

**Brit  
Blaise**

TOO  
MANY  
BRIDES

**CAVE  
CREEK  
COWBOY**



## CAVE CREEK COWBOY: TOO MANY BRIDES

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Just when he started to relax, however, the woman in front of him moved and he nearly impaled her. The warm moisture of her soft nest was like a homing device.

Bev stepped closer. "You don't recognize this?"

With his cock about to take the plunge he couldn't *see* anything. "I've never seen it before in my life."

One of the naked women groaned and another gasped. What was the damned paper? Why weren't they more worried about being in varying states of nakedness in the same room together? How many were there? And how the hell could he stop his damned cock?!

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"He doesn't remember."

"Remember what?" a woman at his feet asked.

He moved a toe and connected with skin.

"Paula, stay out of it. You were so drunk last night, you probably wouldn't remember your own name. It's a frigging marriage certificate and this moron can't remember signing his name to it."

ALSO BY BRIT BLAISE

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# CAVE CREEK COWBOY: TOO MANY BRIDES

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BY

BRIT BLAISE

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CAVE CREEK COWBOY: TOO MANY BRIDES  
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

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*For my Mike, who won the challenge.*

# CHAPTER 1

Mike awakened to discover a naked bottom pressed against his bare stomach. It didn't make sense. How could the arm draped across his hip from behind belong to *that* butt? The woman would have to be a pretzel. And what was tickling his back? Nipples? He slit open a single eye and quickly closed it again. In a fraction of a second he'd seen naked parts of female anatomy everywhere.

"Looks like Prince Charming is finally awake," a heated voice said.

Mike opened his eyes to see a familiar face, an angry one.

"Don't bother. You probably don't know my name," she said as he stared at her. "I'm Bev Wells and these naked women in bed with you are my friends. You, however, are a damned intrusion in our lives. I don't trust you any farther than I can throw you."

"What did I ever do to you?" Mike whispered between clenched teeth.

His head hurt like hell, his mouth tasted like horse shit and, as the

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naked, little ass rubbed against his stomach, his cock started to grow, trying to cop a feel. He moved his hand, at first to stop the too-friendly infringement he was certain would be unwelcome, but once he touched the tightly muscled and perfect woman's bottom, he couldn't resist resting his hand there. Just for a while.

"You did this." The woman named Bev waved a piece of paper in the air with dramatic feminine flair he could do without so early in the morning.

Behind him, the nipples started to stir. The woman rubbed her big breasts into him, making his cock rock hard in spite of the bizarre circumstances. So hard, he was now buried against the crack of the tight bottom in front of him.

Mike tried to keep his cool.

Just when he started to relax, however, the woman in front of him moved and he nearly impaled her. The warm moisture of her soft nest was like a homing device.

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Suddenly, Mike was wide awake and sober as all hell. "My name is on there? A marriage certificate?" He reached out to grab it.

"Ah, ah, ah," she said, lifting it high above her head, away from his reach. "Give the man a cigar. It says Michael Kale right here." She lowered the paper and pointed at it to emphasize her point.

"Who did I marry?"

Bev scowled at him and didn't answer. "I don't think I'll tell you. Connie, do you want to tell him?"

The big-breasted woman behind him sat up and reached for the covers. "I want to kick him in the balls right now."

*Connie? Connie Kettering? Please, don't let it be her!* Mike was a dead cowboy if he so much as touched her. Nipples poking against his back definitely qualified as touching. God only knows what would happen if *she* was the one he'd married.

"That's a 'no' from Connie." Bev held up a single finger, like she about to take a count. "Kresley, do you think we should tell him?"

The nice ass against his stomach moved a fraction nearer and he could feel the start of penetration—so unbelievably hot and tight. His breathing ratcheted and he started to sweat. No way did he want to be doing this in front of all of them. His cock, however, had no shame. Then as if he'd burned her, she jerked away, throwing the covers off for everyone to see Mr. Ready. "I think he'll rot in hell before I'll tell him."

*Kresley? Kresley Hansen? He'd almost... Kresley?*

Bev nodded and raised a second finger. "That's a definite no from Kresley. Paula?"

Mike had a finger he could raise, too.

Paula was too busy staring at his cock to answer. He reached for something to cover the damned thing. Nothing. Hands? Maybe, as a last resort.

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“Paula?”

“I say whatever you guys say.”

“Paula says no. That leaves the twins. Zandra, Zoe, what do you two say?”

But Mike was too busy still thinking about the naked butt. *Kresley Hansen. Why did it have to be her?* But it made perfect sense she’d be willing to fuck him in front of her friends.

“This is wrong. What kind of man doesn’t remember his own wife?” A naked woman on the floor had stood to speak. “I vote no.”

Mike had to look away, just in case she wasn’t his wife. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw another naked body stand. They were coming out of the woodwork. And speaking of wood... Mike attempted to cover himself with his hands and heard one of the women huff.

“Maybe he has amnesia. Connie, you did knock him down the stairs.”

“I didn’t push him. Zoe, you tripped him. I only patted him on the ass.”

“Liar, liar! You’ve never touched a man’s ass. You’d sooner sock them in the gut.”

“Leave Connie alone,” Bev insisted with three fingers in the air. “I need a yes or no, Zoe.”

“I have to vote no.”

“Zandra and Zoe both vote no. It’s unanimous, cowboy. None of us are going to spill the beans. You’ll have to find out for yourself who you married.”

Bev turned her back on him and started for the door. Suddenly, all of them were grabbing for blankets and sheets to cover their naked bodies as they made their way out of the room. He started to count. *Six. Six naked women.*

“Wait,” he called.

\* \* \*

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Kresley Hansen pulled her knees up under her chin and hugged her legs as she listened to Connie rant.

"I wish one of us had gone to medical school to become a shrink. I think there must be some deep-seated psychological reason you married him. Maybe you're hiding from something. Maybe Mike Kale is a way to make your parents notice you."

"*Maybe* I was just drunk, plain and simple," Kresley said, trying to understand it herself.

"What are we going to do?" Bev asked. "Your parents are going to kill you. Isn't there bad blood between your family and Mike's?"

"All I know is the Kale name is never mentioned in our house, even though two of my brothers compete against the Kale's. Since my brother Steve, and Ray Kale are both on the pro circuit, it's hard not to notice the tension. It's all a big mystery. But they never tell me anything since I'm the baby of the family."

"Mike is the youngest of four boys, just like you're the youngest." Connie sounded like a detective. "This is like Romeo and Juliet. Except *they* loved each other. I can't figure what's between you and Mike."

Kresley really didn't have a clue why she'd married Mike, other than the fact he was the first boy she'd kissed. *And I've never kissed anyone—ever—who kisses as good as he does.* How pitiful was that? She was fifteen when she kissed him and hadn't found anyone who kissed better since.

"Connie, you're right. I need a shrink. Where's the Yellow Pages? This all started when we were fifteen."

Connie threw her hands into the air. "Don't you dare bring that up. You know I can't handle it."

Bev sat down next to Kresley on the bed and looped her arm over Kresley's shoulder. Paula's eyes were as big as saucers and it seemed like she wanted to cry. Poor Paula hated confrontations. Zandra and Zoe were in front of the mirror working on their make-up, oblivious to

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the emotional upheaval Kresley was experiencing.

“Remember when we were fifteen and the three of us were at a rodeo in Flagstaff?” Kresley asked.

Bev nodded. “I’ll never forget it as long as I live.”

“I’m sorry, Connie.” Kresley didn’t want to be the one bringing it up, but it was long past time someone did. “I know we made a pact not to talk about it.”

Connie turned away, suddenly interested in the twins. Yeah, right. Connie hated to wear make-up. Kresley felt like a first-class jerk for making her friend think about that night.

“Before the evening went to hell in a hand-basket, remember how I sneaked into the tent where the older kids were playing spin the bottle to get my first kiss? It was Mike Kale I kissed. And we never talked about it because of what happened to Connie that night.”

Everyone, even the twins, turned to stare expectantly at Connie. The twins and Paula hadn’t been around back then—the night Connie was raped—and had no idea what had happened to their friend.

The last thing Kresley wanted was to upset Connie, but she needed to talk about why she’d always internally obsessed about Mike Kale. “Mike didn’t know he’d kissed a fifteen-year-old. He’d have been livid. But I knew I’d kissed him and I don’t think I ever got over it. And to make matters worse, I couldn’t talk about it since...”

Connie’s eyes started to glaze over. “We were stupid messing with the older crowd,” she said before heading to the bathroom.

Kresley wished they could talk about what had happened that fateful night and get it out in the open. Not once in the following seven years had they discussed it.

Bev cleared her throat. “So who’s going first? Which one of us is ready to make the man suffer for not remembering he married our Kresley?”

“I don’t know if I want to do this,” Kresley said. “We were all

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drunk but we still should've known better."

Bev nodded in agreement. "And Connie's idea of an old-fashioned shivaree was insane. All of us need to have our heads examined for going along with it—"

"I don't know," Zoe interrupted. "I think it'll make a great story to tell the grandkids. The night Grandpa went to bed with six naked women and woke up married to Grandma."

"This is all too much drama," Kresley insisted. "Besides, a shivaree is not naked women sharing my wedding bed. It's clanging pots and pans, or some such nonsense, in a noisy mock serenade while the married couple is trying to get frisky. You guys certainly made sure *that* didn't happen."

"Thinking of sex is what got you married in the first place," Bev said. "We were only trying to protect you. However, if you already have cold feet, you need to go first with him. I'll call and set it up." Bev reached for the phone and dialed Kresley's room.

"What took you so long to answer?" Bev snapped, uncharacteristically, into the phone.

This had to be hard on mild-mannered Bev who took her responsibility as a friend so seriously.

Bev covered the mouthpiece. "He says he was in the shower." She put her mouth back to the receiver. "We drew straws and Kresley is first. What are you doing tonight?" Bev listened in silence, while Kresley mentally squirmed.

"Pick her up before you go. You know the room number. You're in *her* room now. And don't go out the door next to the bed where we all went earlier. That one leads to the family suite. You don't want to risk one of Kresley's brothers thinking you defiled his little sister."

Bev listened in silence for a second time, tapping a perfectly French-manicured fingernail against her front teeth. When she dropped the receiver onto the phone, Kresley jumped.

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“You’re going to Brett and Alicia’s wedding tonight with him, but he also wants to see all of us at lunchtime, if we can make it. The restaurant across from the rodeo.”

“He wants to see us all?” Kresley moaned. “I don’t know why we’re even bothering. I’ll probably just end up getting an annulment.”

“Probably? I don’t want to hear it.” Connie came out of the bathroom, her face blotchy from crying. “I’m serious, Kresley. We’ve been friends since we were six. I’ve never seen you do a single impulsive thing—not once in your life. If you married him, even drunk, you *wanted* to marry him. We just have to figure out *why*. I’m sick and tired of you being as big a chicken as I am where romance is concerned. It’s my fault.”

“Let’s get some breakfast,” Bev suggested, probably trying to distract everyone from where the conversation was headed. “This is going to be a long day. It’s safe to go back to your room, Kresley. He said he was on his way out. Everyone get dressed and we’ll meet downstairs at the buffet.”

Kresley walked to the elevator after leaving Connie at her room. The Hansens had a suite of penthouse rooms, mostly because the Vegas hotels catered to her big brother, professional bull rider Steve Hansen. In fact, Steve had just accepted a sponsorship from the hotel where they were staying.

Instead of going straight to her bedroom, Kresley decided to get a Coke from the well-stocked kitchenette.

“Do you want to tell me what was going on last night?”

Kresley turned from the fridge to see Steve standing in the doorway.

“What?”

“Your friends all have their own rooms. Why in the hell did they stay here last night? The giggling and bumping around kept me awake half the night. Not to mention I ran into two of them, naked as the day

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they were born, while I was raiding the refrigerator. I barely made it safely back to my room alive.”

“The twins?”

“Who else but the twins?”

“You know their primary goal in life is to get you into bed with the two of them. Poor baby.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” Steve demanded, suddenly looking uncomfortable. “Why did they all have to sleep here?”

“They wanted to make sure my newlywed husband didn’t take advantage of me in a drunken stupor. He couldn’t keep his hands off of me, so Connie came...and then—”

“Husband?”

“I’m married.”

“Like hell you are.”

Kresley started to get angry. It took a while, but once she began to simmer...watch out. Her big brother was acting like a bully and she was impervious to his dominant-male theatrics. “I have the marriage license to prove it. Actually, I think Bev has it. She said she’s going to keep it safe.”

“I don’t think this is funny. If you’re married, you are in big trouble. Just who did you marry? Better yet, give me his measurements so I can fit him for a casket.”

“Get over it,” Kelsey said and headed toward her room.

“Don’t walk away from me.”

Kelsey gave him a talk-to-the-hand gesture and kept going. Once in her room, she locked the door behind her, just in case Steve wanted to continue their conversation.

“Am I going to make it out of here without popping your brother in the nose?”

Kelsey turned to see Mike come out of the bathroom with a towel around his trim, muscular waist. The thought of what the towel hid

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magnetized her gaze, until he made a defensive move with his hand, as if reminding her to mind her manners.

"I lied to protect you," she said. "I told him I was married. Otherwise, you'd already be a dead man."

His eyes narrowed with a skeptical expression. "Are you saying you didn't marry me? I can rule you out then?"

Kresley felt a flush of heat, completing the slow boil of anger her brother had started. "Please do. I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth."

"You've had hot pants since you were just a kid," he said, moving into her space.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You think I don't remember your tongue down my throat?"

Kelsey winced and tried not to take a step back.

"When I found out I nearly— I kissed a fifteen-year-old...when I was twenty. Someone in your family needs to keep you on a leash."

Kelsey could feel her face heating up to a flaming red. He knew she'd kissed him so long ago?

Mike stared at her lips. "My friends have ribbed me for years. I tried to find the girl who kissed me, only to discover you were jail bait and I had wanted to—fuck it."

"I'm sure you did want to fuck. A couple of your friends raped Connie that night. And you were upset because a young girl with a crush *kissed* you? Get out of here! I hope my brother beats the shit out of you. Jerk."

## CHAPTER 2

It was bad enough to sit next to Kresley Hansen in her tight, little miniskirt, but to sit next to her and hear his friend over the PA system getting a blow job was beyond torture.

Mike reached his hand toward her. "Let's get out of here before I do something stupid."

"Not with me, you won't."

"In your dreams, little girl. I don't want to get in another fight with my brother. When he heard Connie was one of the women I woke up naked with, he wanted to kill me."

"Poor baby. You and your brother ruined everyone's lunch this afternoon, not to mention what happened to Connie's arm. She has a dislocated shoulder from hitting him. Besides, I'm not leaving until the food is served."

"You can torture me if you want, but why do you have to do this to Ray...or Connie, for that matter? Both of them cringe when they look

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at us. Haven't you noticed?"

"Are you always such a charmer?" Kresley pulled self-consciously at her skirt.

"I'm beginning to think all this was ploy to rattle my brother. Is it the only way your brother can win against him tomorrow?"

"Let's get out of here," she said, standing up.

"Just tell me one thing. Tell me I didn't marry Connie. Ray couldn't handle it."

Kresley's leg brushed his hand and he nearly lost it. He wanted to see those legs wrapped around him despite his bravado.

"I know what you're thinking," she said, sounding superior. "And it's not about Connie or Ray."

"Girl, if you knew what I was thinking, you'd be running out of here like your tail was on fire."

And she did. It was all he could to keep up with her.

When he crawled into the limo after her, he half expected a high heel up his nose. Instead, he found her huddled in the corner with her face toward the window.

"I'm sorry." He settled himself at the opposite end of the seat, giving her space. "I shouldn't have said that. You seem to bring out the worst in me."

She turned to look at him with her golden eyes, only a few shades darker than her hair. He'd never seen anyone with amber eyes other than her. Even in the dark, so many years earlier, he'd been captivated by them. He had gone off in search of the girl with the golden eyes, only to discover she was jail bait.

"It's mutual." Her voice said barely above a whisper.

"What do I have to do to discover if you're the one I married?" he asked. He knew what he'd *like* to do. What he had always wanted to do to her.

"Truth or dare?" she suggested. "Why didn't you ever tell me you

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knew I kissed you?”

“Get real. Not only were you too young—much too young—you thought you were hot stuff...princess of the rodeo circuit, surrounding yourself with a throng of admirers. You had your picture in the paper every week attending one up-tight, high-society function after another.”

She winced and turned back to the window, making him feel like a heel. What was it about this woman turned him into a first-class shit?

“Truth or dare,” he mimicked. “Am I married to you?”

“Dare.”

“I dare you to kiss me.” Why the hell had he said that?

Kresley tuned back, narrowing her eyes as she stared at him before she shrugged.

Mike tingled to his toes anticipating her lips on his. When she started across the seat, it was all he could do not to meet her halfway. Her subtle fragrance came first, a woodsy scent, maybe sandalwood. She stopped short of touching him, and he breathed deeply capturing her exhalation. It was intimate breathing her second-hand air.

“Just a kiss,” she whispered before closing the space between them.

Mike had kissed his fair share of women, but from the onset of this kiss, he recognized trouble. This wasn’t just about skin touching skin. The taste of her lingered in a distant memory, unlocking a torrent of emotion. Sensations, he understood...emotions were another story.

Still, he burrowed into the soft, plump lips, running his tongue along their connecting seam to get her to open for him. On a gasp her lips separated and she took him into her mouth. At the same time, she pushed against him, crawling up onto his lap.

Running both hands up her legs as he continued to kiss her, he quickly discovered she wore nothing beneath the short skirt when his hands reached all the way to her firm, little ass. Yes! What a pleasant revelation. The front of his trousers suddenly tightened.

She arched against him, grinding into him. Heat and moisture

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burned through the material separating them and his cock responded with a painful throb. All the while, she kissed him almost desperately, as though she thought he might push her away at any time. Either that or she was a wild woman—he picked the later.

“Close the window and drive.” He pulled away from her kiss long enough to tell the driver, before he moved closer to the center of the seat, giving her more room.

She widened her stance. The girl knew how to move, he’d give her that.

Capturing her lips again, he allowed her to control what happened. The first one was lady’s choice, but the second time would definitely be *his*. He kissed her until they were both breathless and she was writhing on his lap. The sweet, musky scent of her need was thick in the close confines of the limo. If she didn’t do something soon, he was going to explode with her grinding against him like a teenager at the drive-in movies.

“Help me,” she whispered into his mouth. “Please...”

Mike hesitated, even though it took all he had. What if Kresley wasn’t the one he’d married? If he didn’t take this chance with her, though, he might never get another. It startled him to realize he wanted her to be the one. At the moment, he wanted it bad.

“Please?” she whispered again and ripped away his resistance.

Mike reached down to undo the waist of his trousers. Her hands followed as she unzipped him, pushing at his briefs until she had him in her hand. He lifted, pulling his pants down from behind, but with her still seated on top of him, there was no way could he get them all the way off.

However, Kresley wasn’t about to wait. She was already up on her knees, directing his throbbing cock to her hot core. Heat and moisture welcomed him, but she was too damned tight by far. She continued to move against him, thrusting and groaning.

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“Please?” She groaned again.

He lifted his hips from the seat, pumping into her. First the barrier and then the giving sensation as he entered her was unmistakable. Kresley gave a half-scream and came down on him until he filled her.

*What just happened? A virgin?*

Mike weighed his options as the urge to pump his seed into her tightened his balls until they ached. He tried to breathe through it—anything. He wasn’t going to last and he knew it. Quickly he reached his hand down to her clit. He ran his finger over the button and she reacted with a hiss of air between her teeth.

“Hold real still,” he told her. Then he began to massage her.

Only she didn’t listen, or maybe she just plain couldn’t. She started to move and he spewed his load into her. At the same time, she contracted and bucked against him.

*Thank God for small favors.* He hadn’t totally humiliated himself. Long after he was spent, she milked him until she finally stilled against his chest, her face buried in his shoulder. Mike put his arms around her, hugging her tight to him. He had the feeling he was holding a ticking time bomb.

Only Kresley didn’t explode, but he almost did a second time. Before he even knew what was happening, he was filling her again and ready to go—and not in a good way.

*What the hell?*

No way would he allow a second humiliation. He slowed his breathing and pulled back, shifting in the seat until she was under him. Kresley’s eyes were moist as she stared up at him.

“Say the word and I’ll stop,” he told her.

“I’ve wanted this for so long,” she whispered. “Don’t you dare stop.”

Mike pulled back, allowing the tight walls of her sex to collapse around the head of his cock. Pushing back inside he found she was

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almost as tight as the first time. “Are you sure?” he asked.

She wrapped both legs around him and arched into him, taking him all the way inside her. An extra push put him so deep he wondered if he was touching her cervix. She moaned and a second later he felt her contracting, clutching and squeezing with her soft, velvety walls.

It was all the motivation he needed to start moving. He held back, even though it cost him dearly. He was trembling from head to toe while he gently pumped into her, never quite going as deep as he wanted or as fast or hard. The easy rhythm brought him to the edge faster than he would have ever believed possible. What was it about Kresley that made him lose control?

His balls cocked into their tight place and slowing didn’t relieve the pressure. Instead, he began to pull back. No way was he going to spill his seed into her twice. It had to be sex without a condom making him lose control this way. *Didn’t it?*

Kresley tightened her legs, as if she never wanted to let go of him. She was a nationally ranked barrel-racer with legs like a vise. He had no choice. He began to take her like he’d wanted to all along. He plunged his hard cock into her tight warmth, seeking release. Welcoming it.

Mike allowed the feeling to take him, wash over and through him. The physical connection became mental, taking over his awareness. He crested into a contraction, but instead of ejaculating, he crested a second time and then a third going higher and higher each time and still he climbed.

\* \* \*

“What just happened?” Kresley heard Mike whisper into her ear. She didn’t want to talk, didn’t know if she could. The third and last orgasm had liquefied her bones, turning her into a quivering mass floating in space.

“We need to talk.” He pulled back, easing his weight off her.

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With him gone, she experienced a twinge of panic and the onset of mild pain as the air touched her swollen folds. What *had* she done?

“Not now,” she moaned. She didn’t want to ruin the high, but she’d already plummeted back to earth with a vengeance.

“The next words out of your mouth better be you’re my wife. Why else would you do that? You’re twenty-two, how in the hell are—were you still a virgin?”

Kresley wanted to curl up into a ball and fade into the seat cover. It was only then she thought about her surroundings. “You don’t think the driver could see, do you?”

“Wrong answer. Did you hear anything I just said?”

“I’m right here. How could I avoid it?”

“Are you my wife?”

“Would it make a difference if I was?”

“Maybe then I wouldn’t feel like such a giant shit. I always thought you...”

Kresley pulled a page out of Connie’s code of conduct and punched him in the gut. Only Connie would have aimed for his eye. “You *are* a shit. You don’t have to tell me you thought I was loose and willing. You and you’re friends made me the brunt of your jokes. Well, who’s laughing now?” Only she wasn’t laughing. In fact, she didn’t know if she’d ever laugh again.

“We didn’t use protection,” Mike added. “What if you’re pregnant?”

“How do I contact the driver with the window up?”

Mike pointed to an intercom. Kresley leaned forward, pulling her skirt down with her free hand as she pressed the button and spoke the name of her hotel. “Our date is officially over. I think Connie will be your second date. That way I get to enjoy seeing Ray thump the crap out of you, if Connie doesn’t beat him to it.”

## CHAPTER 3

Mike wasn't in the same hotel as Kresley. His brother Ray was being courted by a competitor, so his was down the road a piece. With every rotation of the wheels, he got angrier. Why had Kresley given him such a gift, only to cheapen it by not being his wife?

When he walked into the suite of rooms, Ray was waiting for him, black eye and all. "I've been trying to reach you all night. Why did you duck out of your friend's wedding without telling anyone?"

"Didn't you hear what was happening in the pool house? Is your eye worse than it was?"

"I had another run-in with Connie."

"I'd think you'd learn."

"This isn't about me and my problems with Connie. This is about you being married and unable to tell me her name. Zip your pants."

Mike automatically reached. Damn, had he walked through the hotel lobby with it down?

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“You didn’t.”

“Didn’t what? Didn’t forget to zip? Yeah, it would appear so.”

“You fucked Kresley after you left the wedding?”

“I think it was the other way around.”

“So she’s the one you married?”

A knock on the door distracted Ray. “Now who the hell could that be?” He stomped toward the door, casting a glare over his shoulder at Mike.

“Connie,” Ray said. “Come to admire your handiwork?” Ray stepped aside and Connie came through the door.

“No, it’s my turn with my husband.”

“Bullshit.”

Connie sidestepped Ray as he reached for her.

*What’s wrong with Ray’s head?* Connie had already shown him what she’d do if he touched her.

“Hello, husband,” she said as she approached Mike. She kept coming until she was on top of him. “Eeeww,” she said. “You smell like sex. Did you have sex with Kresley?”

Mike took a step back.

“You did, you son of a bitch.” She started to swing.

Ray caught her as she launched herself into the air.

“Let go of me. Put me down!” she screamed, flailing in the air.

“I’ll put you down if you keep your hands to yourself. You can’t go through life beating up on everyone who pisses you off. Especially with your arm in a sling. It’s anticlimactic.”

“He slept with Kresley,” Connie accused.

Ray huffed. “I suppose you’re so pissed about it because *you* married him. I know you better than that.”

“You don’t know me as well as you think you do. I’m pissed because Kresley is—*was* a damned virgin.”

Mike didn’t see it coming. He didn’t even see Ray put Connie down

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to free his right hand. How the hell he could have missed seeing a fist heading straight for his eye?

"You're lucky I didn't knee little Mike and the twins." Connie reached out her hand to help him up after a while.

"Thanks for small favors. The twins thank you, too."

"You two are crazy," Ray said. "Connie, if you *did* marry him, don't expect me to play the happy brother-in-law."

"Why? Because you think you have to look out for me? You think I can't take care of myself?"

"It's not about that. It never has been." Ray glared at the both of them and then stomped out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

"You have got to quit fighting with your brother," Connie said.

\* \* \*

Kresley walked into her hotel room to see her entire family waiting for her, five older brothers and her mother and father. To make matters worse, she wasn't exactly walking too well, and she was embarrassingly wet down there. She didn't want to think about the not-so-subtle fragrance of sex wafting from her.

Steve took a step forward. "Tell them. Tell them what the hell you've done."

She looked first to her mother's face and then her father's. Neither looked pleased, but it didn't surprise her. Could Connie be right? Had she married a Kale to piss off her family?

"Please tell us Steve is wrong," her mother pleaded. "You didn't marry a Kale."

At first Kresley wanted to deny it, just to see the worried look leave her mother's face. The impulse didn't last long as she thought about Mike. Maybe if her family wasn't so down on the Kale family, Kresley could have shown Mike how she felt about him in a normal way. Instead, she'd spent the last seven years like an obsessed stalker, watching him in muted silence and dreaming of him nightly.

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“Steve isn’t wrong. Mike Kale and I are married.”

“We’ll have it annulled.” Her father actually growled. “You should’ve known better.”

“You can’t have it annulled. I could be pregnant.”

“Did he rape you?” another of her brothers asked.

*What?* Kresley had never felt so alone. “Why would you ask such a stupid question? Of course he didn’t rape me. In fact, it was more like the other way around.”

“Oh, Kresley,” her mother moaned.

“Wait a minute...look at her,” said another brother. “Maybe it happened within the last twenty-four hours. She could get one of those morning after pills maybe.”

“I’ll do nothing of the sort. What’s wrong with you people? Why are you so dead set against Mike Kale?”

“If you’re so set on him,” her father demanded, “what are you still doing here? Why aren’t you with him?”

“Maybe because my family has me mentally screwed up?”

“Don’t say that. This has nothing to do with us.” Her father began to pace as he spoke.

“I know what to do,” Steve said. “I can confront Ray Kale and we’ll get this out in the open once and for all. You better warn Connie the shit is about to hit the fan.”

“What does Connie have to do with this?” Kresley demanded. Then a thought occurred to her...one she didn’t want to think about. *Could the Kales have been involved in Connie’s problem so many years ago? That didn’t make sense.* Connie was the one saying Kresley should try to figure out her feelings for Mike. Connie had some kind of special secret relationship with Ray Kale. She’d talked to him on the phone every Sunday night for as long as Kresley could remember.

“You stay here.” Steve pointed a finger at her.

It was the wrong thing to do or say.

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"I'm twenty-two years old and a married woman. You can't tell me what to do any more."

"If you are married, answer Dad. Why aren't you with your husband instead of here?" Steve snapped.

"Exactly! Why am I here, when I don't need to be attacked like this?"

"No one wants to attack you, we just want—"

"I know what you want," Kresley interrupted her mother. "You want to keep me your little girl. It's too late. And it's about time all of you start treating me like an equal in this family. It's evident all of you know something I don't. That's just wrong."

Kresley didn't wait for an answer. She swiveled on her heel and headed for her bedroom door. "I'm packing. You can find me at my husband's."

"Like hell," her father began.

"Let it go, Hank," Kresley heard her mother say. "Give her a few minutes to settle down."

"Wrong, Mom." Kresley slammed the door behind her and began to throw everything into her suitcases. In a few minutes she planned to be *gone*.

\* \* \*

Mike sighed. Dealing with Connie was like dealing with a hyperactive kid on a caffeine rush. "Connie, calm down. Ray didn't mean it."

"He hates me. He looks out for me only because of some warped sense of macho integrity. I bet he wishes he'd never met me."

"Did you ever consider getting professional help?" Mike joked. However, the ghostly pale Connie's face turned at his suggestion worried him. "I was joking."

"No, you're right. Ray is always telling me to talk to a shrink. He worries he'll advise me wrong."

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“Always telling you? I wasn’t aware you two had that much contact, or were close enough for him to tell you something like that.”

“Ray has called me once a week since I was fifteen. There have been very few times over the years he’s missed even a week or two.”

Mike couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Are you two an item?”

“And spoil our friendship? Besides you’ve seen the women surrounding him. What would he want with me? He’s a big-time rodeo star.”

“Connie, in the past twenty-four hours, you’ve given your so-called friend two black eyes.”

“I didn’t mean to. Really. I’ve apologized. Anyway, you started this whole mess by taking up with Kresley.”

Suddenly Mike got as serious as a heart attack. “Tell me I married Kresley.”

Connie stared at him, assessing him before she shook her head. “I’m not talking.”

“Then at least tell me I didn’t marry you. Ray is fit to be tied.”

“That’s not why he’s so angry.”

“Want to bet?”

A knock on the door interrupted them. It was hard to have fifteen minutes alone in the crowd he ran with. Someone was always stopping by to shoot the bull.

Mike opened the door to see Kresley with a suitcase on each side of her. “I’m moving in with you.”

“As my wife?”

She nodded.

Mike reached for her bags, startled for a few moments by how heavy they were. Kresley followed behind him until she spotted Connie. Kresley threw herself at Connie and began to cry. Connie seemed as surprised as he did.

While Kresley cried, Mike began to pace. The sound ate at him,

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making him feel helpless. Every time he walked near, Connie shot a warning glare in his direction to stop him short.

“My brother Steve said I should warn you.” Kresley’s words confused him until he realized they were directed at Connie. “He’s going to have it out with Ray, and he said you’d want to know.”

“What the hell is going on now?” he demanded. In twenty-four hours his world had been turned upside down.

“Why would Steve do that?” Connie asked.

“You don’t know?” Kresley questioned. “Could the Kales have anything to do with what happened seven years ago? That’s how Steve made it sound.”

“My attack? Yes, the Kales had something to do with it,” Connie muttered. “Why is all this being dredged up now?”

The confusion settling over Mike nearly suffocated him.

## CHAPTER 4

“Don’t worry.” Connie pulled away from the hug she’d given Kresley. “I’ll take care of this. Let me go talk to your family. You and Mike need to work things out.”

Kresley worried her lip and avoided looking at Mike. *Work things out?* She didn’t want Connie to confront her family, but since she still didn’t have a clue why her family was so set against her marriage, what choice did she have? “Keep in touch.”

“The final go-round is only three hours away.” Connie pointed at Mike. “Make sure she’s there.”

Mike nodded and reached for her suitcases again. Kresley watched Connie leave and then followed him. “I’m not sure why I came here.”

“Maybe because it’s our names on the marriage certificate?”

Tired of games, Kresley nodded. “What are we going to do about it?”

“Damned if I know.” Then he smiled.

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Kresley's heart jumped in her chest. Because he was stingy with his smiles, they were breathtaking. His face went from ruggedly handsome to devastating.

She was standing next to him before she even realized it. "We could take some time to get to know each other."

Mike smiled wider. "What did you have in mind?"

"I've already shown you what I have in mind when I'm with you. It's your turn. I'll take a shower while you decide."

"Right this way."

"What are you doing?" she asked when he followed her into the bathroom.

"I thought I could help. You might not be able to find the soap."

"I've never..."

"Evidently, there is more than one thing you'd never done before. It makes me wonder what else I could show you."

Kresley shivered down to her toes. "You could probably show me things I've only imagined."

"I wish you'd told me you were a virgin. I'd have...I would have been more careful."

"No, you'd have run for the hills."

"Do I look like I'm running? Now let's get you out of these clothes."

"If I have to be naked, it would be easier if you were, too."

"Trust me...that's exactly what I had in mind."

Kresley could hardly hold still as Mike began to undo her skirt.

"Do you always go without panties?"

"I had seducing you on my mind when I got dressed for the wedding. I didn't think I'd be too good at it. Leaving off my underwear seemed like something that might entice you."

"You succeeded. But as long as we're being honest, I have something to say." Mike shrugged out of his shirt and reached for his

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belt buckle.

Kresley had difficulty breathing. The raspy sound she made seemed magnified by the porcelain shower.

He unbuckled his belt and then his jeans. "When Bobbi Jo invited you to sit at our table for a drinking competition, I wanted you from the get-go." He unzipped his jeans at a leisurely pace. "I couldn't believe my luck when you agreed to a drinking contest. I intended to have my way with you."

Kresley decided to be honest, too. "Every time I knew you were competing, for as long as I can remember, I went out of my way to watch you."

Mike lowered his jeans, stepped out of them and toed them aside. The tight white briefs bulged with hard evidence he wanted her. He peeled them down, making her wish she could touch him. His cock was thick and long.

"How did that thing fit?"

Mike laughed, a full bodied sound, warming her heart. "Let's see if we can get it to fit again. After our shower." He held his hand toward her.

"I wish it wasn't so bright in here, but I don't imagine it would be too easy to take a shower in the dark."

"Kresley, you're a knock-out. You have to know that."

"It's not about that. With five brothers in the house, I always had to take care not to walk around undone or do anything embarrassing. I'm just not comfortable naked in front of anyone—male."

"I'll close my eyes."

"Yeah, right."

"No, honest. I'll use my sense of touch. How's that sound?"

"Promise?"

"Scout's honor." Mike continued to undress her with his eyes closed until she stood naked in front of him. He was so funny she

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giggled through each fumbling attempt. When his stiff cock poked her in the abdomen, she laughed outright.

“Turn the water on and then lead us into the shower,” he told her. “I’ll find something to keep me occupied while the temperature adjusts.” As soon as he stopped speaking, his hands started exploring. Since she’d moved to the shower, turning her back to him, his hands slid along her back and down her backside.

He stepped into her, running his hands around front to her breasts. The sight of his large hands on her breasts affected her more than him taking their weight in both hands. His touch was almost comforting. When his hands began to move, he captured both nipples, rolling then between his fingers.

Kresley had her breasts touched before, but this... Her knees nearly buckled as the pleasure shot to her nether regions. She arched back against him, a moan escaping her lips.

“How’s the water?” he asked.

*What water?* Kresley reached for the jet of water. *Warm. Perfect.* However, her feet refused to move away from him. She didn’t want to do anything to stop or interfere with what he was doing to her with his calloused hands and fingers on her now-hard nipples.

When she didn’t say anything, he leaned forward, pushing their upper bodies into the shower, taking her with him.

“Are you changing your mind?” he asked.

Why did he get that that idea? “No, I was just... Your hands feel good.”

“This is too much for me to understand. You’ve never had a man’s hands on your breasts?”

“Of course I have. Well, maybe not like this.”

“That’s a story I have to hear, but not now. Let’s get all the way into the shower.”

*All the way.* She liked the sound of that and did what he asked as

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quickly as possible.

“There’s a bottle of soap on the ledge. Can you hand it to me?”

Kresley found the body wash and handed it to him, after flipping open the top. Mike squirted it on her chest, the cold gel giving her a start before he dropped the plastic bottle to the shower floor. Did that mean he was as anxious as she?

With the lubrication of the soap, his hands drove her insane. He moved them leisurely all over her body until she was doing a dance of impatience. She closed her eyes and allowed the sensations to take her over. Until he began to wash her down there. It was all she could do to stay upright as he ran his fingers along her folds.

“Let’s get you rinsed off. This stuff tastes like shit.”

Meaning what? He wanted to taste her?

Mike directed her into the water and she helped wash away the suds. The taste thing sounded interesting. *Hurry, hurry.*

“No more soap,” she told him and heard him laugh behind her back. She turned to see his eyes still closed, but he was grinning from ear to ear.

“See that little seat built into the wall? I want you to sit down on it.”

“What happened to the...”

“What?”

“Never mind.” Kresley moved around him to the wall behind him and sat on the cold tile. “Oooh.”

“Sorry about that.” He laughed. “Let me see if I can warm you up.”

With his eyes still closed, he sat on the floor of the shower in front of her and reached for her foot. Her foot? The seat was large enough for her put her hand on one side and grab a bar running along the wall on the other for balance while he had her leg in the air. He brought it to his mouth and began to kiss her toes. It tickled.

“That tickles,” she said, hearing the disappointment in her voice and wishing she’d kept quiet.

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He opened his eyes and looked at her sex while he kissed her toes a second time. The tickle turned into a zing of pleasure heading straight to the place he stared at.

“Does that tickle?”

Kresley couldn’t speak, so she shook her head.

“Or this?” He moved up to her ankle, still staring boldly where no man ever had.

“You were supposed to keep your eyes closed,” she whispered, but she really didn’t mind. It was just different, new and so intense.

“My exact words were I’d *close* my eyes. I said nothing about *keeping* them closed. Only a blamed fool would miss something this beautiful. I’m making memories for a lifetime.”

While he talked, one of his hands moved up her leg to touch her sex. He ran his fingers along her flesh, while he stared into her eyes and then pushed a finger slowly inside her. Her hips automatically lifted from the tile. Mike’s eyes promised he would deliver what she needed.

“You’re like a skittish colt ready to be broke, afraid of what’s about to happen next. I’ve never been anybody’s first. Trust me, I take the responsibility seriously.” Mike lowered her leg and moved closer with his finger still inside her.

Kresley thought he was going to kiss her, but she didn’t expect him to kiss her *there*. She had five close girlfriends, two of whom talked freely about oral sex, but Kresley had only wondered—until now. Watching his sandy, long hair as his head was buried between her legs was almost more than she could bear. The pressure built so quickly inside her she was ready to come and he’d just begun. When he took her clit into his mouth and flicked it with his tongue, she nearly lost control. When he inserted a second finger, she *did*, over and over until she was left gasping for breath, clutching the support bar like a lifeline.

Mike stood and reached for her. Kresley wasn’t sure she could stand, but she managed.

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“Your turn to wash me.” He retrieved the soap from the shower floor.

She thought about what he’d just done to her, and wondered if he wanted her to do the same for him. His cock bobbed toward her as she took the soap from his hand. It seemed a good a place as any to start.

With both hands, she soaped and rubbed the hard length of him.

“Easy,” he rasped. “Give me a second.” He took the soap from her hand and stuck his face in the water, shaking his head. “All you have to do is touch me...damn.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“Damned if I know. I’ve never experienced this. Normally I have *some* control.”

“I don’t want to hear about your experience.” Kresley shocked herself by speaking her mind. But hell’s bells, she *really* didn’t want to hear about the women he’d been with.

“When I’m with you, I don’t have a single thought about anyone else. Ever.”

Kresley moved under the water with him, threw her arms around his shoulders and began to kiss him. She couldn’t get enough of his kisses. He still kissed like he had when he was twenty. His lips were soft and full, his tongue probing her mouth. She could stay like this forever—or maybe not. His hard cock pressed against her stomach and needed a place to go. Kresley didn’t want to be selfish. She lifted a leg, throwing it around his waist and lifted onto the toes of her other foot.

“No.” Mike pulled away from her mouth and reaching to turn off the water. “I want you in my bed this time.”

As soon as she stepped out of the shower, he swept her into his arms. Kresley’s breathing hitched as she thought about what would happen. He laid her on the bed sopping wet and reached for the night stand next to the bed. When he pulled a foil wrapper from the drawer, it fascinated her to see him open it and roll it over his thick cock.

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She thought about reminding him they hadn't used one earlier, but she didn't want to try to speak when breathing was difficult enough. She moved over on the bed and he followed her, stopping above her to kiss her before he settled his weight between her legs.

While raised up on his arms above her, she could see him trembling. What did that mean? Could this be important to him, beyond casual? She hoped so. After positioning his manhood at her core, he didn't push inside. Instead he lowered his chest until he lay along the length of her, and then he kissed her.

The kiss at first seemed almost shy and not what she'd grown to expect from him. When he deepened it while moving inside her only an inch or so, Kresley tried to move, but he effectively had her entwined in his arms. His tongue began to probe her mouth and he moved inside another inch. She used her mouth to encourage him and her legs to wrap around his to gain leverage.

Then he did the impossible. His kiss took on new meaning, demanding her concentration focus on their mouths. With that kiss, he delivered an unspoken promise. He clearly communicated his feelings for her and she was dumfounded. The poignant intensity brought hot tears to her closed eyes. Kresley knew then she loved him with all her woman's heart! Not the crush of a fifteen-year-old girl, but the deep, lifelong love of a woman.

As if the kiss sealed a pact between them, he thrust inside her, seating himself tightly and then paused, allowing her to adjust to the hard thickness of him filling her so completely.

Without withdrawing, he rotated his hips in a circular motion, rolling her clit somehow. The pressure began to ratchet up. Kresley relaxed and allowed Mike to work his magic. As if he felt her let go, giving him permission to do what he wanted with her body, Mike began to pump into her. At first his movements were long and slow, increasing in tempo with the urgency to release.

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Kresley went over the edge with a spine-tingling burst, while Mike hammered her higher and higher. The intensity lasted so long it was almost painful, but when Mike came, he took her with him to a new plateau of pleasure. One where she floated on a cloud so exquisite, she didn't want to come back.

## CHAPTER 5

All hell broke loose in a matter of minutes. Finding Kresley naked in Mike's bed had made her brother angry beyond reason. Now in the suite's common area, Connie, who'd brought Steve to Mike's room, seemed intent on making things worse.

Connie, with her arm in a sling, launched herself into the air, trying to hit Steve.

"How dare you?" Connie demanded as Ray held her back.

"Did you think I'd just stand by and allow my sister to marry one of *them* after what they did to you?" Steve taunted.

Kresley gasped and Mike pulled her closer, putting his arm around her as she huddled in a sheet from his bed.

"What does my being attacked at fifteen have to do with the Kales?" Connie snapped. "Let go of me," she demanded of Ray.

Steve pointed a finger at her. "I told you I saw you with them that night."

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Connie finally jerked free of Ray. “And I told you to mind your own damned business.”

“Kresley is my business,” Steve insisted. “And if she marries into a family of rapists, I think I have the right to say something about it.”

“What the hell?” Mike dropped his arm and moved toward Kresley’s brother, intent on finishing what Connie had started. Kresley grabbed onto him to stop him.

“Allow me,” Ray said and pulled back his right to take a swing. Connie stepped in front of him and—somehow—he managed to avoid hitting her.

“That’s enough,” Connie said as if she wasn’t usually the first one into the fray. She clutched her fists behind her back as though afraid to trust herself not to hit Steve. “What’s wrong with you, Steve? Ray Kale is one of the best friends I’ve ever had.”

Steve had a dumb look on his face at Connie’s words. “You have a strange sense of loyalty. He rapes you and then you attach yourself to him. I’ve heard about shit like that.”

“You moron. Ray didn’t rape me...he *saved* me. He beat the shit out of the second boy about to...well...let’s leave it at that. Ray and his brother Sam helped me out of a bad situation, the worst of my life. Ray has been my touchstone, the only one I could ever talk to about that night. And this is the thanks he gets? You sanctimonious asshole.”

“But we talked about this. If it wasn’t Ray, who was it? Why won’t you say?”

“I have my reasons and they’re good ones. Neither Ray, nor his brother had anything to do with what happened to me. Just the opposite.”

Steve shook his head doggedly. “But you—I saw you with them and then you told Kresley you were raped. When I asked you—”

“You never asked if it was Ray or Sam. I’d have set you straight if I’d known you’d been thinking this for all these years.”

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Mike couldn't believe what he was hearing. "And you shared the same opinion as your brother?" he said to Kresley. "No, wait. Is this what your entire family thinks of us?"

Kresley didn't answer. Mike didn't know if it was because they did think that way, or she didn't know. Any way you looked at it, the situation didn't bode well for any future he had with her.

"I don't know what to say." Steve couldn't even meet their eyes head on. "Based on what I saw that night, I thought..."

"I'll tell you what. Why don't you take your sister and get the hell out of here?" Ray demanded, sounding at the frayed edge of his patience. "How many people have you told we're rapists? Fuck."

Mike wanted to tell Kresley to stay, but when her brother grabbed for her bags, she didn't stop him. Connie picked that particular time to start acting like a girl. She started crying hysterically. When Kresley tried to comfort her, Connie pushed her away.

Then Kresley started to cry and ran out of the room. It all happened so fast, Mike didn't know what to do or say. Minutes later, as he watched Ray pace around the room while Connie continued her hysterics, Mike still didn't know what to do or say. If feeling like shit counted for anything, *that* he could do well.

\* \* \*

"I'm going home, back to Carefree," Kresley told her family. "I'm packing my stuff and moving in with Bev."

"Now wait a minute," Steve said.

"No! You wait a minute. You don't get a say in this. I don't know if I ever want to hear another word from your mouth. Ever. I don't know you. Any of you."

"Don't blame Mom and Dad. They thought I knew what I was talking about."

"Do you realize what you've done? You condemned an entire family for no reason at all. All of you."

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“Honey, we’ll find a way to make this right,” her father said. “But now isn’t the time. Steve has a big day today. You do, too.”

Her brother shook his head. “My heart isn’t in it. Maybe Kresley’s right to leave.”

“I don’t want anything to do with any of you until you find a way to make this nightmare go away.” Kresley didn’t wait for an argument. She did what she’d gotten good at lately. She left.

With the door at her back, she needed to make a decision. She’d already paid her entry fee and on the last day of rodeo, the attendance would be thick. Since it would be easy to get lost in the crowd, Kresley headed for the rodeo.

When time came for her competition, Kresley knocked over a barrel in her final go-round and then later sat in the stands to watch Mike ride. Right out of the gate she could see his heart wasn’t in it either. He and his partner, Tam, finished in the middle of the pack. Sitting alone, but watching people she’d known most of her life gave her a sense of belonging she needed. When the announcer told the crowd the bull riding was the final event of the day, the crowd went wild. Only then, did she feel out of place. Even mad as hell at her brother, she wanted to be closer when he rode.

“I knew you hadn’t left.”

Kresley looked away from the arena floor to Mike, coming down the stairs behind her. She waved him away.

“We need to talk. These people paid good money for their seats, and they won’t appreciate us disturbing them,” Mike insisted.

“Aren’t you Ray Kale’s brother?” the stranger next to her said. “The bull riding is next.”

Kresley stood. Mike wasn’t the type to give up easily. She apologized to the people she made stand to allow her out. Once standing toe to toe with Mike, she didn’t know what to do. He reached down for her hand and led her back the way he’d just come. “Let’s

## **CAVE CREEK COWBOY: TOO MANY BRIDES**

watch from below. I don't like to be too far away."

Kresley understood. Family always liked to be close...just in case.

Mike didn't let go of her hand while they walked. "Connie told me everything. Well, almost everything. She said there are some things about what happened to her she hasn't even told you. She also told me you had no idea about what your brother thought or you'd have told them how crazy they are."

"It's always been a secret. I knew they didn't care for your family, but I didn't know why. And I didn't say anything because you always disliked me."

Mike stopped with people all around them. "I never disliked you. I disliked kissing a fifteen-year-old when I was twenty. I had no idea. Then, when I discovered it was you, I took a ribbing from my friends. Until you turned eighteen, I did my level best not to think of you at all."

"And I couldn't think of anyone else but you." Kresley stared down at the toes of her expensive Justin boots. "Then I finally found a way to have you, so I did."

"You weren't too drunk to realize what we were doing?"

"I was drunk, but not that drunk. All I could think of was how much I wanted you and how you'd finally be mine."

A cheer rose from the stands. "The bull riding," Mike said. "Steve is first out. Looks like you're going to miss him."

"Do you hate being married to me?" Kresley asked.

"Kresley, no man would hate being married to someone as beautiful as you. I'm the wart on a sow's ass compared to you. You're probably going to regret this one day. Probably sooner than later."

"Do I have any reason to hope you can love me?" Kresley was on the verge of begging. "Any at all?"

Mike's eyes narrowed. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"I love you, Mike Kale. I think I've always loved you. I couldn't be any more serious."

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"I've always admired a woman who knows what she wants and goes after it. I just never expected a woman to go after me like you've gone about it. Damn, as far as I know, you didn't hog tie me and drag me to the altar. I went on my own two feet."

"Actually, you *carried* me to the altar. I was sure you were going to drop me. You insisted there was no way I was going to get away from you again."

"Damn," Mike said. "Do you hear that?"

"What?"

"The silence."

Kresley started to run. "Steve."

She ran to the nearest door leading to where she could see the arena...see where her brother...

"He's hurt," she heard Mike say. "We need to get below. We can't do anything from here."

"What happened?" she asked the nearest person.

"He got thrown. Then the bull caught him under the arm," the man said.

"This way," Mike said and began to pull her.

By the time they made it down to the chutes, the emergency medical team had Steve on a stretcher wheeling him out. Her mother and father were following close behind.

"What hospital?" she heard Mike ask someone.

"He said his heart wasn't in it. Why did he ride?" Kresley started to run.

\* \* \*

A friend delivered Mike and Kresley to the hospital.

"I'll wait out here," he told her outside the intensive care unit.

"Why?" Her face was pale with worry.

"Your family won't want to deal with me right now."

"I need you," she said, barely above a whisper.

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It was all the encouragement he needed. He'd already made up his mind on their silent ride to the hospital that he would stand with Kresley, no matter what. When they'd made love earlier, he knew then. He loved her. When she told him in the middle of a crowded hallway at the arena, she loved him he'd wanted to throw his hat in the air and shout.

"One thing before we go inside." Mike pulled her into his arms and hugged her. "I love you, too."

She reached up to pull his face down to hers. She kissed him gently. "I'll be able to handle this now."

Mike reached for the shining silver release to open the door. Just inside the door stood her mother and father. Both of their faces were tight with emotion, making Mike fear the worst. Neither of them would meet his eyes.

"How is he?" Kresley said, throwing herself into their arms.

Kresley's father looked over her shoulder and gave Mike a nod. At that moment, Mike let go of his anger. Steve was hurt. That's all that mattered.

"The doctor is with him now," Kresley's mother said and then turned to Mike. "I'm glad to see you brought Kresley. We were worried you wouldn't want anything to do with us."

"Family should stick together at times like this," Mike said.

Kresley's mother began to cry and then so did Kresley. Her father looked like he was holding it together by a thread. Matt, one of the Hansen twins, came out of Steve's room. "Did you get hold of Marc or Tim?"

Matt glanced over to Mike and a look of surprise crossed his face. Matt headed in his direction so fast, Mike had to wonder what was about to happen.

"Thanks!" Matt reached out his hand.

Mike grabbed hold of his firm grip and gave it a pump. Only Matt

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didn't let go. Mike could see tears forming in his eyes. "Can you show me where I can get Kresley a cup of coffee?" Mike asked.

Matt nodded and released his grip. He didn't turn back to his family or Kresley as he headed toward the door. "This way."

Mike heard Kresley saying she didn't need coffee, but he followed Matt, intent on finding out about Steve's condition. He had a feeling Matt wouldn't talk in front of his little sister.

"Did you see it?"

Mike shook his head. "Only right after it happened."

"I knew right away something was wrong. He came off the bull and didn't move."

Mike knew what Matt was saying. Bull riders flew into the air with their legs digging for traction. Everything was about getting out of the way of an angry bull. "How bad is it?"

"He's going to live. It isn't about that. But he can't move his legs. He came down on his tailbone and now the doctors don't know if he'll ever walk again."

Mike looped his arm over Matt's shoulder. "Don't second guess this. I'll give my brother Sam a call. He'll know what to do."

"I thought about Sam first thing. Do you think he'll come after what...how we've treated your family all these years?"

"It's water under the bridge. Sam might not be happy to hear Steve thought he and Ray had hurt Connie, but he'll jump to help the brother of my wife."

"I was hoping you'd say that." Matt sobbed. "Steve will probably wish he'd died if he can't walk again."

"We'll get through this," Mike assured him. "I promise."

\* \* \*

*Two days later*

Kresley sat back in Mike's arms in the crowded room with

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everyone else waiting to hear about Steve. It was standing room only. All her girlfriends were there, all of Mike's family and, of course, hers. Several of the men who competed against Steve had come to show their support when ordinarily they'd have been headed for home, two days after the rodeo ended.

She and Mike had spent every moment together since they'd brought Steve to the hospital. Kresley didn't know how she would have made it without Mike's support. She didn't think she could handle it.

Mike's brother, a surgeon at the start of a promising career, held his hands in the air and made a noise to get everyone's attention. "I have good news to share. Steve has exhibited signs of some recovery of feeling in his legs. We're optimistic."

A cheer rose. Kresley's heart jumped in her chest.

"Now, before everyone scatters," Mike's brother continued, "the Kales want to invite everyone to a reception in the hotel tonight to celebrate Mike and Kresley's wedding. Everyone is invited. Steve says he expects you all to be there."

Kresley looked up at Mike as a lump formed in the back of her throat. "Did you know about this?"

"My Mom and Dad might've mentioned it. They figured your parents had their hands full right now."

"Wait—" Kresley started. She didn't exactly know how to put into words the way their support made her feel. She was grateful, yet it also made her question the values she'd grown up with. Not that her family was bad—they weren't. But they could all certainly learn from the Kales. Mike's family had immediately offered their unconditional love and support. Every day she was learning more about both her husband and his family, and it was all good.

When Mike pulled away, she almost started to cry. However, when he moved to kneel in front of her, she gasped.

"Kresley Kale, although you're already my wife, will you consent

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to remaining my wife as long as I live?" After speaking, he held a small box up.

Kresley took the box and flipped open the lid. It was a diamond solitaire. Not big, but probably the most beautiful ring she'd ever seen.

Some of the cowboys starting making rude noises. Kresley couldn't hear what they were saying. Her cowboy wanted her. *He* wanted *her* forever.

"Yes," she said. "I'll be your wife. As long as we both live."

Ray gave a shout. "Another Cave Creek cowboy bites the big one."

Kresley smiled so wide she thought her face would crack. "One Carefree cowgirl married, five to go." Kresley winked at Ray and then pointed to Connie.

"Oh, no, you don't," Connie said.

Ray started for Connie, stopping short when she raised her fists.

Ray huffed. "How many cowboys here have sported a black eye courtesy of Connie Kettering?"

Kresley watched in horror as half the men there raised their hands.

"That's a lie," Connie insisted.

Ray ducked under her fist and tossed her over his shoulder. "One more word and I'll give you the spanking you've been asking for."

"But—"

Ray smacked her hard on the ass and everyone cheered.

"Did you mean it?" Mike asked when everyone's attention was directed elsewhere.

Kresley wondered if Ray Kale had done it on purpose. "Of course, I mean it."

"Do you think we might even repeat our vows in front of our parents tonight? Just something to tell our kids. I'd hate for this to be our only record of our wedding."

Mike handed her another box. A much larger one.

Kresley opened it to find a VCR tape. She looked back to see Mike

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smiling.

His eyes narrowed, but he continued to smile. "It's a recording of our wedding ceremony. We were married by Elvis? No wonder you didn't want to tell me!"

## **BRIT BLAISE**

Brit Blaise lives and writes in hot and steamy Phoenix, Arizona, where she owns a mountainside home among the Saguaro cacti, rattlesnakes, smoldering temperatures and lots of real cowboys. She has a husband, three children and two Labradors. Brit loves the history and adventure of the sunny southwest even if she doesn't love the heat (that kind anyway).

Brit started seriously writing in 2002. Her first contemporary comedy was a finalist in the 2002 Realizing the Dream Contest by Phoenix Desert Rose and since then she's added to her list of achievements.

She enjoys writing and reading above all else, but her hobbies include needlework, quilting, gardening and arena football. Go Phoenix Rattlers! She likes to hear from readers; you can visit her website at [www.Britblaise.com](http://www.Britblaise.com).

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