms and find out whether or not she'd be able to take the whole length of his steel hard cock or if he'd have to be extra careful. But from the looks of her, that wasn't going to be happening anytime soon.

"Samuel," he said, burying his face back into the cutout of the massage table. "Remind me and I'll tell you about it sometime. Right now I want one of your special massages I've heard so much about."

He wasn't lying or trying to stroke her ego, although stroking anything remotely connected to Lacey Winslow worked for him. He'd actually heard all about her magic hands, about how her clients left feeling both relaxed and rejuvenated. He wanted to experience firsthand the sound of her sultry voice as she hummed her way through a

session. It was one of the many things the folks in town talked about.

Chance heard her move and felt her presence long before he felt the first tentative touch of Lacey's hand. Her touch didn't stay tentative for long though. A well placed jab to the ribs made him jump.

"What the hell was that for?"

When he tried to lift his head, she leaned into him with what felt like a pointy elbow, giving him no choice but to stay put.

"I *don't* like being manipulated and I sure the hell don't like your high-handedness. If I had wanted you as a client, I would have accepted you the first time you walked through my door."

Chance couldn't see her face but she sounded damned mad. He could just imagine her eyes flashing with every word she spat. Would the small mounds of her perky little breasts be heaving in indignation?

"You gave me no choice, Lacey. I've laid it all on the line. I told you I wanted you and planned to have you, nothing has changed. I'm a patient man under most circumstances, this isn't one of them."

This time a painful pinch to the tender flesh at his side was the retaliation. His hand shot out and grasped Lacey's wrist. "Enough, Lace."

Her voice shook when she finally spoke. "I'll give you your damned massage because if I don't, I'll be out the cash but after today, I don't want you around, Chance. I can't do this again."

The last of her words met his ears on a breathless whisper, causing him to wonder if he'd made the right decision by confronting her.

Her small hands once again feathered over his sensitive flesh before quickly learning the layout of his back and shoulders. The way her tiny hands moved across his back and down to his lower waist had him moaning in aroused pleasure. The thought of those same hands pumping the length of his cock just before taking him into the warm recess of her mouth sent his senses reeling. If Chance wasn't careful he'd make a mess of both himself and her massage table.

Soon she was making chopping motions with the edge of her hands, loosening the muscles along the way. When finished with that task, she poured some type of warm oil down his spine. It felt thick and smelled heavenly, just the way he imagined she would taste when he finally got his face buried between her thighs.

The thought of using her own oil to lube her back entrance for the small plug he planned to buy for her brought his arousal to a peak. He could mentally picture her body writhing beneath his fingers as he prepared her. She would be scorching hot and ultra tight, begging and pleading for release long before he was willing to grant her wish.

All coherent thought vanished as Lacey began to work on the muscles of his neck. Her hands were strong for being so small. Chance was powerless to protest his lack of control as her thumbs pressed deep into the tissue, milking the muscles she found there just as he dreamed her tight pussy would milk the solid length of his cock.

It seemed only seconds had trickled by before Lacey stopped and yet, from the illuminated numbers of his digital watch, Chance was surprised to find it had been thirty glorious minutes of feeling her hands on him, kneading the muscles of his back until he felt as if he could slide from the table in a boneless heap. The thought of getting up seemed like cruel punishment. Chance said as much.

“Too bad, time’s up.”

Lacey stood at the connecting door, her hands clasped in front of her. She was preparing to bolt. The realization brought all languid thoughts screeching to a dead halt. She wasn’t going to leave. He wouldn’t let her.

Chance sat, then lowered his feet to the floor. His jeans were still unfastened, his chest still bare. He had more important things to worry about than dressing. He had to figure out a way to keep Lacey from walking through the connecting door and locking him out.

“Your next appointment is in thirty minutes. I’ll see you then if you insist on continuing with this fiasco.”

Chance chose to ignore her sarcastic words. “Have lunch with me instead.”

His thinly veiled command must have hit a nerve because instead of responding with a smile, her eyes narrowed to dangerous slits. “No.”

Lacey didn’t even hesitate with her answer. Chance fought to hold back a disapproving roar as she reached for the knob.

“Open that door and I’ll have you over my knee before you know it.”

He didn’t figure the threat would go over too well but when she just stared at him, a look of confusion clearly plastered across her pixie-like face, Chance couldn’t hold back the predatory smile curving his lips. She was such a naive little thing to have been married before.

The memory of her failed marriage wiped his smile away. Knowing she was still fairly innocent because of her ex-husband’s cheating ways made him see red.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Chance Bodine, but I do know you’re cutting into my break time. So if you insist on coming back, that’s fine, but I won’t be back out for thirty minutes.”

Chance stared in fascination as she turned her back to him. He wasn’t the no-nonsense type like his older brother, Clay, but he had an edge to him most knew about and made sure to never press beyond. Evidently Lacey wasn’t one of them.

The snick of the lock jolted him from his inner thoughts and Chance was a bit put out to find himself standing alone in the center of the room still only half dressed. His mind was a riot of ideas. Taming Lacey was going to be far more fun than he ever could have imagined. First though, he wanted her even more off balance.

Chance quickly decided the best way to accomplish such a thing was to keep her guessing. His first plan of action was to do the complete opposite of what she expected. He pulled enough bills from his wallet to cover the whole day, then left her home office, locking the front door on his way out.

The fact that he owed her a spanking was foremost on his mind but he wasn’t going to collect just yet. She’d be expecting something along those lines and was even now probably spending her time trying to figure out either how to evade him or best him at his own game.

No, he’d be giving her a bit of time to worry and wonder. Time to remember his words, the look on his face as he’d said them. Time to forget. Then he’d pounce. Chance’s palms tingled in anticipation. His already erect length throbbed in accordance to his plan.

Chance couldn’t help the sudden boom of laughter that caused some of the townsfolk to stare as he climbed into his truck and headed home to the ranch. Just picturing the

surprise on Lacey's face when the day of reckoning finally came was enough to make even the dourest of souls smile.

The thought of her aroused struggles and heated protests just before his palm made contact with the fleshy globes of her ass and she moaned in delight, was enough to make him rub the length of his denim-covered erection in heated anticipation. It also made for a long trip home.

Chapter Two

Lacey pulled the comforter back on her bed then proceeded to climb between the cool sheets, knowing full well she wouldn't be able to settle down. Not even cursing Chance relaxed her enough to fall asleep.

She couldn't get out of her mind how he'd felt beneath her hands. His skin so hot, his muscles so hard. Lacey wasn't sure she would ever be able to forget. Touching him was hard enough to try and block from her mind but she had a sneaking suspicion that forgetting the taste and feel of his tongue in her mouth would be nearly impossible.

Finally unable to bear the boredom of just laying there, staring at the ceiling, Lacey made her way from her room to the kitchen. Just enough moonlight made its way through the window so as not to need the light on. Combined with the tiny nightlight in the hallway, she could make out what she was doing.

Boredom was a bad thing for people who like to eat, Lacey thought as she mixed herself a glass of chocolate milk. She stood at the sink, chugging her milk while waiting for the toaster to pop. A movement in her backyard caught her attention causing her hand to still in mid-air.

Her heart seemed to have stopped for a brief second before it resumed at a racing speed. Her hand started to tremble as she squinted into the night, once again catching sight of the dark figure moving stealthily away from her home toward the fence separating her yard from that of the neighbors.

Fear turned quickly to anger and before she could think twice about it, Lacey was racing toward the back door. Barefoot with nothing more than an ankle length flowing gown to cover her body, she flung the door wide and stepped out onto the porch.

Cupping her hands around her mouth, she yelled at the retreating figure. "This isn't funny Chance! Next time my broom will be the least of your worries."

Once over the chain link fence the dark figure stopped and turned. It was then that Lacey realized the person quickly vacating her backyard was too small to be Chance. Her knees almost buckled at the realization, making it hard for her to reach the relative safety of her still-dark kitchen.

When brain function returned, Lacey cursed her stupidity for ever thinking Chance would be so underhanded. He might be an overbearing jerk but he would never take to sneaking around.

After securing the back door and the kitchen windows, Lacey went from room to room doing the same. Her mind was still whirling with the implications of what could have happened. The call she'd placed to the police brought two cars screaming up the street. The last thing on earth Lacey wanted to do was admit she'd scared off a would-be burglar by yelling at him but there wasn't much choice when it came to talking to Officer Dodson. Small town Sheriff or not, the man could probably interrogate a rock and come up with the truth.

A sharp knock on the office door of her home made her jump. "Police, Ms. Winslow. Stay inside with the door locked until we take a look around out here."

Lacey was on tiptoes, her face pressed to the door looking through the peephole. No way in hell was she taking any chances. She nodded her head at the officer's words; then

realized he wouldn't be able to hear the marbles rolling around in her evidently empty skull.

"He was in the backyard."

There was no forthcoming answer from the other side of the door, which worried Lacey. She wouldn't be able to live with herself if something happened to one of those men because of her, whether it was her fault or not.

Lacey followed the voices, keeping an eye on the men, following them from window to window as they made their way around back. For several minutes they stood huddled, flashlights in hand at her bedroom window. Feeling much safer due to the sheer number of them, she donned her robe and once again made for the back door.

Going through the back door and out into the yard, Lacey made her way to where the officers were talking. Four sets of eyes snapped to her the second she came into view.

"I'll be with you in just a minute, ma'am. Please wait in the house until the area has been secured."

He spoke the words in a no nonsense tone, his eyes scanning her yard, taking note of the other two officers looking around. Lacey's gaze followed his, also finding the other officers. She was rooted to the spot just watching when she heard him mumble under his breath.

"Just like Chance said, she don't listen for shit."

"Excuse me, I didn't quite catch that?" Lacey said the words as sarcastically as possible, her hands balled on her hips. The man was rude as hell.

Lacey's ears rang with the round of curses that followed. "Back into the house Ms. Winslow."

"Now wait just a minute..." she started, only to be cut off.

"Now." This time the growled command came from a different man. Lean and mean, with his jaw rigidly set, Doug Pennington didn't look like a happy man. He also didn't look like a man Lacey wanted to battle wills with.

Turning on her heel, she stalked her way back to the back porch, cursing small town sheriffs all the way. Once there, she waited impatiently for the men to finally decide she was worthy enough to talk to. After all, she fumed, it was only her house that was almost broken into.

The words didn't even have the chance to leave her lips before she was led into her house by a firm grip at her elbow. Lacey briefly wondered if all men were as pigheaded as the ones in her town. She then felt guilty for her thoughts since they were willing to put their lives on the line for her.

"Please sit down Ms. Winslow, and tell me what happened." The words came from Officer Dodson. His voice was low and gravelly.

"I couldn't sleep so I came into the kitchen for a snack." Motioning to the now cold toast, Lacey tried to hide her nervousness. "I was standing at the sink when I noticed a movement off to the side. It took me a minute before I realized what it was, then I..."

She gave herself a mental kick in the ass. Only two of the officers were in the room but she had no doubt word of her escapade would get around. Being berated or laughed at for the rashness of her actions wasn't high on Lacey's list of accomplishments.

"And then you what, Ms. Winslow?" Officer Pennigton might have a bit of gray at his temples but there was definitely nothing soft about him. Standing with his legs braced apart, hands at his sides, he was as menacing as they came.

Their eyes bore into her and Lacey knew beyond the shadow of a doubt she was not going to make it through the conversation without spilling every detail. She huffed a sigh of irritation and resignation. Lifting herself from her seat at the kitchen table, she walked back to the window where it had all started.

"I ran out the back door and yelled at him." Her body tensed for the explosion. It wasn't as loud as it could have been but the string of muttered curses coming from behind her was enough to instill pride into the crudest of sailors.

It wasn't so much Officer Dodson's curses that bothered her as much as it was Officer Pennigton's bark of laughter.

"Don't laugh at me dammit! I thought it was Chance. It wasn't until I'd yelled at him and he turned that I realized this man wasn't nearly as big as Chance."

Both men narrowed their eyes, both laughter and cursing stilled instantly. "Why would you think it was Chance?" Officer Dodson asked.

Lacey rolled her eyes. Anyone with eyes and ears had heard about the day Chance had barged into her place of business and gotten run back out by the end of a broom.

"Because he's a menace, that's why. The damned idiot won't leave me alone."

"I think it's called 'courting.'" "This came from Officer Pennigton. Lacey remained silent, merely lifting a brow at his old-fashioned choice of words.

The rest of the conversation was professional. The two officers went over every detail, making notes in their handy dandy little notebooks while lecturing Lacey on safety. By the time they were finished she was bored. Surely she'd be able to fall asleep now.

* * * *

The ringing of his phone startled Chance out of a dead sleep. He leapt from the bed, stubbing his toe in the process. When he lifted the receiver, a litany of foul words were still leaving his lips.

"Good morning to you too, sweetheart." The mocking words caused Chance's brows to knit into a frown. It wasn't until the voice on the other end of the line spoke again that Chance finally realized who in the hell it was.

"What's happened, Mike?" Chance was wide awake now and waiting, his patience at an all time low.

"Not much buddy, except that someone tried to break into your lady's house." Chance stilled at the words spoken through the line. "She's fine and Doug is keeping watch until morning when you can come into town."

"I'm on my way. Tell Doug I said thanks but he's free to go as soon as I get there."

Mike chuckled on the other end of the line. "Do that and we'll both end up with broomstick bruises."

"I don't give a good Goddamn, Mike. I won't fucking sit by while something happens, I've waited too damned long."

An impatient sigh made its way to Chance through the phone line before Mike once again spoke. "Your lady wasn't too happy when we left and until the sun peaks over the horizon tomorrow morning, my investigation is over. I've roped off the scene and Doug is staying. I'm thinking you might be able to use the next few hours to cool down some."

He wanted more than anything to climb into his truck and tear into town. The thought of her in danger, even minimal danger, was enough to make him crazy. "If

something happens to her tonight, I'll be taking it out of Doug's ass," Chance growled into the phone. Another chuckle met his ear.

"I'll be there at first light."

Chance slammed the earpiece back on the receiver then marched up the hall cursing all the way. He was dressed within minutes and left with nothing to do but stare into the dark. It would be at least an hour before he could even make his way to the stables to tend to the horses.

Once finished with the horses, he'd stop by the main house and talk to Clay before heading into town. Moving out of the main ranch house and into the foreman's cabin had taken some getting used to but it had all worked out for the best.

Clay and Bobbie were happily married and Mildred had a brand new baby to help them look after. Life on the Bodine Ranch seemed to get better every day, except for his little problem.

Chance had to remind himself that Lacey Winslow might be little when it came to her size but what she lacked in height, she more than made up for in spunk and irritating stubbornness.

Two cups of coffee later Chance felt as if he could chew the bark off a tree, he was so wound up. Ignoring the fact that it was still dark outside, he climbed into his truck and drove the short distance to the stables where he was surprised to find Clay tending to a horse ready to foal.

"Why didn't you call?" Chance wasn't in the mood for niceties.

"It's not time, besides I was already up with Will. After he finally dozed off, I couldn't sleep so I came to check on Lady here and see how she's doing. What's your excuse?"

"Mike called a while ago. Someone tried to break into Lacey's house tonight."

Chance watched Clay's eyes narrow. A moment passed before he gave a decisive nod of his head. "So you brought her to the ranch? Good move."

Here we go, Chance thought to himself, preparing for the little brother lecture of a lifetime. "No Clay, she's not here. Doug's guarding her house and Mike will pick up the investigation first thing after sun up."

Clay was ready with an opinion just as Chance knew he would be. "And you're comfortable with someone besides yourself protecting Lacey?"

"No dammit! I'm not. But if I go barging over there again I'm going to lose what little ground I've gained. She needs time."

Clay moved away from Lady, then headed toward the open stable door grumbling, "What she needs is a damned keeper."

Chance was inclined to agree. Determination set him on a straight course for his truck and the too-long ride into town to Lacey's house. Once there, he was relieved to see Doug seated in the driver's seat of his unmarked patrol car in Lacey's driveway.

Chance waited for the man to back out, then pulled his truck into the vacant spot. By the time he switched off the ignition, Doug was standing beside his truck, a grin splitting his face ear to ear. "Surprised you held out so long."

Chance merely lifted a brow. "I'll take over from here."

His original plan had been to spend the predawn hours of early morning in his truck but since his nosy little vixen was peeking through the blinds covering the front window, Chance was sure he wouldn't have to wait until sunlight for a confrontation.

He wasn't at all disappointed when Doug finally left. Nor was he disappointed when, mere seconds later, the front door was flung open. Lacey stood on the threshold. The light coming from behind her haloed her body perfectly. She was obviously angry and gloriously nude beneath her sheer ankle-length nightgown. She must have forgotten her robe.

Chance climbed out of his truck and slowly wound his way up the walk until they were no more than inches apart. "With the light behind you like that darlin' you look like an angel."

Lacey sucked in a breath when he reached out with one finger and traced the areola surrounding the turgid peak of her nipple. "A naughty angel but still an angel."

He couldn't believe it when she didn't pull away from him. In fact, as he lowered his lips to hers, she melted against him. Chance fought the need to back her to the wall and slam into her. Over and over, he reminded himself that she'd had a scare and was in need of comfort, not seduction.

The only problem was that the minute her tongue tangled with his and she struggled to get closer, grinding the softness of her abdomen against his erection, all good intentions fled, to be replaced with nothing more than the need to be buried deep inside her.

Chapter Three

He was larger than life and in her home, kissing her, loving her body with every caress of his large work-roughened hands and Lacey felt powerless to stop the slow seduction his touch had on her.

Not that she wanted him to stop. God only knew, Chance not stopping was the last thing she wanted, but the possible complications that could arise out of a relationship between them were tremendous.

He would swallow her whole and Lacey wasn't sure she could live that way after finally finding the strength to get on with her life, alone if need be. Marrying young only to find that her beloved husband was a cheating bastard had been hard enough, but the most disturbing part of being alone was the utterly quiet nights.

Knowing there would be no one to share with, no one to hold, to love with every breathy moan, was heart wrenching. The thought of finding love and then losing it again was too much to consider.

Lacey held on tight to Chance, wanting nothing more than to get lost in the moment. His hold was firm, his touch sure, sending sparks of arousal rioting throughout her body, leaving her wet and ready.

There was no thought of argument as Chance backed them through the business section of her house toward the private living quarters. Breathless with anticipation, Lacey clung to Chance, her arms wrapped around his waist. She moved when he moved, trusting him to guide her backward trek through the hallway.

His beard rasped against her cheek as he deepened the kiss. He was insistent, his tongue tasting even the deepest, darkest recess of her mouth, tracing her teeth, rasping against her gums as if in search of more. Lacey wasn't sure she'd ever been kissed so thoroughly and was loving every minute of it.

A shiver raced the length of her spine, making Lacey shudder with delight as her back met with the solid surface. Reaching behind her, she grasped the knob and gave it a twist. She was ready to turn. To grab Chance's hand in her own and drag him to the bed where she could have her wicked way with him when he stopped her.

"If you've got any doubts now's the time to voice them, darlin'."

"Just make love to me, Chance. That's all I ask." How she wanted to ask him to love her, thoroughly, unconditionally, but to do so would only bring with it regret and heartache, something Lacey needed no more of. So for now, she would love the magnificent man in her arms and worry about the repercussions of her decision at a later time.

Chance walked her to the bed, where he once again kissed her until Lacey thought she might go up in flames. When his hands gripped her nightgown at her waist and started lifting, all thought fled.

In a matter of seconds she was pulled into the abyss. Heated arousal flowed in waves over her body. Her thighs quivered and her pussy spasmed at the thought of what was to come. When Chance pulled the sheer length of her gown over her head, Lacey whimpered in delight. As he dropped to his knees in front of her, her whimpers changed to a rumbling purr of sexual desire.

Lacey wasn't at all sure she was going to make it through whatever Chance happened to have planned for her. The rasp of his tongue along her navel sent her heart into overdrive. The scent of Chance's aftershave wafted up between them. Cool and crisp, it beckoned her to taste. Lacey leaned forward and pressed her lips to the smooth surface of Chance's head. The flick of her tongue made him groan. Lacey cradled his head in her hands, running her thumbs across his temples as he stayed kneeling in front of her, worshiping her body with his tongue.

Chance stood, then began removing his shirt. Lacey couldn't bear to stand idly by watching, not when her fingers itched to help and her mouth longed to taste. A single step brought her within reach of his glorious chest.

The curly brown hair peeking from the opened collar of his shirt beckoned her touch, but Lacey wanted so much more than to merely touch. With deft fingers, she gently shooed Chance's hands aside and took over removing his clothes until he stood before her completely nude.

She took an achingly long time for the sheer joy of teasing him, tantalizing his baser instincts. Keeping his need growing at an alarming rate.

"I've wanted to touch you like this for so long," Lacey murmured the words against his chest as she cupped the heavy weight of his arousal in her hand.

Chance's growl of arousal and frustration rumbled deep within his chest. Lacey felt the movement against her lips as she teased his flat male nipple until it was erect. His arms lay rigidly at his side.

"Then go ahead and touch me, darlin'."

Lacey could tell the words were forced from his flat lips. His face was a tense mask, his eyes tightly closed. Reluctantly, she removed her hands from Chance's body. His eyes snapped open. His chocolate brown eyes were trained on her. Intense. Heavy-lidded with arousal.

"Why in the hell did you stop?" His words were rough, his breath ragged.

"I didn't think you wanted me to touch you." He was giving off mixed signals, confusing Lacey, and since her mind was lust-muddled to begin with, it didn't take much to expand the problem.

The grip of his hand on her arm was reassuring. When he pulled her impossibly close, Lacey wanted to melt against him, to climb inside of him. The idea of being so close to anyone ever again scared her.

"If I wanted your touch any more than I already do, I'd have come in my pants the minute your hand gripped me."

"Then why..." Her words were abruptly cut off by a searing kiss.

When Chance pulled away, he said, "You'll just have to trust me darlin'. I'm not used to giving over the power and I can't guarantee it'll ever happen again, but for tonight, I'm all yours."

"To do with as I please?" Lacey couldn't hide the smile curving her lips.

"All yours, baby, as long as you get started before I lose my mind."

There was no way in hell Lacey planned to disappoint Chance. "No problem, cowboy."

With the flick of a wrist and his complete cooperation, Lacey pushed Chance until he was sitting on the edge of the bed. First she removed his boots and then his socks. Once his feet were bare, she crawled her way up his lap. Once there, she leaned in to nip his

abdomen. His abdominal muscles bunched and rippled beneath her lips.

“Lift up.” Lacey murmured the words against his cloth-covered erection. When Chance did as instructed, she pulled and tugged his jeans and boxer briefs until they were completely free of his body.

He sat before her magnificently nude. The bulbous head of his cock was a deep red in color and leaking copious amounts of his essence. No longer would Lacey have to wonder and dream of his taste. Finally she would have firsthand knowledge.

As soon as her mouth closed over the head of his rigid shaft, Chance fisted her hair in his hands. His hold wasn’t painful, yet he held her tightly, instructing her of his likes, his needs, without a single voiced word.

Lacey loved the way his large hands felt on her. It didn’t seem to matter where or how he touched her, her body reacted as if he were strumming her between the thighs. She immediately became wet, slick with the magnitude of her own arousal.

She hummed in satisfaction as his shaft delved deeper into her mouth. He tasted hot. Slightly salty and musky, rich in manliness, just as she knew he would. When Lacey fondled the heavy sack of his testicles in her hand his cock bucked in her mouth, a spurt of come lingering on her tongue, filling her already on-edge senses.

His flesh was fiery hot against her palm as she weighed him with what she hoped was the perfect amount of pressure. His moan of pleasure was her answer just before he stiffened, spilling into her mouth.

His large hands fisted in her hair urged her on, and without backing away, Lacey took everything Chance had to offer, milking his softening cock until he shuddered with every pass of her tongue.

* * * *

“Damn, darlin’!”

Chance wasn’t sure he’d ever experienced anything quite like Lacey’s lips wrapped around him. The feel of her small hand holding him from below while she tormented him with her mouth and tongue had made it nearly impossible to hold back.

It wasn’t at all like Chance to allow a woman the upper hand when it came to bed play, but there was just something about Lacey that made him want to protect her and make her happy.

After the attempted break-in and the scare she must have felt, Chance figured the best thing for her besides being in his presence and his care, was for her to be in control, even if it was of nothing more than him and the situation at hand.

A situation she’d handled marvelously if the magnitude of his orgasm was any indication.

“Damn baby good, or damn baby bad?”

Her question startled him out of his reverie. How could she possibly think anything but good had come from the encounter?

“Good Lacey, very good. So good, in fact, I think I should return the favor.”

Chance winked, then gave her a lopsided smile. She was completely still, in her position kneeling at his feet. She was staring with wide hazel eyes as if trying to see right inside of him.

“But, you already did...”

Lacey’s voice trailed off. She tried to turn her head to hide the flush of her cheeks,

but Chance was having none of it. There was only so much power he could comfortably give up and allowing Lacey to hide her emotions from him when he'd just gotten her to open up, was beyond that limit.

"Look at me, darlin'."

It took a minute, but she did as he asked. Chance helped her to her feet and then onto the bed. When she was settled, he once again garnered her attention.

"That was nothing baby, just a taste. I had to have a little sip of your sweetness to tide me over or things would have gone much quicker than you deserved. But now I plan on feasting, so just lie back, relax and leave it all to me."

Just talking about tasting her, loving her pretty pink pussy with his tongue, made Chance hotter than hell. His cock stirred to life in agreement.

He helped her settle back on the bed, then lifted her hips, burying a pillow beneath her. The position brought her to the perfect height for his mouth, leaving enough room beneath her hips to get a good grip. He'd need a good grip to hold her to him when she started bucking with pleasure.

And she would buck with pleasure. Chance would see to it if it took all night long.

Leaning in, he buried his face between Lacey's thighs. Inhaling deeply, he tried to burn her scent into his memory because in the morning there would be hell to pay.

Hell, Chance would gladly go through hell if it eventually brought about the end result he was aiming for. He wanted Lacey as his own, forever. And he intended to get exactly what he wanted.

Her taste was delicate, just like her petite stature. Chance wanted to devour her whole. Instead he teased her with one long, torturously slow swipe of his tongue and when she wiggled to get closer he tsked her for the effort and held her in place with his arms wrapped around her widely spread thighs.

While still holding her snugly where he wanted her, Chance used his fingers to separate the glistening lips of Lacey's sex, exposing her to him, freeing the erect nub of her clit from its hooded hiding place.

"You taste so good, darlin'. I could stay right here with my tongue buried in you all night long."

Her breathing was fast. The quick little panting breaths caused her breasts to jiggle enticingly. Chance made a mental note about how much talking dirty seemed to arouse her. He'd be sure and keep her aroused often with wickedly naughty words, keeping Lacey continuously on edge right where he wanted her.

"Oh! I... uh, I... Oh my God!" Her keening cry came as Chance simultaneously drew her clit between his lips and sucked hard while thrusting two fingers deep into the tight sheath of her pussy.

"That's one baby, how long do you think it'll take me to get number two?"

When she tried to close her legs Chance gave an amused chuckle. The quivering muscles of her thighs were no match for him. "I'm thinking three's the charm. How about you?"

No words came from her slightly parted lips, but when she dazedly lifted her head from the mattress to look at him, Chance knew he would walk through fire to see her fly again.

"Chance," she finally squeaked when he rimmed her vaginal opening with a persistent finger.

Her eyelids were heavy over her hazel eyes and her lips were pink and kiss-swollen, just the way he preferred. Chance continued watching her, devouring her with his eyes while allowing his fingers to wander. When he came to the virgin tight entrance of her anus, he applied slight pressure, causing Lacey's eyes to snap open. She no longer seemed dazed.

"If you want me to stop all you have to do is say the word, Lacey."

Chance prayed she wouldn't do so, but if she did he would honor and respect her choice even as he dreamed of taking her there. When she took a shuddering breath and lowered her head back to the mattress, he wanted to shout for joy. Lacey was trusting him with an act so intimate it boggled the mind.

"Do you have anything to use, darlin'?" Chance wanted nothing more than to sink his fingers into her.

"In the nightstand drawer." Her voice was barely a whisper.

Chance climbed from the bed to collect not only the lubricant but also a condom from his wallet, which was still located in his jeans pocket. Lacey's eyes trailed him across the room and back, never once leaving his face, his body.

Once back on the bed, Chance set out to arouse her beyond the point where she felt self-conscious or hesitant. The continuous teasing and testing of Lacey's body made her shiver beneath his hands. When she was moaning his name and writhing beneath him, Chance lubricated her anal entrance and his finger.

He kept the pressure light, gradually introducing her to his touch. A shuddering gasp left her lips as he sank knuckle deep into the ultra-tight depths of her ass.

"Damn you're hot, baby. Hot and wet," he said as he slowly pulled his hand back until his finger was almost free of her body. "Seeing my finger disappear into you is almost as good as it's going to be when I fuck you there."

"Oh, Chance." Her inner muscles quivered around his finger, telling him exactly how close she was.

"Fuck yourself back on my finger, darlin'. Show me how much you want it. How much you want me put my cock where my finger is."

His words made her still, to which Chance chuckled then said, "Not this time, Lacey. You're not ready, but soon darlin'. Real soon."

She seemed to once again relax at his words; then her hips started pumping, searching for the elusive climax he was holding just out of reach.

"That's it, baby. Show me how you like it." Chance said the words, then proceeded to lap at her clit like a kitten with a bowl full of cream. The dual effects sent Lacey into orbit. Her scream of release rent the air as her body bowed with wave after wave of her climax.

Chance allowed her to come back to earth just long enough to protect them. The broad head of his painfully rigid cock was perched at her entrance, his brain trying to comprehend the heat found there when the doorbell rang.

Chapter Four

It took Lacey a bit of time to figure out why Chance was stringing together the crudest group of curses she'd ever heard. Her body was quaking with need even after being completely satiated. Her brain, in a lust-induced fog, didn't grasp what the ringing of the doorbell meant until Chance climbed from the bed, grabbing his jeans in the process.

She groaned at the unfulfilled sensation of not having Chance's hands on her body. Struggling to pull the sheet around her, Lacey sat on the edge of the bed trying to get her bearings. When her head no longer spun with the magnitude of her arousal and she didn't feel as though her skin was zinging with pleasure keeping every nerve ending on alert, she stood, with the intention of disappearing into the bathroom, only to be brought up short by Chance's words.

"We're not done baby, so don't go running off."

The man was beyond arrogant, too sure of himself by far. Confused by all that had happened between them, Lacey decided to take the easy way out and not answer. She headed toward the bathroom, trailing the sheet behind her.

Even though her breathing had resumed a normal rhythm and her pulse was no longer fluttering along, her body was still ultra aware. The effects Chance had on her body and mind were frightening and intense.

Lacey wasn't sure whether she should be cursing right along with him because of the untimely interruption or if she should thank whoever was at the door. Feeling Chance's body buried deeply inside of hers could possibly have been just the thing needed to push her over the edge and, as a result, she very well could have lost her heart.

Inside the confines of the bathroom, she turned the shower on until there was a thick cloud of steam billowing over the top of the shower curtain. Inside the shower, she tried to relax, allowing the water to beat against her back but it did little, if any, good. Lacey was wound so tight she thought for sure she would snap at any moment.

It wasn't until the water ran cold that she finally stepped from the shower. Squeaky clean but still uptight as hell, Lacey wrapped a towel around her naked body, opened the door as quietly as possible and peeked around the door, only to find her bedroom empty.

Muffled voices could be heard as if from afar but she couldn't hear what they were saying. It was just the excuse Lacey needed to dress quickly and interrupt their little meeting. The last thing she wanted was for a group of pumped up, overprotective, macho men making decisions on her behalf.

"Good morning Officer Dodson, Officer Pennington." Lacey plastered a smile on her face as she blandly greeted the men on her way into the kitchen.

"Mike."

"Doug." The officers in charge of her case both offered at the same time.

"Fine then."

She merely nodded toward Chance, not willing to vent her frustration and confusion in front of others. "I'll get some coffee going."

She couldn't help but smile inside at how quiet the room became. Not one to back down, she pushed even further. "You don't have to stop your conversation on my behalf."

After all, you were more than likely talking about me.”

The words were said as she finished with her task, then turned to face the men. Mike watched her, a bit of annoyance written clearly across his face, which was the complete opposite of Doug, whose silver eyes flashed in mirth, a crooked smile curving his lips.

Lacey was almost afraid to look at Chance, there was no telling what his reaction to her sarcastic greeting might be. She was left little choice in the matter when he spoke directly to her.

“Mike was just telling me how you single-handedly ran off your masked man by...” He let the sentence trail off. Holding her gaze to his as if she had no free will to look elsewhere, Chance finished. His voice was hard, unbelieving, “...yelling at him. Tell me I misunderstood, Lacey.”

Being cornered like an animal, and in her own home, had a not so good affect on her temper.

“You heard it right Chance, but I don’t see what that has to do with anything. The man was already climbing the fence when I went outside to see who it was.”

“Good Goddamned, woman! Are you insane?” Chance’s thundering voice boomed throughout the room. Lacey was in utter shock and surprised as hell that the kitchen window wasn’t rattling.

It took everything in her to keep her chin from quivering. Stiffening her spine against the hurt and humiliation, Lacey did her best to remain calm. She turned back to the counter, where she grabbed a coffee mug and poured herself a cup of the steaming black liquid.

When her hand no longer shook and she didn’t feel the need to cry any longer, she turned back to the three men sitting at her kitchen table.

“I’m thinking the answer to that question would be yes, I am insane or at least partially, for ever letting you in my house. I’d like you to leave now.” She barely managed to get the words out before she spun and gave them her back.

No matter how hard she tried, her voice shook with anger and pain, breaking at the end of her speech until she barely croaked out the order to leave.

The creak of a chair as it was pushed from the table sounded like a shot behind her. “Damn, baby...”

Chance attempted to soothe her but Lacey wasn’t in the mood to listen. “Don’t you ‘woman’ me and don’t you ‘baby’ me, Chance Bodine. As far as I’m concerned this isn’t any of your business.”

Lacey was on a roll. It felt good to be the one giving the orders, venting her anger at the idiot who could manage to make her lose her temper so early in the morning.

“That’s where you’re wrong, sweetheart.”

“No it isn’t.” Lacey stomped across the room until she reached the back door. Once there, she swung it open with vigor then gave Chance a look that would send most mortal men running.

When Chance reached her side, he bent low until they were eye to eye. “This isn’t over. Not by a long shot, *baby*, so don’t go thinking I’ll let you off so easy.”

His voice had the ability to make her cream her panties. Lacey inwardly cursed her wayward hormones and Chance, all in the same breath, while outwardly trying to appear calm. In the most even tone she could muster, Lacey said for his ears only.

“You almost got what you came for Chance, I bet that makes you proud. But what

happened last night was a mistake I don't plan to repeat." Her body screamed at the denial, her heart ached knowing the truth, but there was no way in hell she would admit to either Chance or herself that she'd already lost a tiny part of herself to the rugged cowboy.

"You just keep telling yourself that darlin', if it's what makes you feel better, but I'll only warn you once not to try and play me. Now that I know what you want, what you need, and I've had a taste of your sweetness, there's no turning back."

The kiss he bestowed upon her lips was whisper soft, gentle and sweet, so unlike the man himself, it nearly brought tears to her eyes but his parting words were a vivid reminder though of why she'd wanted to wring his neck only seconds ago.

"Remember, I protect what's mine even if that protecting is from yourself and your damned impulsive ways." He flicked the tip of her nose with his index finger, winked, and then stepped through the door whistling as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"Arr!" Lacey growled deep in her throat, a sound of pure feminine frustration. After slamming the door, she turned around and found herself being watched by two sets of inquisitive eyes.

"Damn, damn, damn," Lacey muttered as she walked across the room to an empty seat at the kitchen table. When she was seated and had taken a sip of her lukewarm coffee, she felt levelheaded enough to ask some questions.

"Were you able to come up with any prints or something we might be able to use in order to find this guy?"

Two sets of bushy brows lifted at her use of the term *we*.

"We won't be finding this guy anytime soon, I'm afraid. There were no fingerprints and, due to the grass covering your backyard and the empty, grass-covered lot adjacent to your yard, we were unable to find any shoe prints."

Lacey did her best not to scream in frustration. Not knowing what else to do, she turned on her heel and walked from the room without a backward glance at the two men still happily seated at her kitchen table. They could let themselves out.

* * * *

Chance removed his leather gloves, then wiped his sweaty palms across the seat of his pants. Mucking stalls was dirty work but it kept his hands busy and gave him time to think.

Of course, thinking might not be the best thing to do to pass the time, considering his brain kept taking him right back to having his face buried between Lacey's thighs. And that mental vision led way to memories of how tight she'd been as his finger delved into the virgin tightness of her ass.

"Son of a bitch!" Chance swore as he once again donned his gloves.

"Boss." Chance heard Rick Marshall, one of the ranch hands, call from a few stalls away. "Everything all right?"

The amusement in Rick's voice annoyed Chance to no end. It was a good thing for the ranch hand that he was more like one of the Bodines than an employee.

"Just fine, dammit!" Chance muttered the words as he stalked from the newly cleaned stall. He dumped the last shovel full of soiled hay into the wheelbarrow, then headed out the fully opened stable doors and into the fresh air of the ranch yard.

Chance continued to work, waiting as patiently as possible for the hours to pass.

When the sun started to set over the horizon, he put away his equipment and headed home for a shower.

Before entering, Chance removed his boots, leaving them on the back porch. His socks, jeans and shirt followed. After a long day of mucking stalls the last thing he wanted to do was clean house.

In nothing more than his boxer briefs, Chance made his way through the house to the bathroom where he turned on the shower, adjusting the knob until the temperature was perfect.

The glass doors of the shower were covered in steam in a matter of seconds. Before Chance could try and change his line of thought, a vision of Lacey popped into his head. She was standing in his shower with nothing more than fog-covered glass between her beautifully nude body and his eagerly aroused one.

Her profile was graceful even with her petite stature. Head thrown back into the spray of the shower, her back arched seductively, showing off every curve of her compact frame.

Chance reached out, groaning when reality hit and he was once again standing in his bathroom naked as the day he was born, daydreaming about a woman.

"You're going fucking nuts 'ole boy." Chance climbed into the shower, his body anything but relaxed, his cock at attention just as it always was when Lacey was in question.

Might as well finish it off, Chance thought to himself with a bit of amusement. It didn't take much to remember her taste or the sounds she made as he sucked and stroked her clit with lips and tongue.

After wetting a washcloth, Chance set about cleansing himself of the effects left over from a day's work on a ranch. Once finished, he leaned back against the cool tiled wall and took the heavy length of his cock into his palm.

The mere thought of sinking deeply into Lacey's wet and willing body made his shaft throb with need. Sliding his finger over the bulbous head, Chance closed his eyes and made believe it was Lacey who was teasing him, torturing him with her pink tongue.

Chance's body shuddered as he fisted his hand around the length of his cock and pumped slowly up and down. The hot water cascading over his back had yet to wash all the soap from his body, making the movement of his hand on his cock silky smooth, just as he imagined her mouth to be.

He'd gently fist her blonde hair in one hand, encouraging her on while caressing the soft skin of her face with the other. In Chance's mind, Lacey's blue eyes were closed in concentration as she worked his length with her lips, stroking him with her tongue until Chance was sure he could hold out no longer.

The feel of his wet palm against the heated flesh of his shaft was great but not nearly as arousing as the real thing would be. When his arousal peaked Chance pumped furiously while picturing Lacey on her knees in front of him.

As his release became imminent, Chance could imagine her lips suctioning him, then swallowing every bit of his essence as it was milked from his body. She would be making those sexy purring noises that always seemed to turn him on. And even as she licked him clean, she'd be fingering herself to orgasm for his eyes only. That single thought was what pushed Chance over the edge. To see Lacey pleasuring herself in his presence, for him, even in thought alone, was too much for Chance's overly aroused body to bear.

He growled through his release, locking his knees when they threatened to buckle, and in that moment Chance decided he was done playing games. Lacey belonged to him. She deserved to be protected by him and although he'd tried to remain calm, it wasn't going to happen anymore. Chance's time for being Mr. Nice Guy was done and over with.

With renewed vigor, Chance dragged himself from the shower. He dried off with a fluffy tan-colored towel, then strode naked into his bedroom where he rummaged through his closet for a clean pair of jeans and a shirt.

Once dressed, Chance donned his socks and slid into his non-work boots. He made his way down the hall, grabbing his wallet along the way. Just before leaving, he lifted the phone from its receiver and set his plan into motion. The last thing he reached for before pulling the door open was his tan Stetson. With his hat firmly on his head, and his mind made up what to do, Chance walked to his truck.

Before heading down the dusty ranch road toward town, Chance made a quick stop at the main house. Clay's truck was gone but Bobbie would be home, and it was her opinion he was interested in at the moment.

Upon reaching the rear entrance leading to the kitchen, Chance stomped his boots and knocked on the door before entering. He was immediately assailed with the familiar scents of home. Bobbie stood at the sink, her back to him.

"Hi sis." He'd come to think of Bobbie as his sister long before Clay had finally come to his senses and stopped acting like an ass. Not once had he regretted the decision to bring Bobbie to the ranch.

"Hey there, Uncle Chance." A smile curved his mouth just thinking about his newborn niece.

"How's peanut doing?"

"She's great. Getting bigger everyday."

It was then that Bobbie turned to look at him for the first time. Her brows furrowed and the beautiful smile that had just been spread across her face was replaced with a frown of concern.

"What's wrong?"

The damned woman was much too perceptive.

"Nothing," Chance lied then added, "Well, not really."

Bobbie took his hand and led him to the kitchen table, then pushed him down into an empty chair.

"Have a seat and tell me all about this nothing that is wrong while I get us some coffee. I hope decaf is fine."

Chance made a face at the thought of drinking anything less than the real thing.

"I know the feeling, damned Clay won't buy anything else. First it was because I was pregnant and now it's because I'm nursing. At least I get the pleasure of knowing he's suffering right along with me." Bobbie's laugh was one of pure feminine wickedness. Chance couldn't help but join her.

"So, do I have to coax it out of you or are you going to talk?"

"I'm going to bring Lacey to the ranch." There, he had said it. Of course saying it didn't make it so.

"Clay didn't say anything about the two of you settling down."

Oh, hell, Chance thought to himself. He knew that tone of voice. "We aren't, at least

not yet. It's not safe for her to stay by herself when we don't know who tried to break into her place or for what purpose."

Bobbie sat across from him at the table. Pushing his mug of coffee toward him, she watched him with her expressive eyes, then nodded. "There's plenty of room here."

Chance interrupted before she could get going with that plan. "She'll stay with me."

Bobbie's eyes went from wide to narrowed slits in nothing flat. "And if she doesn't want to?"

"Come on Bobbie, you know Lacey. She's as stubborn as a mule."

"I won't get involved, Chance, but I'd think twice about trying to force your way of thinking on Lacey Winslow. If I know her as well as I think I do, it'll blow up right in your face."

* * * *

The drive into town was quiet except for the hum of the engine and the twang of some low country music. There were no other cars on the road except for a few truckers, making the trip a quiet one with way too much thinking time.

Like a compact disk set on repeat, Bobbie's warning kept playing over and over in his mind. Chance tried to ignore the dire warning and think positive.

At least he was prepared. He had called ahead of time for two steak dinners to go with all the trimmings from the local diner. They would give him a reason to stay once he charmed his way through Lacey's door, and if she was still pissed and refused his company, he'd do whatever he could possibly do to coax her to his way of thinking, even if it meant using her own body against her.

Just thinking it might make him an asshole in the eyes of most but Chance didn't give a shit. Right now his main priority was Lacey's safety and the only way he could think to keep her safe was to keep her at the ranch with him until things blew over and hopefully by then, she'd decide to stay of her own accord.

If not, Chance would cross that bridge when he got there.

Chapter Five

The day had been hellaciously long. Lacey felt as if she'd been hit by a truck and dragged a country mile. The more she tried to forget the feel of Chance's hands and lips teasing her heated body, the more intense the memories became.

She'd worked herself into a stupor cleaning the place after her last session was over and yet, every nerve ending still hummed with need. Lacey cursed her body's betrayal, cursed her damp panties, but most of all she cursed Chance.

Reveling in her aches and pain to help her forget, she turned out the lights and was just leaving the office when there was a knock at the door. Company was the last thing she wanted but Lacey wasn't one who could just let the phone ring without answering or leave someone standing on her doorstep without seeing who it was.

As soon as Lacey opened the door, she cursed her nosiness and vowed to change.

"Hey Lace, how's it going?"

It was the sound of his voice combined with the knowledge that her slime ball of a cheating ex-husband would dare show up at her home that nearly had Lacey screaming in frustration. Instead, she asked as coolly as possible.

"What do you want, Andy?"

She wanted to vomit when his mouth split in that cheesy, 'I am a gigolo' smile, with his too white teeth contrasting against the fake tan of his too dark skin. "Come on now, babe, is that any way to speak to your husband?"

Lacey couldn't help but wonder if all men had been created idiots or just the ones roaming loose in her town. "I'm neither your babe nor your wife, so spit it out already."

A slight shiver of warning walked up her spine and his eyes narrowed on her, but he quickly covered it up with a greasy smile. Lacey chose to ignore the feeling of apprehension she felt in his presence. After all, she'd been married to the man and although he was a womanizing adulterer, there wasn't anything dangerous about him. Was there?

"Fine, you want to play it that way, then I'll come right out with it."

"Why don't I save you the trouble? I don't have any money and even if I did, I wouldn't give it to you."

Lacey just wanted him to leave. She wanted a hot bath to ease her sore muscles and then she wanted to crawl into bed and forget. Forget about Chance and his talented hands and forget about Andy and his idiocy.

With the flick of her wrist, Lacey slammed the door in his face. Sighing in relief, she turned in her second attempt to leave the office. She was barely to the door separating her personal living quarters from the office when the bell over the door jingled.

"Damn."

Lacey cursed her tiredness and the memory lapse that caused her to leave the door unlocked after closing in her ex-husband's face. In exasperation, Lacey kept moving. Anger was mounting and if she wasn't careful, they were going to end up in a yelling match.

"I slammed the door on you for a reason, it's because I don't want you here."

Her angry declaration was met by silence. The lack of a smart-ass retort piqued

Lacey's curiosity, which in turn had her spinning on her heel, only to come face to face with Chance, a not very happy Chance who was standing stock still at the door.

"Great, just what I need." The mumbled words sounded petulant, even to her ears.

"What's going on, Lacey?"

The question was simple enough, but the tone of Chance's voice was intense, causing tiny little bumps of awareness to rise across her flesh.

Lacey didn't want to argue, especially not with Chance. There was just something about the Bodine men and their wicked ways that made arguing with them useless and she knew it.

When she spotted the carry-out bags from the diner up the street in his hand, she clamped on it like a drowning victim hanging on to a life preserver.

"You brought food. God bless you!" Lacey tried to hide her weariness under a smile, but one look at Chance and she knew it wasn't working.

"Lacey." His low growl of disapproval was proof enough.

Releasing her pent up breath with a sigh, she turned to him. "Look Chance, I really don't want to go over it." Her stomach picked the moment to rumble in hunger. Looking up she asked, "Did you bring that in here just to torture me or are you actually going to feed me?"

Groaning with relief wasn't an option but that was exactly what she wanted to do when Chance's frown smoothed into a small smile.

"Come on, darlin', let's get some food into you before that rumblin' wakes the dead."

Chance chuckled as he took her hand and led her from the room. Lacey took one look back at the front door before she closed the connecting door. Andy was lucky he showed up when he did. Meeting Chance at her front door wouldn't have been a healthy move.

Once in the kitchen, Lacey busied herself by transferring their dinner from take out cartons to plates and finally to the table where Chance was seated after serving their drinks.

Although not nearly as hungry as her stomach pretended to be, Lacey lit into her food like she might never make it to another meal, anything to keep from looking at Chance. The last thing she needed was a conversation that might turn ugly. She definitely wasn't in the mood for it.

Lacey ate slowly, chewing every bite until it was dust in her mouth, trying to hold off the questions she knew would come. Chance wasn't the type to let things slide. When she could no longer stomach another bite and her eyes were so droopy she thought she might very well collapse sitting there at the kitchen table, Lacey stood, collecting her plate.

When she reached for Chance's, he stopped her with a hand wrapped around her wrist.

"I'll do it baby, you just sit there and relax."

Lacey could only stare. Had she heard him right? "I ... um ... okay." She finally reneged when Chance gave her his famous 'I'll put up with no nonsense' look.

That tiniest, simplest touch had the power to make her insides tremble. Her already damp panties became soaked just thinking about his strength, the power he held in check. He was masterful and macho and could be the biggest jerk in town, but he'd somehow

gotten under her skin. Lacey wasn't so sure she liked the thought of getting too close. It wasn't as easy to trust as it once had been.

Watching was good. Chance moved about her kitchen as if he owned the place. Not a single movement wasted, he worked his way around until not only were the dishes washed and laid out to dry but the counters were cleaned until they sparkled. It wasn't until Chance finished that he turned to her.

Lacey lay with her head resting in her folded arms on the wooden surface of the table. Her eyes were as tired as her body was achy, but she wouldn't chance closing them because she might miss something.

She followed Chance with her eyes as he moved across the kitchen. His bowlegged cowboy walk was as sexy as hell, especially as he drew nearer. There was just something about his trunk-sized thighs encased in tight jeans that made her feel like a drooling fool.

When he bent at the knee, bringing them face-to-face, Lacey couldn't help but give him a sleepy smile.

"Wait right here darlin'." Chance leaned in and kissed first one eyelid and then the other.

After the butterfly soft kisses, Lacey couldn't seem to open her eyes back up. Her lids were far too heavy. The rhythmic click of Chance's boot heels on her linoleum floor was comforting in a way she couldn't begin to explain.

* * * *

Chance filled the claw-footed bathtub with steaming hot water and a capful of the scented bubbles Lacey had on the windowsill. His senses came to immediate attention as the scent filled the room. Vanilla added with Lacey's spice. It was no wonder he lost his mind every time he was around her.

As quietly as possible, Chance made his way up the hall and back into the kitchen where Lacey was sound asleep right where he left her. She looked so cute he really hated to move her and yet, leaving her was not an option.

He'd seen her grimace in discomfort with every move, as well as her disheveled appearance, not to mention the lemony fresh scent of cleaner that permeated not only the air but her clothes as well. And all of that had nothing to do with the fact that she'd lied to him, even if by omission.

Someone had been there before he'd shown up, someone who had upset Lacey, and Chance damn well planned to find out who it was. An idea had already blossomed in his mind as to the person responsible but Chance knew he couldn't go off half-cocked. He would find out for sure before beating Lacey's ex-husband to a pulp for bothering her.

"Time for a bath, baby." His murmured words were a low rumble in his chest as he lifted her into his arms.

Her cradled body felt perfect against him. It was as if she held the other half of his heart within the palm of her tiny hand. Chance would bet she'd fit him like a glove. Just the thought of filling the snug confines of her pussy made him ache with need.

Chance silently but firmly reminded himself that Lacey was in no shape for the loving he had planned for her. Tonight she was off limits. Except for when it came to holding her in his arms, which he planned to do throughout the night if she'd let him.

In the bathroom, Chance sat on the closed toilet seat with Lacey in his lap. Being careful not to bump her on anything, he unfastened the snap of her jeans, then slid the

zipper down until the waistband of her panties peeked out.

The slightly rounded plane of her abdomen beckoned his touch, the paleness of her flesh made it almost impossible not to. Chance shook his head, inhaling deeply to clear his mind and bring his raging libido back in check.

When his pulse slowed and he no longer felt as if he was going to explode behind his zipper, Chance removed Lacey's shoes and socks with one hand, while balancing her on his lap with the other.

Her head lolled against his chest, her eyes still closed as a sound of annoyance left her pursed lips. "Up you go." Chance said the words as he stood Lacey on wobbly legs.

"I don't wanna."

Her mumbled words of protest were too cute not to chuckle. "No choice, Lace," Chance answered as he tugged her shirt over her head, revealing the cotton-covered slopes of her breasts.

Leaning her into his chest, Chance removed her bra, keeping every touch as efficient as possible. If he slipped even one time, he'd end up dropping to the floor with her pliant body beneath him. And sure enough, if that happened, there would be hell to pay and then some.

With his sexual frustration at an all time high, Chance wasn't sure he'd make it through the removal of her jeans and panties. He stilled himself for the inevitable pain of a raging erection being corralled by too-tight jeans, then slid her pants down her hips, taking her panties with them.

He left himself no time to think, to even consider doing more than bathing her before he settled her into the tub. The minute her body touched the water her eyes shot open and her arms came around his neck in a death grip.

The action cause Chance to lose his balance and in a magnificent splash that soaked Chance's front from head to toe, Lacey was in the tub.

"Good Lord, Chance! What the hell are you trying to do, drown me?"

"Not hardly and I didn't plan on getting a bath of my own either."

His words brought Lacey's eyes snapping back to his cloth-soaked front. Her gaze traveled up and down his body, sending a jolt of searing heat straight to his cock, which once again stood at rigid attention.

The tip of her moist pink tongue peeked out to wet her lips. The gesture, although seemingly innocent, was as erotic as hell. When she reached out with one small wet hand to trail a finger up the burgeoning length of his cock, Chance couldn't stop the animalistic growl that escaped his lips.

"Enough!"

"Chance." Her whisper was seductive, hot, and so filled with want and need Chance wasn't sure he'd be able to hold back.

"You're in no shape for what I want to do to you, Lacey. Now let me torture myself washing you so I can tuck you into bed and head home before I forget my manners."

What in the hell was he thinking? Go home? *No fucking way!* His body screamed in protest but Chance didn't listen.

He couldn't afford to listen because if he did, he would end up staying the night and sure as shit, before morning he would find himself buried balls-deep in the ultra tight channel of Lacey's glorious pussy.

To take advantage when she wasn't up for it was even beyond Chance's stooping

level. He was willing to do just about anything to get Lacey in bed, but to do so under such circumstances would ruin the future he had planned for them and that wasn't something Chance was willing to risk.

Her hazel eyes were trained on him, roving his body as if she could devour him with nothing more than a look.

Chance lathered the washcloth he'd grabbed from the cabinet then proceeded to wash her. No amount of preparation could keep him from trembling slightly at the feel of her warm flesh beneath his palm. Even with a washcloth separating his hand from her body, he could feel her heat.

Her nipples beaded to tight points beneath the surface of the water and the intoxicating cluster of hair at the V of her thighs all but called out to him. To get through the ordeal, Chance's strokes became brisk and all business-like. Within minutes, he had Lacey squeaky clean from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. It was all the beautiful wet flesh in between that had him insane with lust.

She seemed relaxed but no longer on the verge of passing out from exhaustion. He was thankful Lacey would be able to dry and dress herself.

"I'll leave you to dress." He knew his voice was curt, he could see the confusion in her searching eyes but there was nothing he could do for it. If he didn't get out of the steam filled room, away from Lacey's nude body and silky skin, he was going to go stark raving mad.

"When you're done come to the kitchen and kiss me goodbye, okay darlin'?"

Chance watched Lacey watch him. She was so beautiful standing there like a towel-wrapped pixie with her pink skin and sultry curves. The minute she nodded her head in acknowledgement, he fled the room.

Staying in the kitchen while Lacey was up the hall dressing was sheer hell. A hell of his own making, so bitching about it would do no good, Chance reminded himself.

He heard the pitter patter of her bare feet as she made her way up the hall toward where he stood in the kitchen. Chance turned, expecting to see her in the doorway, but she wasn't there. Only silence came from the direction of the hallway so Chance decided to go see what was taking her so long.

She stood in the hall staring at the open door to her office. A small light shone on the desk by the front door. Chance moved behind her, his movement making her jump.

"What's wrong, Lacey?"

She looked up at him, a smile that more aptly resembled a grimace plastered across her face. "Nothing's wrong." It was clearly a lie but before Chance could call her on it, she moved away from him and into the room.

Moving silently, almost cautiously, Lacey locked the front door before turning out the light and moving back toward him. She had her arms wrapped around her middle, rubbing her hands over her arms as if to warm herself.

"You sure you're okay, baby?"

"I'm fine, Chance, really. But I'll be even better if you'll stay with me tonight."

Her words were like music to his ears, but the way she leaned into him, raising herself on tiptoes to nibble at his mouth, set his body on fire. After that, there was no thinking, no wondering about the change. The only thing Chance knew for sure was that he had to have her.

Chapter Six

Lacey held onto Chance as if her life depended on it. She wanted nothing more than to confide in him, to let him know how scared she was and how glad she was for his presence.

First a burglar, and now this, it was too much for Lacey to comprehend. The door connecting her office and her living area had been closed. Hell, she'd closed it herself. Lacey wanted to ask Chance if he'd gone into the room for something, but couldn't bring herself to do it. If he hadn't, he'd surely go off the deep end and as a result, every cop in town would once again be at her house. There was only so much testosterone she could handle on a weekly basis so Lacey kept her mouth closed and her fears and suspicions to herself.

After all, Chance was staying with her. He would keep her safe and in the light of day, she would be just fine. Lacey tried not to think about tomorrow night or those to follow. It was enough to creep her out.

"Lacey darlin', you're beginning to worry me."

Damn, his voice was so freaking sexy that just listening to him made her wet. Even when Chance was growling at her, as he had earlier, she could still get lost in his voice. But when he lowered it in the soothing way only he could manage, Lacey had a hard time not dropping to her knees and begging for a taste.

"No need to worry cowboy." Lacey added an edge of mischievousness into her voice to try and mask her own anxiety.

Giving him a wink, Lacey tugged him to her bedroom. She wasted no time before undressing him. Piece by piece she disrobed him, baring his wondrous body for her touch. As each inch of flesh was revealed, Lacey kissed it.

When Chance's breathing became rapid and she could hear his heart beating wildly in his chest, she changed from teasing kisses to torturous nibbles and licks as she skillfully worked her way down his body.

She dipped her tongue into Chance's navel then giggled when he gasped in pleasure. Her hands grasped his muscular thighs, still encased in the faded fabric of his jeans. His muscles bunched and rippled in response to her touch, pushing Lacey closer to the edge.

"Damn darlin', your mouth is like magic."

With the taste of his bare skin on her lips and the feel of his large body against her, Lacey was no longer frightened. Now she felt needy and hot, not to mention horny as hell. Inhibitions gone, she felt completely free to let go.

"Not as magical as it will be, cowboy," she taunted, as she popped the button of his pants free before slowly lowering the zipper.

She removed Chance's pants slowly, reverently adoring his body every step of the way. It was a long but enjoyable journey down the expanse of his legs. The removal of his boots wasn't nearly as fun but they both got a chuckle out of the process.

When Chance was completely nude, Lacey took his length as far into her mouth as she could. When she flicked the underside of his engorged manhood with her tongue, Chance growled low in his throat and grasped a handful of her hair in his fist.

"Oh yeah baby. Just like that."

Lacey longed to take Chance to greater heights than he'd ever experienced before. A man as good looking as he was must have had numerous women over the years. She wanted nothing more than to wipe every other sexual experience from his memory, leaving him wanting only her, craving only the feel of her mouth and the taste of her on his tongue.

His hips bucked against her mouth, burying his shaft so deeply that Lacey had to relax her throat to accept him. She hummed in delight at his movement. To feel his muscles tense against her palm as she held onto his thigh to steady herself was a powerful boost to her self-esteem.

"Fuck! That's so good. Keep going darlin'. Suck me deep."

Lacey did as Chance asked, wringing a groan from him. The hand fisted in her hair tightened until her scalp tingled at the pressure. He was getting close, the quick motion of his hips as he pumped in and out of her mouth told her just how close to losing it he was.

The pulsing beat of the vein running the length of his shaft fed her hunger and fueled the fire burning throughout her system. The heat of passion took over and with the flick of her tongue Lacey had Chance spilling his essence into the warm recess of her mouth.

Chance's shout of release filled the air. The deep tenor of his voice brought every nerve ending to life, raising chill bumps along her skin.

"Your sweet mouth makes me lose control every time."

She stood before him, her mouth curved in a triumphant smile. "I like it when you lose control."

Lacey watched Chance's whiskey-brown eyes widen, his full brows arching at her words. It was as if he were trying to figure her out, but Lacey couldn't wait that long. Her body was ultra sensitive, heated beyond belief and in need of love.

Rising to her toes, Lacey initiated a kiss so hot it could have melted stone. Chance didn't back off in disgust, as her ex would have. He reveled in the taste of himself on her lips and pushed for more when she would have pulled away.

The vice-like grip he held her in left her breathless and raised the heat another notch. His arms, wound so tightly around her, were better than any bindings even the kinkiest could come up with.

"I need you."

Lacey couldn't help the breathless whisper as she rubbed her body against his nudity like an alley cat in heat.

"And you'll get me darlin', it just isn't going to be hard and fast the way you think you need it right now."

His words barely registered. Her body ached in places it had never ached before. Her breasts were heavy with peaked nipples and her pussy couldn't help but quiver in anticipation. She wanted Chance to take her, needed him to plunge into her depth with relentless determination and make her beg for more even when she thought she'd die from the pleasure.

"Now, Chance. Please. Now."

"My way, Lace."

His voice was husky, his words no nonsense. When Chance tugged at the drawstring of her pants; then let them slide over her hips to the floor, Lacey made no attempt to stop him. Her tank top soon followed. Due to her lack of underclothes, she stood naked before him, loving the way his eyes devoured her body.

“Chance,” Lacey pleaded, needing to feel his hands on her body more than she needed her next breath.

“I’m going to fuck you, baby. Long and so slow you’ll be begging when I finally let you come.”

Oh, hell, Lacey thought silently. The determined set of his jaw, the wicked gleam in his eye. Even his wide-legged stance spoke of just how serious he was. She was in trouble. The variety of trouble all women hope to taste at least one time in their life.

* * * *

Chance wanted to devour her with his mouth the same way he was with his eyes. The perfectly shaped mounds of her pale breasts made his mouth water, while the thatch of curls covering her pretty little pussy had him aching with need.

“On the bed, Lace.”

Her body tensed at his command. Chance couldn’t help but smile. Lacey turned and did as he bid. She climbed onto the bed with slow determined movements, ones she knew would drive him crazy with lust.

Her ass moved enticingly as she crawled on all fours toward the center of the bed. Looking over her shoulder, she gave him a saucy smile before settling back on the pillows. Her legs were spread, so Chance could clearly see the creamy moisture coating her nether lips. She was a minx for teasing him and knew damned well what she was doing.

“Nice try baby, but it’s not going to work. I told you, my way.”

Chance was determined to take Lacey slowly, so slowly she would writhe beneath him in need for a long while before he sent her over the edge. Crawling up her body, Chance bestowed feather-light kisses across her abdomen and then her chest before taking the turgid peak of a nipple into his mouth.

Nibbling and nipping, he drove her hard, until she was moaning his name. Her hands gripped his head, holding him close, as if she was afraid he would leave.

As much as Chance loved the fierce way she held him, he needed to be completely in control this time around. With slow, deliberate movements, Chance lifted his head from her breast, leaving her no choice but to release his head.

He gave her a wide smile before collecting her hands in his. When he pinned them to the bed, one on either side of her head, Lacey’s hazel eyes widened, searching his face.

“I could tie you, but this time I think I’ll just hold you where I want you.” When she said nothing in return, Chance cocked his head to the side, watching her face for any sign of fear.

“I’ll never hurt you darlin’, but it’ll always be my way. Do you understand?”

The nod of her head wasn’t good enough for Chance’s peace of mind. “I need to hear the words, Lacey. I have to know you understand what I’m saying and that you’re okay with it.”

She licked her lips, the tip of her pink tongue peeking out to do the job was more erotic than a blatant invitation. “I understand, Chance, and I trust you.”

Her words were like a balm to his soul. A new sensation in the vicinity of his heart warned him that things had definitely moved past friendship or lust. He was falling fast and falling hard.

Chance rubbed his nose against hers while still holding her hands to the mattress

beside her head. "Thank you for that, darlin'."

With his knees, he nudged her thighs until she spread them wide, making room for him in the place he most wanted to be. With agonizingly slow movements, Chance began to enter the warm clasp of her pussy.

"You're so tight, Lace. So tight and wet, just for me."

Her breathing was shallow and rapid, causing her breasts to jiggle enticingly. "Oh please, Chance," she gasped, trying to lever herself up to force him deeper.

A quick nip to her full lower lip brought silence to the room and utter stillness to Lacey's body. "Uh uh, baby. My way, remember?"

Chance kept his voice low and gentle as he continued to tease her, both with the purposefully slow thrusts of his hips as his cock burrowed into the tight sheath of her pussy and his wickedly erotic words.

"Slow, baby, just like this," he said giving her another inch of his shaft; then retreating fractionally before moving forward again. "I love fucking you slow, Lacey. Hearing what it does to your breathing, seeing the change in your eyes as you take me. The way your beautiful pale skin blushes so prettily with your need for more."

Chance could feel his control slip as Lacey's inner muscles tightened around the length of his cock. Her rasping breaths and the scent of sex in the air only added to the downward spiral.

"Keep your hands right here," Chance said, his voice ragged with desire.

Resting the weight of his upper body on his elbows, Chance cupped her face with his hands, burying his fingers in the hair at her temples. As his mouth met hers, it was like a raging inferno swallowed them whole.

He angled Lacey's head so he had better access to her mouth, delving deep with his tongue, tasting every inch of the dark recess of her mouth. An overpowering sensation of contentedness roared through his body along with the taste of her.

Mysterious and alluring, her body promised sweet bliss unlike anything he'd ever had the good fortune to experience. Being with her, in her, tasting the ripe sweetness of all that was Lacey, brought a new understanding to Chance of just what had been missing in his life.

"Mine," he growled, finally burying himself in her fist-tight sheath. Her moan of surprise and delight only spurred him on. When she lifted her legs, wrapping them around his waist, allowing him to sink even deeper into her luscious depths, he lost it.

Gathering her hands within his, Chance once again held her to the mattress as she begged for release, her body writhing beneath him in sensuous abandon. He intertwined their fingers, then held on for dear life as he picked up the pace.

She met him stroke for stroke, her hips pumping to meet his even as their pace became frenzied. Spiraling out of control, Chance bellowed his release as the feminine muscles of Lacey's pussy clenched around him in rippling waves.

* * * *

"Oh my God, that was great!" Lacey was the first to speak.

She seemed awed at what had happened and pleased as well, with herself. A beautiful smile curved her lips, her eyes shone with pleasure.

"I've never had it happen at the same time. Hell, it hardly ever happened at all, unless I got myself there."

Several thoughts crossed Chance's mind. The first was that he didn't want to know a fucking thing about her sex life before him. That he wanted to yell from the rooftops. As far as he was concerned, there was no past, only a future for the both of them.

On the other hand, the thought that he'd accomplished what her ex couldn't manage made him want to strut around with his chest all puffed up. Then there was the mental image of Lacey taking care of her sexual frustrations on her own. All sorts of wicked ideas sprouted with that thought.

"I want you to show me, Lacey. One day soon, I want you to make yourself fly for me, while I watch."

Her pupils dilated at his words. The pink flush of her cheeks deepened, giving her a wanton look. When her tongue peeked out to moisten her lips, Chance couldn't help but groan. His cock, which was still buried in her warm sheath, twitched in awareness.

Lacey smiled again, this time allowing a bit of naughtiness in the quirk of her lips as her eyes shone brightly. "I will if you will."

Lacey said the words as she squeezed him with her inner muscles. Her smile grew with every curse and groan to leave Chance's lips as he began moving within her once again.

Chapter Seven

Lacey woke deliciously sore and alone in her bed. There was no time to get upset over that fact. She was going to be late for work as it was. Throwing the sheet aside, she climbed nude from the bed, then made her way across the room toward the bathroom, where she took a quick shower.

She hastily dressed and gave her hair a quick brush, praying all the while that the day wouldn't continue to spiral downhill. With barely enough time for a cup of coffee, Lacey headed for the kitchen.

There on the counter lying next to the coffeemaker was a handwritten note. Lacey's mouth curved as she read the missive letting her know that Chance had gone to the ranch to tend to his chores and would be back by noon to take her to lunch.

So, the day wouldn't be lost after all. Her breath hitched just thinking about what might happen when Chance finally made it back to her.

Lacey worked through the morning, massaging her clients while either talking quietly of everyday life or nothing at all. The quiet camaraderie she shared with her them made her career choice all the more wonderful.

As the day wore on, her anticipation grew. Lacey silently taunted herself for being so excited over a simple lunch. It wasn't as if Chance would jump her on sight, although the effect that visual had on her body was instantaneous and a bit troubling. Her heart was dangerously close to being lost for good.

The thought of losing her heart to Chance scared her shitless.

It was almost lunchtime. Chance was due back soon. Lacey's fingers trembled slightly her nervous excitement was so great.

"Bye, Ted. Stay out of trouble." Lacey gave him a conspiratorial smile as he reached for the door.

"See ya, Lace."

Ted pulled the door open as he winked his goodbye to Lacey. She couldn't help but sigh when she spotted Chance standing on the threshold. The look on his face told Lacey exactly how unhappy he was to have met up with Ted Snider, firefighter extraordinaire, in her presence once again.

She opened her mouth with every intention of deterring the argument to come when Ted held up his hand.

"Whoa there, cowboy. I'm here for a massage and a massage only, and I'm too fucking relaxed to fight with you now." The words were spoken casually, with no heat. Ted moved around Chance before once again turning around. "If you give a shit about Lace at all, you'd stop acting like the jealous boyfriend and start acting your age." Lacey knew Ted's words hit their mark when Chance's hands balled into white-knuckled fists at his side. It wasn't until Chance took a menacing step forward that she interfered by placing her hand on his arm.

Chance said nothing in return; he merely inclined his head in acknowledgement.

When Ted was gone, Chance closed the door with a snap. He was tense, his large body wound tight. Lacey could see it in his stance, in the way his jaw clenched, causing the muscle at the side of his face to twitch.

She longed to soothe him, to tell him how she would never dream of being with another man while she was involved with him, but anger at not being given the benefit of the doubt wouldn't allow the action.

Chance stalked directly to her. Without saying a word, he pulled her into his arms and slanted his mouth over hers in a kiss so masterful it made her toes curl. Lacey tried to remain stiff in his arms but the more she objected with her body, the deeper he took the kiss until his mouth devoured hers.

The feel of his tongue stroking beneath her upper lip just before he sucked it into his mouth, tugging sharply, was the last straw. His action sent a coil of desire spiraling straight to her pulsing core.

Her moan of aroused defeat filled the room. Lacey moved impossibly closer, burrowing in until there was not even a millimeter between them. Once comfortably ensconced in Chance's tight hold, she melted against his large frame and let her passion flow.

She kissed him back as if she might never get the chance to taste him again. With her hands around his narrow hips, Lacey proceeded to run her fingers along his spine, teasing and touching until Chance growled low in his throat and broke the kiss.

He stared at her, his brown eyes so intense Lacey felt as though he could quite possibly see right through to her soul.

"I thought he came on Tuesdays."

Lacey's thoughts were still jumbled, her lips still swollen and tingling due to their delicious kiss that it took her a minute to comprehend what he was saying. When the accusation in Chance's deep voice finally penetrated the lust-induced barrier of her brain, she tried to pull away.

He held tight, the steely bands of his arms around her didn't budge an inch. "Now don't go stiffening up on me, darlin'. I just asked a question."

Lacey couldn't help the cynical laugh that burst from her mouth. With both palms now flat on his chest, Lacey pushed. Chance loosened his hold enough to allow their bodies to part but no more. With as much dignity as possible, even though she wanted to cry at the unfairness of the situation, Lacey threw her head back, tilting her chin at a stubborn angle.

She was not going to let this man bully her. Been there, done that, her mind taunted. She'd let her ex-husband get away with it for far too long, but she sure the hell wouldn't let it happen again, even if it meant never seeing Chance again on a personal level.

Just thinking it caused pain deep in her chest, but Lacey wasn't about to lie down and play the victim.

"No, you weren't asking, you were accusing." Lacey knew as soon as she opened her mouth that she should have just asked him to leave. Every ounce of her recent frustrations came pouring out then and, although humiliated by what she perceived to be weakness, she just couldn't seem to stop.

"Ted is a client, nothing more. Not that I owe you any explanations."

Chance released her and turned to pace across the room, his agitation at her words obvious. When he turned back toward her and opened his mouth to talk, Lacey interrupted.

"Don't! I'm not done. I lived for years with a man who, while out screwing anything with legs, would come home and accuse me of the very same. Because his guilt ate at

him, I was an easy target and I let it happen, but I'll be Goddamned if I ever let it happen again, Chance, so if you can't stop acting like I'm going to fuck anything with a dick, then I think it would be best if we call it quits now while we're ahead."

The look on Chance's face was almost comical. His head snapped around so quickly, Lacey was surprised he didn't end up with whiplash.

"What in the hell are you talking about?"

Chance's voice boomed through the room as he took hold of her arms. Although able to easily overpower her petite frame, he did nothing more than shake her. "Don't you ever fucking talk about yourself like that, Lacey. I'll have you bare-assed over my knee so fast you won't know what the hell happened."

Lacey wondered if all men were clueless or if she had just been blessed twice in the same lifetime.

Chance glanced down where his hands still gripped her arms as if he wasn't aware of the hold he still had on her. Dropping his hands, he cursed viciously. He lifted a very large hand to his face then lowered his head and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"I'm sorry sweetheart. I had no right to put my hands on you like that."

Lacey laughed. After all that had just been said and done, after threatening to spank her, the idiot was worried about a little shake.

"This isn't funny, dammit!"

Lacey watched Chance. His movements were jerky, not his usual fluid rolling cowboy gait. She lifted a brow in a sarcastic gesture. "You accuse me of fucking my client and threaten to spank me for saying as much, but it's the fact that you shook me that has you all worried." She shook her head in defeat. There was just no getting through to the opposite sex, evidently, and at this very moment in time, it was too damned tiresome to keep trying.

Lacey turned from him. Her plan was to head into her kitchen and drown her sorrows in a pint of double chocolate ice cream, but Chance's next words stopped her in her tracks.

"I'm jealous, dammit! It drives me crazy just thinking about your hands all over another man, Lacey."

The words were spoken low, forced out in a rush, but Lacey heard every one and felt the unspoken truth Chance had decided to share with her. Her heart swelled until she thought her chest would burst.

* * * *

"Damned stubborn-ass woman," Chance muttered as he stalked back across the room toward Lacey. Her face still showed a hint of surprise over his heated admission. Didn't she understand how just the thought of her hands dancing across the flesh of another man's body affected him?

To know that every stroke and caress was doled out lovingly for a career choice she loved as much as he loved ranching, and not for his benefit, was enough to make Chance's blood boil.

"I know it makes no sense, Lacey but dammit, I'm possessive of what's mine."

He knew immediately he'd not chosen the right words. Lacey's shoulders stiffened and her spine snapped straight as she placed her hands on her hips. Her eyes shot blue lasers, her anger evident in every nuance of her features.

She'd never looked more beautiful, and Chance wanted nothing more than to toss her over his shoulder and cart her off to the bedroom where he could have his wicked way with every inch of her luscious body. Before he broke down and did just that very thing, Chance figured he'd better make amends and take Lacey to lunch as he'd planned.

"You don't have to say it darlin', I already know how you feel but I won't make excuses for my feelings either."

He shook his head briefly before touching her lips briefly with his own. "Let's go to lunch, baby."

Surprised that she gave no argument in return, Chance claimed Lacey's hand, then tugged her gently to him before leading them to the door, their fingers entwined.

The walk to the local sandwich shop was a short one. The weather was beautiful. Clear blue skies with only the slightest breeze to ruffle Lacey's hair and cause her scent to tease Chance's senses, made the fact that she was with him all the better.

In no time they were seated and eating. Chance wanted more than anything to toss every dish covering the surface of the table to the floor, so he could splay Lacey across its surface and bury his face between the creamy smooth flesh of her thighs.

Wickedly sensual thoughts, such as tasting every inch of her body, then burying himself to the hilt in her heat, made his cock twitch and rise to the occasion. Chance shifted his weight in order to ease the discomfort his rigid length caused between his thighs. They needed to get back to Lacey's place so he could turn each vision into reality.

Chance tugged Lacey from the booth shortly after she finished chewing her last bite of food. His roguish grin caused her cheeks to pinken even as a wide smile curved her lips causing her cheek to dimple.

Leaning in, Chance flicked his tongue across the dimple before moving on to her lips to taste her sweetness. He didn't release her from his hold or leave the heat of her mouth until a group of teenagers walked by and made several sarcastic comments.

Pulling away, Chance said, "Sorry darlin', lost myself there for a minute." He released the taut hold he had on Lacey's ass, a virtually impossible feat but one he managed with a groan of frustration.

They'd only walked a few blocks when Chance could no longer hold out. Backing Lacey into an ally, he lowered his mouth to hers. Their kiss was fierce and passionate in its intensity. By the time he lifted his head from hers, nipping her bottom lip in farewell, she was shivering in his arms.

One hand held tightly to his neck, the other to his head as if she was unable to let go.

"Damn darlin' you taste good."

"Mmm, you too." She murmured the words against his neck just before Chance felt her hand move across the flesh of his bald head. "What made you decide to go bald?" Lacey asked the question, her hazel eyes searching his.

Chance gave a mocking chuckle. "Clay and I made a bet over the sex of his and Bobbie's baby. He wanted a little girl to coddle and I tortured him the whole time with all the reasons why the baby was going to be a boy."

Lacey laughed. Damn how he loved her husky laugh. "I take it you lost."

"Yeah, you could say that but, then again, the feel of your hand rubbing across my naked skull makes me wonder."

"Is that why you've kept it this way?"

"Not originally. Originally, I found I liked being bald, although the maintenance to

stay smooth is a pain. But now that I've felt your hands on me, I know it's worth it."

Lacey's pupils dilated and her cheeks flushed, making it impossible for Chance not to kiss her again. It wasn't until he felt the silky bare skin of her pert breast beneath his palm that he realized just how out of control he was getting.

Reining in every ounce of his waning will power, Chance backed away. "Sorry sweetheart," he explained when she continued to stand there, eyes wide. "We'd better go."

They had only made it another block or so when Chance noticed someone in the window of the local lingerie shop. She appeared to be dressing a mannequin in a frothy, barely-there set.

"What are you doing?" Lacey's voice was husky, proving to Chance that their kiss had affected her just as much as it had him.

Chance didn't answer her question as they walked through the door. Instead, he led her to the back, where he assumed the changing rooms would be. Right outside of the small curtained-off room was a plush looking chair.

Without divulging why, Chance gently pressed Lacey into the chair. "Stay right here, baby." He laced his voice with just enough steel so she would know he meant business. Instead of being afraid or sulking as many women would do, Lacey upped the ante.

"And if I don't?"

The mischievous twinkle in her sparkling blue eyes caught his attention, as did her pink tongue peeking out nervously to wet her kiss-swelled lips.

Leaning in, he nipped her full bottom lip. "Get up and your ass will be as red as your lips."

He couldn't help but chuckle when her jaw dropped before she closed it with a snap. Her eyes narrowed in challenge but she made no move to disobey his order. With no more than a quick look to be sure she stayed put, Chance wandered back to the front of the store where he began to look through racks and bins of some of the sexiest undies he'd ever seen.

"May I help you?"

Chance turned to find himself looking almost eye to eye with a tall stately woman who was built like a fence post. "Yes ma'am, I'm looking for some things for my girlfriend." He gestured to where Lacey sat. Her eyes bore into him with an intensity that kept his cock half-aroused.

"I see."

Chance wasn't sure what the woman saw but whatever it was, it must not have bothered her because within minutes his arms were overflowing in lingerie. Everything from wisps of lace and silk to leather and buckles adorned the dressing room before she finally stopped.

The height of Chance's arousal was overwhelming just from imagining Lacey in all the tiny outfits strewn about. He tried not to think about how easily his body reacted to her or about how light his heart felt when she was around. Pushing thought of all except seeing Lacey in as little as possible aside, Chance helped her from the chair, then lowered his lengthy frame into its cushioned softness.

"Try some of those pretties on for me, sweetheart."

Lacey looked from him to the store clerk; then back to him again. Chance wished he could see inside her head, hear what her inner thoughts were saying. He bet, whatever it

was, they weren't being quiet. She was more than likely arguing with herself, trying to think of a reason not to do what he'd asked.

When it appeared as if she would refuse, or worse yet, bolt, Chance grasped her hand. Running his thumb over the smooth skin of her inner wrist, he leaned forward. "For me darlin'. Only me."

The store clerk took Chance's words as her cue to leave. With a small smile on her mouth she turned and left them alone. "Let me know if you need anything," were the only words she spoke as she faded out of sight.

It seemed to take Lacey a minute to come to a decision, but when she finally did, Chance was sure he was going to explode. Lacey's face went from nervous to downright wicked in a second flat.

"And I assume you want to see."

Chance shifted in his seat, trying to relieve the pressure on his aching shaft. "Oh yeah."

"Then hold onto your hat cowboy, cause you're about to get one hell of a show."

With no more than those words and a wink, Lacey turned on her heel and sauntered into the curtained dressing room.

Chapter Eight

Lacey was a nervous wreck. Her hands shook as she removed her clothes, eyeballing the tiny scraps of fabric cluttering the dressing room. She decided to start with the blue silky chemise. All least it covered all of her parts, even if it did leave her bare from the thigh down.

The thought of opening the curtain in order to let Chance see her made Lacey's stomach clench to the point where she was sure she'd either pass out or vomit, possibly both. The only thing that kept her from doing either was the way Chance had looked as she'd turned from him.

His eyes had gone dark, nearly black, his irises were so dilated with arousal. The fine sheen of perspiration covering the surface of his bald head belied the way he sat casually back in the chair, stroking the reddish brown growth of his moustache. His position might seem casual, but the large bulge straining the front of his pants proved he was far from it.

Sucking in a deep breath, Lacey opened the curtain far enough to peek out. Chance was ramrod straight and sitting on the edge of his chair in two seconds flat. His eyes met and fixed on hers, boring into her very soul with an intensity that made Lacey shiver deliciously deep inside. His gaze spoke of promise and wickedly erotic retribution for teasing him.

"Ready, cowboy?" Lacey hoped the surprise she felt at her brazenness and ability to choke out a sultry voice didn't show.

Chance unfolded his length and stood before answering. "When it comes to seeing you in any of this stuff, I was born ready, darlin'."

He clearly meant every word he spoke. That knowledge gave Lacey the edge that she needed to overcome the majority of her self-consciousness. Her fingers no longer shook. Instead, warmth spread over her like a warm barrier and as she pulled the curtain aside and tried to strike a sexy pose. Chance's eyes roamed her body, adding to the heat until she was sure she'd go up in flames.

"Good Lord, darlin'. You take my breath away."

Lacey smiled, tilting her head as Chance lowered his. Their lips met and it was as if nothing else mattered.

"No more, sweetheart. Not unless you want us to be carted off in cuffs for acting indecently in public." The words were whispered against her neck, the heat of Chance's breath flowing across the sensitive spot just below her ear as he untangled her hands from around his neck.

Lacey couldn't help but smile. Her mind was whirling and it was almost impossible to get lust-induced visions of her and Chance tangled in the sheets of her bed out of her mind.

"Try another, Lacey, but this time I'll just stay over here." Chance moved back toward the chair, sitting once he reached it.

Feeling her feminine power, Lacey made a bet with herself. "I bet he won't last through the next set," she whispered as she rummaged through tiny scraps of lace and froth until she found the perfect combination.

"Did you say something?"

Giggling, Lacey answered, "Just talking to myself, Chance. Planning your arousal-induced demise," she added under her breath as she clasped the demi-cup bra around her waist.

Twisting the garment, Lacey pulled it up until the half cups covered her breasts, then slipped the lacy straps over her shoulders. The pale yellow cups lifted her breasts as if offering them up for a taste, while the beautiful lace trim barely managed to cover the half moons of her areolas as they peeked over the top.

She stepped into the thong panties, slipping them over her legs and up her hips and thighs until the back was nestled snugly into the crease of her bottom. The pale yellow and white complimented her pale complexion, making her feel delicate and feminine.

"Ready or not, here I come." Lacey dropped her voice, giving it an unusually husky sound as she opened the curtain.

Chance sat there staring. His hands gripped the chair arms so hard, Lacey was surprised she didn't hear the sound of wood splintering. When he leaned forward as if to stand, she shook her head.

"Uh uh, cowboy. You said you'd be staying right there."

It took a lot of willpower, Lacey could tell, but he remained seated. A wicked smile curved her lips. There was no stopping it.

To add fuel to the fire, Lacey ran her hand down her body. She started at the outer curve of a breast and into the dip of her waist before moving forward over the slight swell of her abdomen. Not even her ever-present tummy pooch embarrassed her with Chance's gaze burning into her.

"You're playing with fire, Lacey." The growled words brought a shiver of delight to her overheated body.

"Getting a bit warm in here, isn't it, cowboy?" Lacey's taunting words sparked something in Chance's brown eyes. He looked feral, like a predator ready to play with its prey before slowly devouring it.

"Turn around." There was no mistaking the command in his voice.

"You sure you can handle it?"

Lacey turned and before she was facing away from him, his voice burst forth with a string of curses. "Son of a bitch! I knew you were gorgeous, baby, but this sexy little number is killing me."

Lacey looked over her shoulder, expecting to see Chance coming toward her, but he wasn't. He was still sitting, spine straight, eyes glazed, with a look on his face that would have most women running for the hills.

He gave a decisive nod of his head as if he'd come to a decision. "Put your clothes on."

Now that she hadn't been expecting. "Chance?"

"Now, Lacey. Give me the tags to those and put your clothes on over them."

She just stood there, staring dumbfounded until he jerked the curtain closed on her. She wasn't sure what to think and couldn't seem to get her hands to move to do as Chance had ordered. The lack of movement on her side of the curtain must have alerted him, because in the blink of an eye, the curtain was jerked open and she was flush up against his muscular chest.

"I need you to get dressed and I need you to do it now or I'm going to fuck you right here for all to see and damn the consequences."

His hands shook as they held her to him. The pressure of his erect shaft against her stomach proved exactly how close he was to losing it.

"Do you understand?" Chance lifted her chin with a finger, his eyes insistent, intense.

Lacey couldn't seem to breathe, much less speak, so she nodded, pulled away, and began removing the tags from the bra and panty set.

"Goddamn! Hurry up baby, or I'll have you right here." Chance snatched the tags from her trembling fingers and stalked from the dressing room like a man on a mission.

Lacey wasn't sure being taken in the box-sized dressing room would be all that bad. Her pussy throbbed and spasmed in need, and her new panties were damp and clinging, but she decided not to push her testy cowboy. So she dressed.

* * * *

Chance walked to the front of the store where he handed over the tags.

"Will that be all?" A knowing smile curved the shopkeeper's thin lips.

"Yes ma'am." His mind was on getting Lacey home as quickly as possible, not on polite conversation or knowing smiles.

He wasn't at all sure he was going to make it. Paying for their purchase had been hard enough, but waiting while Lacey finished dressing, knowing damned well what she had on under her clothes, was sheer torture and now they were forced to finish the walk back to her place. Not the most comfortable thing to accomplish when a man's rigid cock reminded him every step of the way what he wasn't doing.

When Lacey's place was in sight, Chance heaved a sigh of relief. Although close, he couldn't wait a second longer to taste her. He needed a kiss something fierce. Backing Lacey against the tree shading her front yard, he planted his lips over hers.

Her taste bloomed in his mouth, bright and bold, just like her personality. "I need to be inside you so badly that it may be a month before I let you up."

A moan of pleasure met Chance's ears as he buried his hands in her hair. With a gentle tug, he had her head angled for his pleasure. Their kiss was so consuming that neither of them saw the car approach or heard the doors close.

It wasn't until Chance heard the shuffling of feet and the sound of someone clearing their throat that he realized they were no longer alone.

Seconds later, Lacey made the same discovery. Her cheeks pink from arousal, embarrassment, or a combination of both, she pulled herself from his arms.

"Oh, there you are Ms. Winslow. I was so afraid you wouldn't be here."

"If I'd have known you'd show up, she wouldn't be." Chance grumbled the words beneath his breath, then looked to Lacey for a clue to what was going on. A shrug of her shoulders was his only answer.

"What can I help you with, Mrs. Garrett?"

After Lacey walked away to speak with the elderly couple, Chance watched the byplay between them for a few minutes. His erection no longer felt as if it would be the death of him, but anger was rapidly replacing arousal. He wanted some answers and decided to take the most direct route to get them.

"I need to talk to you," he said, stalking over to where she stood with her guests.

Lacey glanced his way briefly before leading the Garretts into her office. Chance watched through the open door as she prepared her table before offering a gown to Mrs.

Garrett. By the time she made her way back to him, Chance was ready to explode.

“No fucking way, Lacey!” Chance knew damned well he was acting like a spoiled five-year old but he could care less.

Lacey crossed her arms over her chest. “Mrs. Garrett slipped in the kitchen. She isn’t hurt, but she’s afraid she’ll be sore tomorrow as a result.”

“So send her to the hospital.”

Lacey cocked an eyebrow in irritation but made no excuses. “You can come back later.” Her words were low and soothing. Chance cursed his luck.

“I can’t, not tonight. Clay is out of town for the night and we’ve got foals ready to drop. Rick is expecting me to be on the ranch in case any problems arise.”

Lacey unfolded her arms then moved closer to him. Her warmth and womanly scent sent his senses into overdrive again. When she wrapped her arms around his waist and laid her forehead against his chest, Chance had a hell of a time not carrying her off to the ranch and saying to hell with everything.

“I’ll pick you up for lunch tomorrow and then we’ll go to my place where we won’t be interrupted.” She was shaking her head in the negative before he finished the sentence making his irritation mount to an all time high.

“Why the hell not?”

“I’m having lunch with Bobbie and the baby tomorrow.”

Chance let loose with a string of curses a country mile long. “Clear your schedule and I’ll pick you up after your lunch. No, don’t say another word,” he insisted when Lacey opened her mouth as if to argue. “If I don’t get to taste you, all of you, I’m going to go fucking nuts.”

“Sometimes I wonder if you’re already there.” The words were whispered against his lips just before her tongue peeked out to torture him.

She knew there was little he could do with the Garretts on the other side of the door so she took advantage, something Chance would see she paid for.

“You’re trouble with a capital T, baby.”

The sinful smile curving her lips was the only warning Chance had before she slipped her hand between their bodies and cupped the engorged length of his cock. He was helpless to stop the low growl of approval that left his lips.

Not a man to be one-upped, Chance leaned in low to nip the sensitive flesh of her neck. “You might have the upper hand now darlin’, but tomorrow when you’re facedown over my lap we’ll see who is doing all the smiling.”

Chance moved from her neck to the sensuous line of her mouth to punctuate his word with a stinging nip to her full lower lip. “I believe your client is waiting.”

“I’ll umm, see you tomorrow, then.”

Chance smiled even through the fierce arousal blanketing his body, he couldn’t help himself. “You can bet on it.”

When Lacey turned from him, he bestowed a swat to her ass, startling a yelp from her. “Had to leave you with a small sample of what’s to come.” After his parting words, Chance walked to his truck and headed home, smiling the whole way.

Chapter Nine

Lacey finished cleaning her office with single-minded determination. All day long she fought with herself to keep thoughts of Chance at bay. To keep his parting swat and erotic promise from causing her insides to flutter and her panties to become wet, but it was no use.

The man was possessive and arrogant as hell, everything she swore she would never again want in a man after being married to the king of losers. There were so many differences between Andy, her ex husband, and Chance but the single blaring difference was trust. Lacey felt deep in her heart that Chance would remain faithful to her as long as they were together. Was knowing that about Chance enough?

Thoughts of Andy Winslow crossed her mind. It had taken every ounce of her willpower not to send Chance after him yesterday afternoon. She'd spotted the idiot standing across the street from the lingerie store but decided against mentioning it to Chance. Why ruin a perfectly good day when more than likely that was what the asshole was hoping for?

Lacey shook thoughts of Andy from her mind. He was in her past and would forever remain there. Besides, she had much more to worry about. Important things like losing her heart to a wicked cowboy who thought he could claim her. The disturbing part was, Chance was closer to being *the one* than he could ever imagine.

Canceling her afternoon appointments wasn't the smartest move she'd ever made, but there was no way in hell she was going to not meet with Chance. Come hell or high water, Lacey was bound and determined to take everything he had to offer and give equally in return. As soon as she finished having lunch with Chance's sister-in-law, Bobbie, and her darling daughter, she would climb into his truck and go to his ranch.

She no longer had a problem with the sexual side of their relationship. When it came to Chance's roving hands and devilish lips, she was lost, a burning inferno of tumultuous need. There was no way around their attraction. The sex between them was great. It was the thought of losing her heart once again that disturbed Lacey greatly.

Pushing the troubling thought aside, Lacey made her way to her room. All that was needed was a quick change of clothes before she could make her way to the diner to meet Bobbie for lunch.

After donning clean clothes, Lacey left her home and drove to the diner. Bobbie was already seated, a chubby gurgling baby seated in her lap.

"Goodness gracious she's a cutie." Lacey cooed the words to the toothless bundle of joy. To Bobbie she said, "I can't believe how much she's grown and how fantastic you look!"

She meant every word of the compliment. Bobbie's face glowed with happiness. She seemed so different from the troubled woman Lacey had met only last year.

"Thanks sweetie. Between Madison here and her daddy, it seems I'm always smiling these days."

Lacey wanted to congratulate Bobbie on what seemed like a match made in heaven, but the cynical little devil riding her shoulder reminded her that she'd once been married to a man she thought she'd spend the rest of her life with. The memory prompted her to

keep her mouth closed and hope for the best where Bobbie and Clay were concerned.

Smiling, Lacey held her arms out in a silent plea to hold the wiggling bundle.

"Maddy, Aunt Lacey's gonna hold you now so no misbehaving."

Lacey held stock still, not wanting to admit how much she enjoyed being referred to as the baby's aunt. To hide the shock still coursing through her body, she gave an unladylike snort. "As if this little angel could ever misbehave."

Bobbie stared at her as if she'd lost her mind, then they both burst out laughing. The next hour was spent talking and eating. Lacey was having such a good time she completely lost track of the time.

Evidently Chance hadn't. He strode through the front door of the diner looking sexy as hell in his worn jeans and weathered Stetson. The way his snap front chambray shirt hugged every inch of his muscled torso made Lacey's mouth water. She had to mentally talk herself down from charging into his arms to devour his mouth.

"Ahh, so that's how it is," Bobbie said the words low, for Lacey's ears only, as Chance made his way across the diner toward them.

Lacey chose to ignore the softly spoken statement, instead pretending she hadn't heard. Thankfully Chance's legs carried him swiftly across the large expanse of the room and Lacey was saved from trying to come up with a coherent answer.

After greeting them both, Chance started speaking softly to Maddy, who was now seated in her infant carrier, a plump fist shoved in her mouth. The gentle hum of his voice left Lacey breathless. Watching his facial expression as he talked to the baby gave her heart an extra little flutter. The way he allowed her tiny hand to grasp one of his fingers as he cooed softly to her brought visions of Chance taking care of his own children, their children, to mind. The thought knocked the air from her lungs, leaving her edgy and confused.

She watched him warily from the corner of her eye, knowing damn well she'd never be able to hide her emotions, from herself or Chance. The richness of his chuckle as Maddy tried in vain to pull his finger into her mouth hit Lacey like a ton of bricks.

"I am so screwed." She muttered the words under her breath without thought, causing Bobbie to turn and look at her.

"What was that, Lacey?"

"Huh? Umm, oh nothing. Just thinking out loud." She shifted uneasily in her seat. The need to be far away from them, the darling little baby included, overwhelmed her. "I need to stop by my place so I'll just meet you out there." Her words were spoken low, hopeful and unsure all at the same time.

Lacey knew the minute Chance trained his eyes on her that he wouldn't allow her to drive herself. Damned macho jerk! Narrowed, piercing, his gaze mesmerized her.

"Leave your car and we'll come back by later and pick it up." His words came as no surprise, but Lacey wouldn't relent this time. She couldn't

She needed the peace and solitude the brief trip alone would afford her. Time she could use to gather her strength and protect her heart.

"I need to drop my car off, Chance. Pick me up?" Lacey silently prayed he'd save any questions for later, when they were alone. And even then, she had no idea if she'd be able to give him the truth.

If she knew Chance Bodine as well as she thought she did, he'd use any chink in the armor surrounding her heart against her. He'd use it as a way in and once there, he'd

never release her.

After what seemed like an eternity of having his whiskey-brown eyes devour her as if he could see right through her, Chance relented. He rubbed his hand down his face, a sign he was irritated.

“All right, darlin’ I’ll be there as soon as I say goodbye to my niece.”

Lacey wasted no time before hugging Bobbie goodbye, a promise to visit between them. She waited until she was behind the wheel of her car before allowing a sigh of relief to leave her lips.

The reprieve would be short, that much Lacey knew for sure, but then again, a short amount of time to get her feelings under control was better than no time at all.

Her mind whirled with emotion during the short trip home, making it hard to focus on the road. Once home, she pulled into the driveway, killed the engine then just sat there. It took several deep breaths before she felt the roiling turmoil recede. She was in deep shit and she knew it. Now she just needed to figure out what to do about it.

By the time she made it to her front door, she was no more certain of what needed to happen next. Her thoughts took an abrupt halt when she lifted her key to the door only to find it already open.

“What the hell?” She voiced the thought aloud, hoping beyond hope that her voice would help calm the sick feeling cramping the pit of her stomach.

She glanced over her shoulder, a silent prayer on her lips that Chance would be quick about saying his goodbyes. Lacey’s heart pounded in her chest with indecision. Normally she would have walked through the door to check things out on her own, but after the recent attempted break in, she decided against it.

Unaware that her face had gone pale, making her large eyes appear even bigger, Lacey held a trembling hand to her chest. That was the way she looked when Chance pulled his truck into the driveway behind her car.

Relief flooded her system, allowing her rapid pulse to slow slightly. The smile on Chance’s face disappeared the minute his eyes landed on her face. By the time he reached her side his feet were pounding the concrete at a dead run.

“What’s wrong, Lace? What happened?” His hands were gripping her upper arms, his face a mask of impatience and worry.

“The door was already open.”

Chance’s features turned rigid. It seemed as if every muscle in his body tensed in preparation for the unknown. The look on his face caused Lacey to take a small step in retreat and say a word of thanks that she’d never been on the receiving end of such a fearsome look.

Chance unclipped his cell phone and handed it to Lacey. “I’m going in to look around, Lacey. I want you to stay here and call Mike. His number is there, just look up Dodson.” Then he disappeared into the house.

Lacey’s trembling fingers fought with the tiny buttons until she found Officer Dodson’s number. It only rang twice before there was a gruff answer. “Dodson.”

“Officer Dodson, it’s Lacey Winslow. Chance told me to call. I think we might need you at my house.”

“On my way,” was the growled response before the phone clicked in her ear.

Lacey stashed the phone in her pocket and waited. She waited for what seemed like hours before deciding to peek her head through the door. “Chance.” The single word was

whispered low. The last thing she wanted to do was make things worse but the lack of noise from inside was too much for her to bear.

Lacey took a deep breath, then proceeded to open the door further, peeking inside as she went. All seemed well in her office. There was nothing out of place, not a single sign of anything out of the norm. She exhaled the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding.

It wasn't until she reached the hallway that the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach returned. Feathers were strewn about, leading straight to the partially closed door of her bedroom.

She stopped to listen, but couldn't hear a thing over the thundering beat of her heart. Her wobbly legs had trouble carrying her the rest of the way but she pushed on, until she was standing in the open doorway of her room.

The further she walked into the room, the worse it seemed to get. The sight that greeted her made her skin crawl and her hands shake. Dark spots appeared before her eyes and for a moment she thought she might pass out. Her once pristine comforter now lay in shreds. It hung precariously off one side of the bed. The stuffing from her slashed mattress billowed over the opposite side and in the middle of it all was what appeared to be the remains of the pale yellow and white panty and bra set Chance had just purchased for her.

With her hand over her mouth, Lacey turned to flee the room. It wasn't until then that she saw the word *WHORE* painted across the door of her closet.

* * * *

Chance made his way back through the house. His anger was at a boiling point and before it was over someone was going to pay. Whoever had broken into Lacey's home, invaded her privacy and destroyed her property would be found and when they were, there was going to be hell to pay.

But for now he needed to keep Lacey from witnessing what had been done to her room, to get her as far away from there as possible. The need to keep her safe was overwhelming, causing the possessive beast in him to roar to life.

He rounded the corner and came to a stop. There, standing just inside the bedroom door, was Lacey.

"Son of a bitch!" Chance's curse echoed off the walls as he made his way to her.

"I told you to stay outside, dammit!"

She turned to him, her frightened blue eyes luminescent with unshed tears. Her eyes appeared overly large in her pale face.

"Aw, damn." He wanted nothing more than to shake her or take her over his lap and blister her stubborn fool ass but he couldn't get past her pale face and frightened eyes to do either just yet. Instead he pulled her close. "Come on darlin', you don't need to be in here.

"Why would someone do this?"

Her voice shook with emotion, leaving Chance feeling helpless and angry. "I don't know Lacey."

Knowing someone had purposefully done the damage to frighten and hurt Lacey went beyond his endurance. Just thinking about what might have happened if Lacey hadn't gone out for lunch or had come home early made his hands shake.

After gathering Lacey in his arms, Chance led her back through the house, being extra careful not to touch anything.

The sound of sirens pierced the otherwise quiet streets. Mike climbed out of his patrol car and headed toward Chance, who had already started across the yard to meet him.

Left alone on the porch, Lacey slid like a boneless heap to porch floor, her face in her hands. Chance caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and motioned for Mike to follow him as he changed his course and headed back to Lacey.

“What happened?” Mike’s words were harsh, torn from his throat as he neared them. His voice seemed to bring Lacey around. Her spine stiffened, and before his eyes, color flooded back into her cheeks, but her hands never stopped trembling.

“My room.” Her words were low. “Don’t go back in there,” she pleaded when Chance motioned Mike into the house.

“It’ll be all right, Lacey.” Chance kept his words low, soothing, as he helped her to her feet. Her hands were like ice and that pissed him off even more.

He led her to his truck, where he helped her into the passenger seat. When she seemed as comfortable as she was going to get, he said, “I’ll be right back, sweetheart. You stay here, okay?”

He tried to keep his voice soft and soothing, but feared he failed miserably. He feared for her when she turned her eyes to him but said nothing. Her lack of agreement made Chance push harder.

“You don’t need to go back in there, Lacey. Promise me you’ll stay here.”

“I promise.”

Chance’s instincts were running rampant. The fact that someone dared to break into Lacey’s home had him mad as hell. That anger boiled over when he witnessed once again what the bastards had done to her bedroom.

Careful to not touch anything, Chance and Mike made their way back to the office where they met Doug. As Doug and Mike talked, Chance made his way back out to the truck and back to Lacey, who appeared to be holding her own. Her color seemed more normal and although not steady, her hands no longer shook as fiercely.

Chance couldn’t help but chuckle when the two officers headed toward them and Lacey grumbled, “Great. Just what I need.”

Chance stayed with Lacey while Mike and Doug questioned her. Visibly irritated, Lacey answered all their questions but insisted she had no idea who would do such a thing or why.

She gave no argument when Chance bundled her back into his truck and headed to the ranch. He figured it was just a matter of time before her head cleared and the arguing started. She’d insist on going home to work and Chance would have to forbid it. That in and of itself would start a war, he was sure, but there was no help for it because Chance wasn’t willing to risk her safety for the sake of keeping the peace.

The drive to The Lazy B was quiet. Lacey sat snuggled beside him, her hand resting on his upper thigh. Even the slightest touch from her tiny hand brought his arousal to an all time high.

Chance needed to know she was okay, to feel her mouth beneath his, the tight sheath of her core pulsing around him. Thinking about what could have happened had Lacey gone home during the break in scared him to death.

Tomorrow there would be plenty of time to talk and to think. For now all Chance wanted was to make Lacey feel, to help her forget, at least for the time being.

He pulled his truck to a stop in front of the foreman's cabin he called home, then helped Lacey out the driver's side door behind him. He wanted her close. Close enough to touch on a whim. Close enough to feel her warmth and smell the heady scent of her arousal.

Grasping her small hand within his own, Chance led her through the front door and into the living room, where he saw to it that she was comfortably situated on the couch.

"Be right back." After excusing himself, he went to the kitchen where he popped the top on a beer for himself and grabbed a can of soda for her.

Chance returned to the living room to find Lacey wandering the room looking over the framed family pictures lining the shelves.

"Is this okay or would you like something stronger?" Chance crossed the room until he stood directly behind Lacey. The feel of her backside curved against his body sent flames licking at his shaft. As his arousal grew, his cock leapt to life. Hard and ready.

"This is fine." The words puffed from her lips on a breathless whisper as she leaned back into him.

She tilted her head back and gave him a beseeching look, one that drew him in, leaving no choice but to taste her. Chance caressed the curve of her jaw with one hand, loving the feel of her soft flesh beneath his fingers. The fine bones of her face reminded him just how fragile she was, how tiny she was compared to him.

The comparison brought forth horrible thoughts about the danger she'd put herself in by following him into the house before she knew it was safe to do so. Before the night was over, Chance was going to make sure Lacey learned the lesson to never take such a risk again.

On a soft sigh, Lacey leaned her head back against his chest. She continued to relax as he stroked the sinful line of her neck, shivering against him when he gently fondled the shell of her ear.

"Kiss me, Chance." Her husky voice pushed him close to the edge. Soon he'd have to touch her, flesh on flesh. The need to feel her against him, to tease and taste every inch of her petite frame wouldn't allow him to hold out for long, but for now, he would give her exactly what she wanted.

"Whatever you say, darlin'."

Chance turned her to him, holding her tightly as he lowered his head to initiate the kiss. As he knew it would, her taste invaded every cell of his being, thrusting him even deeper in love than he already was.

Lifting her from her feet, Chance carried her to his bedroom. He took the can of soda from her hand and set it along with his beer on the top of his dresser. Drinks forgotten, he methodically began undressing her.

He lowered the straps of her bra until he could lower the cups, freeing the creamy mounds of her coral-tipped breasts. He removed every article of her clothing as if he had all the time in the world.

The sultry sound she made as the lacy cups abraded her engorged nipples made it hard to keep his composure. Chance knew it was no use the moment he latched onto one delicious berry, plucking and pulling with teeth and tongue until Lacey was gasping for breath.

A short second later, she was completely nude and flat on her back upon the wide expanse of his bed. Chance left no time for thought, no time for anything but protection before he entered the ultra hot sheath of her wet sex.

“You just get better and better, baby. Every time I taste you, feel you wrapped around my cock squeezing me, it gets better.”

When Lacey lifted her legs, wrapping them tightly around his lower back, Chance knew there was no going back. Things would not be slow this time. This time his need was fierce. Untamable. This time he needed to hear her scream his name as she climaxed. To know her need was just as strong. To know that her need was for him and no other.

Chapter Ten

He was so deep inside of her. The length of his pulsing shaft sent heat to every pore, abraded every nerve, until Lacey was sure she'd die from the intense pleasure of it. When Chance quickened his pace, she held on for the ride.

Her hips met his thrust for thrust, taking him as deep within her body as she possibly could and still, it wasn't enough. Chance must have sensed her urgency. His body stilled above her, the rise and fall of his chest proving just how much their lovemaking affected him.

Lacey cried out at the loss when he pulled himself from her. She felt empty without his length buried deep within her but Chance left her little time to think about the loss before he flipped her onto her stomach and pulled her to her knees.

He planted one hand on her hip and the other firmly in the center of her back, positioning her for his quick entrance. The position left her completely open, allowing Chance to delve impossibly deep within her body.

Lacey arched back, accepting everything Chance had to offer as he pushed in to her, offering her his cock inch by glorious inch.

"Oh hell yeah, baby. Just like that," Chance growled the words from behind her, his voice a deep rumble of pleasure.

Lacey used her inner muscles to squeeze him tightly, enjoying the burn her action caused. His hands now roamed her back and her hips. He stopped at her hips and held tight, pulling her sharply to him as he rocked in and out of her heat.

The scent of their lovemaking was heavy on the air, heightening her senses, pushing her excitement to an all time high. The sound of flesh upon flesh thrust her over the precipice.

"Oh God ... Chance!" Her voice broke, as did the dam of her arousal. Bright light burst behind her eyelids as her wet sheath quivered around his length, milking every ounce of pleasure possible from his heated body.

Chance pulled her to him several more times before stiffening behind her. Lacey could clearly feel his throbbing erection as he filled the condom covering his shaft. The groan that left his throat seemed to be torn from his body as he slumped forward over her back, bearing them both to the mattress.

"Damn! Sorry baby." His quiet words met her ears as he rolled from her, gathering her in his arms.

They just lay there, side by side, for several minutes. She was drifting into a lust-induced slumber when he nudged her neck. "You're incredible, Lacey Winslow."

Chance's words were sincere. They made her heart race. The way he spoke, full of awe over what they had accomplished together. How Lacey wished she could say the words coursing through her mind.

To be able to turn to him and say *I love you* without feeling as though she'd lose all the tiny pieces of herself she'd so recently found. Lacey couldn't take the chance of that happening.

Feeling a bit uneasy, she scooted from the bed as quickly as possible. She picked up the first article of clothing she came across, which just happened to be the chambray shirt

Chance had shrugged off and carelessly thrown on the floor.

She should have known better. It smelled of Chance, manly and musky and too damned close.

"Lace?"

Lacey didn't feel like answering questions. She needed time to think, a few minutes to gather herself and to protect her heart against the ache she knew was destined to come.

"Are you hungry?" She didn't wait for an answer before heading toward the door. "I am. I think I'll go raid the fridge and see what I can find for us."

Lacey reached for the door without looking back. It was probably a good thing she didn't look back because if she had, she'd have seen his brown eyes narrowed in her direction. The intense look combined with the fierce scowl crossing Chance's face might very well have scared the crap out of her.

"I'll be there as soon as I clean up a bit." Lacey heard the bathroom door snap shut like a shot in the dark as she bolted from the bedroom.

"I am such a damned idiot," she mumbled. Her house had been broken into, her bed destroyed and here she was, alienating the man who had willingly taken her in.

Lacey forced the memory of seeing her room tore up away even as she fought the panic rising in her chest over the feelings she didn't want to have for Chance.

If she admitted to loving Chance she'd be doomed. There would be no way out. No way to keep her heart separate from the sex she enjoyed so much.

"As if you're doing a good job of keeping them separate now."

She pulled the refrigerator door open with more force than necessary. Dammit! She was a new woman, an independent woman who'd recently fought to overcome so much and won, so why in the hell couldn't she just sleep with the man without falling for him.

The thought whirled through Lacey's mind as she pulled sandwich fixings from the fridge, slamming them on the counter. She was so caught up in her fit, muttering to herself that she didn't hear Chance enter the kitchen.

When he grabbed her wrist before she could slam the jar of mayonnaise onto the counter, Lacey nearly jumped out of her skin.

"Care to tell me what's going on?"

She plastered a mulish look onto her face but refused to look at him. Instead, she jerked her wrist from his grasp, thanking her lucky stars that he let her go, and said, "Nothing is going on. I'm hungry is all."

"You're gonna have to try harder than that, baby, because I'm not buying it."

She turned then with the intention of laying into him. The words died on her lips when he pinned her to the counter. "Don't take whatever is pissing you off out on me, Lacey. I already have a few things to take up with you. You don't want to add to the list."

Men could be frustrating as hell but add to that a macho cowboy who is full of himself and the whole thing turned downright aggravating. Lacey wanted to say as much, to question his sanity as well as hers, but couldn't manage to string enough words together to form a sentence.

His closeness stole her breath. The width of his bare chest left her fingers tingling with want. It was enough to make a grown woman scream.

"Just leave me alone for a few minutes, Chance."

"Not going to happen, sweetheart. You're trying to block me out again and I won't have it."

Chance grasped her arms, gently but firmly, and pulled her to him. His kiss was punishing. He took everything she offered and pushed for more. When she refused to part her lips for the invasion of his tongue, he wound her hair in his hand and tugged just enough to make her gasp.

“Bastard,” Lacey breathed the word as his taste bloomed on her tongue and that was all it took for her to melt into him.

His hand left her hair, trailing down the side of her head until it rested on her cheek. His other hand occupied the same spot on her other cheek, effectively caging her face in for his kiss, his desire.

Never before had Lacey felt as cherished as she did just then. His thumbs stroked her temples as his fingers massaged her scalp, rendering her unable to do more than lock her knees and hope she could remain standing.

She was left breathless and panting when he finally broke the kiss. A smile of sheer masculine triumph curved his mouth. “Much better,” the arrogant beast said, as he stroked a thumb across the sensitive plane of her kiss-swollen lips.

Lacey tried not to notice Chance’s lack of dress as he moved across the kitchen toward the table. His jeans hugged his ass, outlining every luscious inch of him. When he moved around the table and turned to face her before sitting, she thought she might swallow her tongue.

Unfastened, his jeans didn’t hide his obvious arousal. Sans underwear, it was hard to miss the glistening head of his erect shaft as it peeked over the lowered fly of his jeans. Knowing she wasn’t the only one affected by their kiss helped ease her irritation a bit, but not enough to keep her from huffing as she followed in his wake across the kitchen to plop their sandwiches onto the table.

* * * *

Chance wanted so badly to chuckle at Lacey’s antics. It was obvious she was trying to avoid him, or goad him, Chance wasn’t sure which but it didn’t really matter because, as soon as they were finished eating, he was going to take care of some unfinished business with Lacey perched face down over his lap.

And as soon as that was taken care of, he was going to take her right back to bed and make love to her every way a man could love a woman. After accomplishing those two tasks, Chance might consider taking her down to the stables with him to check on the horses.

The palm of his hand tingled in anticipation and there was no amount of mulish looks aimed at him that could ease the ache between his legs.

He shifted his weight on the chair then said, “Eat up Lacey, we’ve got some business to take care of.”

Chance took a large bite of his sandwich, trying not to smile at the narrow-eyed look she had pinned on him. Just as he’d said before, the minx was trouble with a capital T.

Lacey’s lips opened, showing her straight pearly white teeth, as she put the last bite of her sandwich into her mouth and proceeded to chew slowly. When her tongue peeked out to gather a stray breadcrumb, Chance watched in utter fascination.

He wanted to follow the path her tongue had taken with his own. To trace the seam of her lips, nibbling and nipping until her knees grew weak and her body sagged against his.

“Now,” she started. “What business was it that we needed to take care of?” Lacey asked the question in the same tone a prim and proper teacher would use. The only thing that belied her nervousness was the fact that she had folded her napkin over and over until it formed a perfect square.

Chance stood and held out a hand for hers. “Come on and I’ll show you.” He tried his damndest to hide the anticipation in his voice. He’d waited a long time to paddle her fine ass and now that the time was upon them, he could almost hear her husky cries.

He stood there with his arm outstretched until she placed her hand in his. Curling his fingers, Chance gently engulfed her small hand in his.

He moved silently down the hall toward his bedroom with Lacey beside him. His arm was now firmly planted around her waist, holding her close. Savoring the feel of her petite frame next to his.

When they reached his room, Chance released Lacey, then moved across the room to sit on a chair. Her eyes were trained on him, the need to ask questions written clearly in their depths.

“Close the door, Lacey.”

Chance smiled when she turned to do his bidding, no questions asked. He would bet The Lazy B’s prized brood mare that she’d be arguing soon enough. When the door was firmly shut and Lacey was once again facing him, he continued forward with his plan.

“Come on over here, baby. I have a few things I need to say to you and I want you close so I know you’re paying attention.”

Her pixie-like face scrunched up in a frown at his words, worry lines etching themselves between her pale brows. After heaving a noisy sigh, she moved across the room, stopping only when she was standing before him, held close in his arms.

Chance kissed Lacey’s cloth-covered abdomen before releasing her. “What did you want to talk to me about, Chance?”

“I’ve got a few points to get across. You want to sit or stand?” She made no reply. Instead, she lowered herself to his thigh, driving him insane. Chance could feel the heat of her right through the denim of his jeans. Knowing she was naked beneath his shirt only made it worse.

“The first thing I have to say is that you don’t listen for shit. Now don’t go pookering up on me, darlin’,” Chance said when she stiffened in his arms. He continued, undeterred by her reaction to his words.

The first day I came back to your place as a client I warned you I’d paddle your ass if you walked away from me. You did it anyway and then I learn you single handedly chased away a would-be robber.”

That alone was enough reason to set her ass on fire. Chance paused to see if Lacey had anything to say, but she remained silent, her lips clamped firmly shut, her eyes shooting blue daggers his way.

“As if that wasn’t bad enough, today you follow me into your house not knowing what in the hell was going on in there and after I told you to stay put.”

His second volley of words seemed to be just the thing needed to ignite her ire. Lacey leapt to her feet. Chance didn’t try to hold her. She stalked several feet away before whirling on her bare heel.

She was a sight to behold. Her hair was a riot of untamed curls flowing around her shoulders. Her eyes were narrowed to mere slits and the way she held her balled fists on

her hips outlined her shape perfectly in his overlarge shirt.

“You are an arrogant ass, Chance Bodine and if you think I’m going to stand here and let you spank me, you’re crazy to boot.”

“Not standing there, baby. That wouldn’t work too well, I don’t think. You’ll have to come back over here and drape yourself across my lap.” Chance patted his thigh to punctuate his point.

He could almost guess at what was going through her mind. Could she make it to the door before him? Was he serious? Would he really spank her and if so, would she like it?

The questions chased their way across the blue oceans of her eyes.

“Come on back over here, Lacey.” Chance lowered his voice. “This could be one of the most arousing experiences of your life, baby, all you have to do is open yourself up to it.”

Roaring his need wouldn’t get anything accomplished except to scare her, but for the life of him it was exactly what he wanted to do. When she inched her way closer to him, Chance smiled and held out his arm.

His help was minimal as she awkwardly draped herself over his lap. He needed Lacey to do it herself, to take responsibility for her part in what was about to happen. Chance wasn’t about to leave an opening for her to play the victim. Either she was a willing participant or it didn’t happen.

“Ready, Lacey?” Chance stroked her back over his shirt. To feel the warmth of her flesh right now would set things on a different course.

When she nodded her head, Chance ran a finger up her spine, causing a shiver to reverberate down its length. “Say the words, baby.”

“I’m, uh, I’m ready.”

Chance gave her no time before laying a heavy hand on the pale globes of her ass. Her swift inhalation of air told him he’d caught her off guard. He landed several more swats. Each one intense. Burning. Serving a purpose. “You won’t ever put yourself in harm’s way again, Lacey.” Chance delivered another volley of swats to her now pink backside. “Do you understand?”

“Yes. Ahhh.” Her voice broke as Chance changed the strength of each smack from punishing to that of a caress.

He dipped his fingers between her thighs, feeling exultation when she shifted to widen her legs. Teasing her heated flesh brought forth cries of both pleasure and frustration.

“You’re so wet, Lacey. Is that for me? Are you hot for me, baby?”

“Oh God, Chance. Do something, dammit.”

She rubbed herself against his lap. The movement caused the pinkened cheeks of her ass to jiggle invitingly. Chance could wait no longer. It was time. Time to hear Lacey scream his name in surrender. Time to love her until she knew once again what love was.

Chapter Eleven

It was embarrassing the way her body reacted to Chance's nearness. It didn't seem to matter whether they were nude in bed or mucking out the stables, as they had earlier in the day, her body still craved his touch, the taste of him on her lips. Hell, she even craved the burn of her flesh as his hand landed with quick, efficient strikes.

The thought of all they'd done last night after her spanking left Lacey shaken and confused. Never before had she let loose with such wild abandon. It was infinitely startling just how much emotion Chance could wring from her body as well as her heart.

It was time to come to terms with the fact that somewhere along the line, she'd fallen deeply in love with all that was Chance Bodine. From the top of his cowboy hat to the tip of his scuffed boots and all that lay in between, Lacey was lost.

Being lost wasn't one of the emotions she dealt with well, so as the day wore on, her nerves grew thin. She felt so brittle it seemed as if a good stiff wind could shatter the last of her control.

Lacey thanked the stars that Chance had gone back to the stables after lunch to check on one of the mares who was showing signs of foaling. His absence gave her the time she needed to think.

Not only had she let the man spank her, but she'd moaned and writhed beneath him as he pounded into her body, her moans of delight filling the room. There had been nothing one-sided about the whole experience, though. Not only did she take what Chance so willingly offered but she gave in return.

It wasn't until this morning that Lacey realized she gave as only someone in love could give. The thought made her stomach churn. How could she have fallen in love so easily when she'd barely managed to get on with her life after the mockery that had once been her marriage?

Lacey shifted her thoughts in another direction. She wasn't willing to dwell on what might happen when Chance tired of her. She'd deal with that bridge when she crossed it.

In order to keep her train of thought off of Chance, Lacey concentrated on going over the shocking events of the night before. Closing her eyes, Lacey pictured within her mind the destruction of her bedroom.

Knowing someone had been in her bedroom made her feel violated, and normally that would have angered her, but it seemed that in this instance, the only emotion she could muster was fear.

As the memories assailed her, her hands began to tremble slightly. She'd never considered herself a wimp, but there was just something about knowing someone had been in her home, her bedroom, with the intent to do damage that shattered every vestige of innocence she might have still carried deep within her heart.

The shrill ring of the phone caused her to jump, but Lacey welcomed the interruption. Dwelling on the break-in would accomplish nothing, she silently told herself.

"Hello."

"Hey sweetie. You okay?"

Lacey recognized Bobbie's voice right away. She smiled at the other woman's

worried tone, thinking how nice it was to have a friend to lean on.

"I'm fine, Bobbie. How's Maddy?"

"Almost as mean as her daddy." Lacey giggled at Clay's outraged bellow in the background.

"I've been worried about you since Clay told me what happened." Bobbie's voice was low and steady. Lacey silently thanked her for not calling in hysterics or overly emotional. She felt as if she were hanging on to her emotional sanity by a mere thread.

"I'm still in shock really. It was pretty scary showing up to my house only to find it unlocked. Then Chance went inside without waiting for anybody..."

The possibilities lingered in Lacey's words as well as in the shake of her voice. She didn't realize how much the thought of Chance getting hurt had affected her.

"He's a big boy, sweetie, and can take care of himself."

"I know, but that doesn't make it any easier. Besides, I was embarrassed for him to see what had been done to my room."

Another realization to sneak up on her.

"Will you be able to salvage anything? If not, I've got clothes and anything else you might need, and what I don't have, we'll buy. Okay?"

"Thanks Bobbie, but that won't be necessary. The damage seemed to be single-mindedly thought out. Other than painting obscenities on the wall, the only things damaged were my bed and the lingerie Chance bought me."

Something clicked in Lacey's head as she spoke the words. Visions of Andy watching her and Chance as they'd left the lingerie shop, flashed before her eyes. The way only her bedroom had been ransacked but nothing had been stolen, it all fit.

"Lacey? Lacey are you there?"

Bobbie's persistent voice pulled Lacey from the disturbing images crowding her mind. A red cloud of anger seized every muscle in her body and for the first time in her life, she wanted to do bodily harm to another human being. Not just any human being but her no good, sorry ass excuse for an ex-husband.

"I'm here, but I've got to go. I'll call you later."

Bobbie must have heard something in her voice. "What's going on, Lace?"

"That coward thinks he's going to get away with terrorizing me, but he's got another think coming."

The more Lacey vented her anger the worse it became. "I'm going to wipe the floor with his ass and then I'm going to have him thrown in jail, ex-husband or not."

Lacey hung up the phone and headed for the door. Instead of relieving some of the anger boiling inside of her, the walk to the stables where Chance's truck was located only increased the amount of betrayal she felt deep inside.

As Lacey rounded Chance's truck, she knew she had another battle to win before laying into Andy. Chance stood in the doorway of the stables. His legs were spread, his arms crossed over his massive chest and he didn't appear to be too happy. Bobbie must have told Clay what she'd said because he stood beside Chance. He seemed to be relaxed, but Lacey knew better than to dismiss the man. He was just as protective of women, if not more so, than Chance.

Lacey took a deep breath to calm her nerves, then straightened her spine and stalked over to the pair.

"I need to use your truck. I'll bring it back as soon as I'm done."

Short, simple and to the point. Of course, she knew he'd never agree, but she didn't feel as though she had any choice but to try. Lacey turned her head to glare at Clay when he chuckled. He held up his hands as if to ward her off, but didn't leave her alone with Chance.

"Nice try, baby, but I don't think so."

Lacey felt like screaming but she wasn't at all surprised. "Dammit, Chance. Don't screw with me."

He arched a brow at her, but made no move to hand over the keys. Long seconds passed before he even opened his mouth to speak.

"I've already called Mike and Doug, Lacey. Things will be taken care of."

Once again, Lacey had to wonder if all men were idiots. Was it impossible for a man to understand that a woman might possibly be able to fend for herself? That she might actually want to have a say in the way things happened?

She moved forward until she stood nose to chest with him then took the long visual journey to meet his face. There was more there than irritation or even anger. A sparkle of something made his features seem different. Lacey didn't want to be distracted and cursed Chance for having the ability to do so.

"I don't care who you've called. I want to know why and I want to be there when they cart his ass off."

The sparkle disappeared to be replaced by a fierce scowl. "I won't let you use my truck."

Lacey knew by the way Chance was holding himself, by the determination and sheer stubbornness of his voice, that no amount of coercion would make him change his mind.

Without another word, she turned and walked away, leaving Chance and Clay where they stood.

"Where in the hell do you think you're going?" Chance's voice thundered across the small stretch of space she'd put between them.

"To town."

"How?" The question was growled between what Lacey imagined to be clenched teeth.

Without turning, she yelled over her shoulder. "Walking, I guess. Until someone happens by and offers me a ride."

She couldn't help the triumphant smile that curved her lips when she heard the door of his truck slam closed accompanied by a string of spewed curses.

* * * *

The damned woman was a menace. A brat of the worst kind, but that didn't stop Chance from loving her, heart, body and soul. She was testing just a bit more than his patience. Every nerve in his body was on red-hot alert, demanding he make her listen.

Tie her to your bed if necessary to keep her safe! The voice inside his head demanded, but Chance knew doing so would cast aside any chance he had of a real future with the stubborn as hell Lacey Winslow.

He revved the engine of his truck, sending gravel spinning as he headed toward Lacey, who was still stalking resolutely down the road leading from the ranch. She could goad a saint and Chance wasn't feeling very saintly at the moment. He wanted to lock Lacey in his house, go find Andy Winslow and beat the man to a bloody pulp.

“Get in the truck,” Chance demanded, as he pulled up beside her.

When she stood there glowering at him, it took everything in him not to get out of the truck, pick the troublesome minx up and bodily put her in the truck. Chance knew if he so much as touched Lacey he would end up either fucking her senseless or paddling her ass until she couldn't sit and neither option would do in this case.

He held tight to his frustrations, fighting the urge to collect Lacey and take her back to his place. Instead, he waited as patiently as possible until she finally relented. He watched as she walked around the truck; then opened the door before slowly climbing inside the cab.

She didn't scoot to the center of the seat where he could reach her and pull her close. The aggravating woman hugged the door, acting as if he was going to pounce on her. It was probably for the best. God only knew she could test the patience of a saint and Chance was feeling far from saintly.

She pushed and pushed until Chance felt as though he'd reached the end of his rope and all without the benefit of a net to catch him when he fell.

Why did he have to fall head over heels in love with a woman who refused to listen? He mulled over the thought. He knew there was going to be hell to pay before things got worked out, especially if Lacey thought he was going to sit back and do nothing while she continually put herself in danger.

“Not going to happen.” He muttered the vow beneath his breath, ignoring Lacey when she turned to him, her blue eyes searching his face for answers.

“When we get there, I want you to stay in the truck until I get the chance to talk to Mike and Doug.”

Her small hands fisted in her lap at his words. She turned in the seat until she was seated sideways, facing him. Chance wanted to chastise her for not having her seatbelt on but decided against it even though the overwhelming need to keep her safe knotted his gut.

Ready for an all out verbal war, Chance was surprised at Lacey's calm retort.

“I'm not waiting in the truck, Chance.” When he opened his mouth to argue, she held up her hand, a gesture meant to silence. Chance snapped his mouth shut even though what he really wanted to do was talk until his words sank in and she finally agreed with what he had to say.

“Just listen to me for a minute. I know you're worried, but Andy won't hurt me, he's just trying to scare me and for a while he accomplished it.”

Her voice was strong, resolute. Her chin was tilted at a defiant angle and while he wanted to shake some sense into her, he also wanted to run his tongue along the pale column of her neck.

“That man had me walking on eggshells for years. I was afraid to say or do anything that might break up our marriage, afraid to be myself or to stand up for myself, but I'm not afraid anymore, Chance.”

He watched her chest rise as she took a deep breath. Her throat worked as if her next words were hard to get out. “I'll never again let anyone, man or woman, take from me who I am. Not even you.” The last came out as a tortured whisper.

“Dammit, Lacey.” There was no heat to his words. Chance was worried and torn. The possessive beast inside pushed one way while the man who loved the woman sitting beside him pulled another.

“It’s taken me a while, Chance, but I’ve finally found myself again. I’m strong and loving you has only made me stronger, but I won’t let you fight my battles, at least not this one. This time I have to have my say.”

Chance was reeling at her declaration of love. Did she even realize what she’d just said? His heart beat wildly against his chest at her admission. He gripped the steering wheel tighter, knowing what he had to do.

He didn’t have to like it but in order for Lacey to continue past the hurt her bastard of an ex-husband continually tried to heap on her head, he would have to stand back and watch in silent support as Lacey worked with Mike and Doug to make sure Andy paid for his crimes.

Maybe in the process, she would be able to relinquish the ghosts of her past and be willing to grasp hold of a future with him.

She was staring at him. Waiting. Her blue eyes were wide, her face a bit pale, causing his protective instincts to go on high alert. Chance wasn’t sure what she wanted him to do or expected him to say. There was no time for the words he wanted to express or for the actions he hoped would follow. When he finally got her alone once again, it would take days, possibly weeks, before he let her go. She would know every emotion his heart held so protectively, just as he would reacquaint himself with every silky smooth inch of her body.

Chance pulled the truck to a stop along the curb in front of Lacey’s house. Mike and Doug were already there. Leaning against a patrol car, the two were talking, their faces grim.

When Lacey turned from him to open the truck door, Chance could no longer keep quiet or keep his hands to himself. With a hand on her arm, he stopped Lacey’s forward movement. A gentle tug pulled her to him and in a matter of seconds Chance covered her mouth with his. The kiss was seductive and possessive. Although hard, it was in no way punishing. Lacey moaned against his lips, taking what Chance readily offered, her hunger apparent. Although it was the last thing he wanted to do, Chance ended the kiss. Resting his forehead against hers, he said, “I can’t promise anything, Lace, but I’ll do my best.”

She stared at him for a minute before nodding her head. Her eyes seemed stark, desolate. Chance wasn’t sure what emotion she was holding back and had no time to think further on it, but something in the back of his mind warned that more was wrong than just the upcoming confrontation with her ex-husband that was bothering her.

Chapter Twelve

Lacey wasn't sure she could remember a time when she'd been so angry and hurt. She wanted to lash out at those around her, but doing so would hinder, not help. Mike and Doug might very well be the epitome of macho male jerks, but they meant well in their own twisted way so the very least she could do was cooperate.

The anger blurring her view should be aimed only at the man responsible, so that was where Lacey concentrated. Andy deserved every vulgar thing coming to him for the things he'd done to her.

It was very disconcerting to admit, even to herself, that at one point in her life she'd been in love with the weasel. Lacey pushed away all the other thoughts rolling around in her head.

She didn't have time to dwell on the fact that Chance hadn't so much as uttered a word of gratitude, much less a vow of undying love in return for her emotional admission. When it was all said and done there would be plenty of time to kick herself repeatedly in the ass for blurting out her feelings the way she had, but right now there was business to be taken care of, questions to ask.

The main thing Lacey wanted to know was why? Why would a man who had once vowed to love, honor and protect her do the things he'd done?

Because he's a coward.

The little voice in Lacey's head didn't tell her anything she didn't already know. Hell, she really had no reason to confront the idiot, but she was going to anyway. Something was compelling her to do so and Lacey felt deep inside that if she didn't insist on hearing Andy's answers firsthand, insist on retaining a small amount of control over the situation, she'd regret it.

After taking a deep breath, Lacey walked toward where Mike and Doug stood. It wasn't until she had nearly reached the patrol car that she realized Andy was sitting in the back seat. Her heart thundered against her ribs and her palms were damp with sweat. They'd caught the bastard.

Lacey heard the door of Chance's truck squeak open, but didn't turn to see what he was doing. Her gaze was focused on her ex-husband. She briefly wished she were a man but the thought didn't linger long when she remembered the feel of Chance's hands as they roamed her heated flesh.

The immense amount of anger coursing through her veins propelled Lacey forward. She stalked the rest of the way to the patrol car in single-minded determination to reach it and slap the shit out of the coward sitting in the back.

"Dammit, Mike, would you stop her!"

Lacey heard Chance's bellowed words and the sound of his feet hitting the ground in quick thundering succession. He'd stayed away much longer than she thought he would. Persistent was what he was. A small smile curved her lips.

Lacey reached for the door set on asking questions and getting answers. "Not so fast," said a voice from behind her as a beefy arm was wrapped around her waist from behind, lifting her off the ground as if she weighed no more than a feather.

A growl of frustration erupted from her throat, startling her and making the man

behind her chuckle. "I just want to ask him why."

Mike Dodson lowered her to the ground near the front of the patrol car. Lacey turned to give him a narrow-eyed stare when he kept a hand clamped firmly on her arm. He kept her in place until Chance was standing beside her. Lacey vowed then and there that if he said a word to her he would live to regret it. He remained silent, although the look in his eyes reeked of frustration and anger. Barely leashed violence lingered just beneath the surface of his gaze.

"You'll get your chance to talk to him, just not quite the way you had planned." Lacey sighed. With no choice, she resigned herself to following the rules.

Mike swept an arm out, leading the way. He led her to a now open door of the patrol car where Andy sat, hands cuffed behind his back, his face stark, pale. The front of his shirt was dirty and torn as if he'd resisted arrest and lost. Lacey had no real desire to have a conversation with the man, she just wanted to have her question answered.

"Why, Andy?" It was really a very simple question and yet, her ex-husband looked as if she'd just asked him how to bring about world peace. His blank stare fueled her anger. The fear and hurt she'd felt all came rolling back over her like a thundercloud on a dark and stormy night.

"Dammit, Andy, why?!"

Her anger seemed to snap Andy out of his trance. His face mottled with rage belying his anger. "Because of him. You've been whoring for him when you belong to me."

Lacey couldn't help but stare, dumbfounded. The man couldn't really be that big of an idiot.

"I don't belong to you, Andy. I don't think I ever did, really, not when you couldn't remain faithful to me." She shook her head, all of a sudden weary.

"Why did you try to break into the house before?" Not knowing for sure if he was responsible for the attempted robbery on her home bothered Lacey more than she cared to admit.

Andy's eyes widened at her words, then narrowed before a mask of indifference crossed the worn features of his face. "I needed money. Over and over you refused to give me a loan so I decided to take what I could, but then you woke up and I had no choice but to leave."

Lacey nodded her head as if she understood, although she didn't. To know so little about the man she'd once been married to was a hard pill to swallow. With nothing more to ask, she turned and walked away. She headed toward her house; the need to cleanse her bedroom of Andy's touch was overwhelming. Almost as compelling as the need to get away from Chance before she did something stupid like throwing herself at his feet and begging him to love her back.

The back of her eyes stung with unshed tears, the vulnerability making her angry. Lacey stopped dead in her tracks at the familiar sound of footsteps behind her. With single-minded determination, she squared her shoulders and turned around.

Three sets of intense eyes started back at her but it was the whiskey depths of Chance's brown eyes that drew her.

"We'll need you to come down to the police station to make a statement." His eyes shifted from her to Chance and back again before he added, "Later." Doug was talking to her but it was as if his mind was somewhere else. There was just something about Officer Pennington that screamed danger.

Lacey's attention snapped back to Chance as he moved closer. "If this evening doesn't work for you, tomorrow morning should be just fine." A crooked smile curved Doug's lips as he spoke to her, a glimmer of amusement once again shining in his eyes. Doug brought a finger to the brim of his hat before he turned and walked away.

Released from the stilted conversation, Lacey turned to walk away as well, only to be brought up short by another steely arm around her middle.

This time she recognized every bulging muscle and delicious hollow as Chance's front came in contact with her back. "Where do you think you're going?"

The low purr of his voice was instantly arousing, dampening her panties and causing the slick passage of her pussy to swell and spasm in anticipation. Only this time she couldn't just lean back into him. To allow him to hold her, to absorb his warmth as if it were her own would only make matters worse. Lacey had no doubt Chance had some sort of feelings for her. The way he watched her, touched her and held her, proved it, and yet he hadn't returned her words of love.

His closeness and her rioting emotions were making it impossible to think, impossible to focus enough to block out the pain of knowing once again she had fallen wholeheartedly in love with a man and his feelings in return were not as strong.

She couldn't seem to find the words to let Chance know she needed a bit of time alone to pull herself together. Burning tears stung her eyes, and not even rapid blinking would fix the problem.

"I'll call you later." The choked words left her lips, an overabundance of emotion along with them.

Chance must have been shocked by her words. He made no move to hold her when she tugged his hands free of her waist. Lacey didn't look back. She couldn't look back. The thought of not being with him left a hollow spot in her heart, one she had so recently spent much time repairing. Anger and grief warred as she stalked through the front door of her home.

The office was neat and clean as she passed through the room and into her private living quarters. Unheeded tears stained her cheeks but Lacey didn't notice. Overwhelming anger blinded her for a moment.

"I can't do this again." The anguished whisper wafted across the stillness of the room as Lacey lifted a knickknack from its spot perched on a shelf and launched it against the wall. The shatter of glass as the figurine hit the wall did nothing to soothe the hurt.

* * * *

Chance watched Lacey walk away, her back poker straight, her head held high and wondered what in the hell was going through her stubborn ass head. If she thought for a minute she could tell him she was in love with him, insist he stand idly by while she confronted her psychotic ex-husband and then just walk away like nothing ever happened, she was beyond wrong.

With no other option as far as he was concerned, Chance followed her. Although it went against everything he'd ever been taught, he entered without knocking. She was obviously not in her office, so Chance made his way through the room to the closed door leading to her living area.

He had just reached for the knob when he heard a frustrated growl and the shatter of glass. Chance burst through the door not knowing what to expect. His heart seemed to

stop, only returning to a more normal rhythm when he spotted Lacey across the room.

The haunted look on her face as she cried silent tears tore at his heart. He crossed the room. His long legged strides carried him to her side in a matter of seconds. He cupped her cheek, running his thumb over the wetness he found there.

“Tell me.”

The glorious length of her hair fell forward when she buried her face in her hands. Chance rested his hands on her shoulders, then proceeded to run them up and down her arms. He needed to feel her, to touch not only her body but her heart and her soul. The need to connect them together for all time shook him to his very core.

“Lacey, baby, what is it?”

She took a shuddering breath, lifted her head and looked at him. Her blue eyes were wide, stark and so damned lovely Chance was sure he could drown in their blue depths.

“I can’t do it again, Chance.” He opened his mouth to ask what in the hell she was talking about, but her next words cut him off.

“I didn’t mean to fall in love with you. I never wanted to fall in love again but it happened anyway.”

Another tear slid down her cheek. Chance had a sinking feeling she was going to break it off with him because of her fear of being emotionally involved. There was no way he’d let that happen. The urge to take her in his arms was overwhelming. The problem was, he didn’t know whether he wanted to hold her close or shake her.

“Listen to me, darlin’.”

The stubborn fool was shaking her head before he managed to get the words out. “No Chance. I need to tell you now. I think in many ways I fell in love with you the day you carried me away from Clay’s wedding. I was furious and embarrassed and made your life hell for a while after that, but even then I loved you, I just hadn’t realized it yet.”

Her voice shook with emotion as twin rivers streaked her face. “I’d do anything for you except stay in a relationship where I’m not loved in return.”

What in the hell was she talking about?

Chance tightened his grip on her upper arms. “I don’t know what in the hell...” He was ready to blast her with anger. To yell and rant and rave if that is what it took to make her understand exactly how wrong she was but once again, she cut him off.

“I’m not asking for forever, Chance. I’m not even asking for words you’re not ready to give.”

Enough was enough. “Lacey.” Chance growled her name, his patience about ready to snap.

Her eyes shot up to his face. The fact that she understood she was treading on dangerous ground was evident by the look on her face.

There was so much he wanted to say, so much he would insist on saying but first he had to taste her, to brand her his own. Her lips were soft beneath his. Chance slanted his mouth over hers, taking more than she offered then plunging his tongue deep when she gasped.

When her stiff body relaxed against him, softening in his arms, allowing the onslaught of so many emotions, Chance softened the kiss, then pulled away.

“If you’re done, Lacey, I think it’s my turn now.”

She didn’t say a word, merely nodded her head. Chance had trouble suppressing a chuckle.

“I hated you being married to Andy Winslow. You’ll never know how often I wanted to drag you away and make you mine, and now that I have, you think I’ll *ever* let you go?”

His voice had gone hard and possessive, but there was little Chance could do to change the feelings battering his heart.

“It took everything I had in me not to pound the asshole just now. I stood back like a damned coward because I knew you needed to have your say. You stun me by telling me you love me, then walk away like nothing. I won’t let you end this, Lacey.”

Chance was thoroughly exasperated by the end of his tirade. “I love you too much to ever live without you, dammit! How could you not know?”

She stared at him her eyes unblinking. The hand she brought to her forehead quivered slightly. “You ... you love me?”

“Good Lord woman, how could you think I could do anything but love you?”

This time Chance did give her a little shake, right before he gathered her close. Her trembling body felt perfect against his.

“Say it again. Tell me you love me, Lacey. Tell me you need me as much as I need you. Tell me you’ll pack everything you own and move to the ranch where I can hold you in my arms all day and beneath me every night.”

Her body shook against his. For a brief moment, Chance wondered if he’d said something wrong. When Lacey’s hands pushed against his chest, every nerve ending screamed to hold her tight.

It wasn’t until he finally gave her enough slack to put a bit of space between them that he noticed she wasn’t crying, she was laughing. Tears still trickled down her cheeks but they were accompanied by a bright smile.

“Good grief, Chance. Even when you’re professing your undying love you still manage to be possessive and bossy.” The words came out on a bubble of laughter, then she rose up on her toes and kissed him lightly on the lips.

“I love you, Chance Bodine.” She nipped his lower lip; then laved the offended flesh with her pink tongue, causing Chance’s cock to stand up and take notice. “And yes, I’ll move to the ranch and let you hold me by day if I can be on top sometimes at night.”

Her peal of laughter was music to his ears just as her naughty words. He swatted the lush expanse of her ass before lifting her over his shoulder.

“I say we forgo shaking on this deal. I can think of much better ways to seal the bargain.” Chance carried Lacey out the door and to his truck, where he settled her in the center of the bench seat so she’d be close. As they drove to The Lazy B, he thanked his lucky stars he’d been given the chance of a lifetime.

The End

About the Author:

Maggie Casper’s life could be called many things, but boring isn’t one of them. If asked, Maggie would tell you that blessed would more aptly describe her everyday existence.

Marrying young and being loved by a great husband and four gorgeous daughters

should be enough to make anybody feel blessed. Add to that a bit of challenge, a lot of fun and an undeniably close circle of friends and family, and you'd be walking in her shoes.

Speaking of challenges and fun, when not writing, Maggie's alter ego spends her time fighting fires and treating patients as a Lieutenant and Advanced Emergency Medical Technician with the local fire department. These awesome people are like her second family, no picking and choosing, they're just stuck with her.

A love of reading was passed on by Maggie's mother at a very early age and so began her addiction to romance novels. Maggie admits to writing some in high school but when life got in the way, she put her pen and paper up. Seems that things changed over the years because when she finally decided it was time to put her story ideas on paper the pen was out and the computer was in. Took her a while to catch up but she finally made it.

When not writing, Maggie can usually be found reading, doing genealogy research or watching NASCAR. If you'd like, drop by www.maggiecasper.com to see what Maggie's working on next.

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