

**Brit  
Blaise**

christmas  
**CAVE  
CREEK  
COWBOY**



## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

*In broad daylight?*

*In the hay?*

“All you have to do is say no. Hell, you don’t even have to say it. Just whisper it and I’ll keep my pants on.”

“In the hay?”

“Hay is an aphrodisiac for me.” He stood and held his hand out to her. When Connie took it, he pulled her to her feet and then spread the blanket.

His desire pulled her to him like a magnet. Connie jerked the snaps on her western shirt before shrugging out of it.

Ray stopped fussing with the blanket to stare at her. “I take it the answer is yes.”

She reached behind her back and unsnapped her bra. Her girls loved to be free, especially in front of Ray. Both of them pointed at him boldly, in case he failed to notice them right away. Shameless...

ALSO BY BRIT BLAISE

*Another Cave Creek Cowboy*

*Cave Creek Cowboy*

*Cave Creek Cowboy In Vegas*

*Cave Creek Cowboy: Too Many Brides*

*Music Man*

*Out Of Space*

*The Virginia Model-Logues*

# CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

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BY

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CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS  
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*My Cave Creek cowboys have seen  
me through some of the roughest days in my life. To Cave  
Creek cowboy Don and his beautiful wife, Leanna Niedermier, both  
recently gone, but never forgotten: my dad, a true life cowboy,  
and Mom, the special woman who won his heart even  
if she had to get on a horse to do it.*

# CHAPTER 1

“Another Cave Creek cowboy bites the big one,” Ray shouted, sweeping his hat off his handsome head and waving it in the air.

Connie heard the pride in his rich baritone voice. His younger brother Mike had gotten hitched a few days earlier. Standing next to each other, except for their height, Ray and Mike could be twins. Both had sandy blond hair and striking blue eyes.

Kresley, Connie’s best friend and the newlywed bride, smiled brightly. Connie had never seen her look more beautiful.

“One Carefree cowgirl married, five to go.” Kresley gave a sassy wink to Ray and then pointed straight to Connie.

“Oh, no, you don’t,” Connie said to her friend and took a step back.

Ray playfully started for Connie and she raised her fists before realizing she’d done it.

Ray stopped short and huffed. “How many cowboys here have sported a black eye courtesy of Connie Kettering?”

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“Get serious.” Connie couldn’t believe Ray asked such a stupid question.

A crowded hospital waiting room in Vegas was not the place for this kind of silliness. Kresley’s brother had been tragically hurt in the final go-round of the bull-riding competition shortly after Kresley and Mike Kale’s impromptu wedding. Even though Steve’s prognosis was good, the occasion called for respect.

When at least half of the cowboys in the room raised their hands, tears started to sting Connie’s eyelids. She wasn’t *that* bad.

She wasn’t!

*Was she?*

“That’s a lie,” she insisted and watched some of them raise their hands even higher.

Her already simmering temper started to flare out of control. Ray always picked the worst time to tease her. Her entire life had turned upside down with Kresley’s marriage, didn’t he know that? Next to Kresley, he was her best friend, but that didn’t give him the right to humiliate her.

To make matters worse, both the bride and groom’s families, the Kales and the Hansens, were embroiled in a bitter conflict over something that had happened to Connie years earlier. Connie’s dark secret became common knowledge when the newlyweds got together. With Ray part of the groom’s family and Connie an honorary member of the bride’s very strange brood, she’d suddenly found herself in a precarious position.

She took a deep breath before she did something really stupid. Just as she was about to back away and call a truce, Ray ducked under her fist and tossed her over his wide shoulder like a sack of feed. Her new Stetson went flying and everyone started to laugh.

“One more word and I’ll give you the spanking you’ve been asking for.”



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“But—”

Ray smacked her on the ass...hard. It shocked more than it hurt her. The sound at first cause someone to gasp and then a cheer sounded.

*Probably that damned Vince Moore.* She'd given him a black eye at lunch the day after Kresley and Mike got married. *The stinking little weasel.*

Then everyone seemed to join him cheering even louder. Her emotions, already in turmoil, went from anger, to humiliation, to her feelings being hurt in a fraction of a second.

When Ray started to walk, with her bouncing on his shoulder, she prayed he'd take her out of the waiting room because, if he sat her down, things were sure to go from bad to worse.

She got her wish. When he lowered her feet to the floor, they were in the hallway, hopefully away from prying eyes. Connie looked both ways to make certain no one would see her punch him.

Ray raised a sandy brow. “Don’t do it, or this time I’ll spank you for real. I mean it. Connie, you have to stop using your fists every time someone makes you angry. It’s getting old.”

The deadly combination of words and the stern, sobering tone coming from the most important person in her life scared the fight right out of her.

She relaxed her fist. Letting go of her anger, however, did a curious thing. It released the floodgate holding back her usually well-controlled emotions. Tears started to pour and sobs followed closely behind. Connie buried her face in her hands, more embarrassed than she'd ever been in front of Ray, save the day she met him. Nothing could be worse than that day.

When he pulled her into his arms, she forgot her embarrassment. How many times had she wanted him to hold her like this? Nestled against his strapping chest, with both his arms wrapped around her, Connie stopped crying. His touch was magic. It reminded her of

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another time he'd carried her to safety. A time she'd done her best to erase from her memory, but the events of the last few days had forced her to confront what happened.

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize..."

His breath was warm against her cheek as he spoke. Her body responded with a jolt of desire. In the eye of a storm of emotions and sensations she'd only dreamed about, Connie was out of her element.

It scared the shit out of her.

But what worried her even more—how could she get him to do this again—alone—preferably with a bed nearby?

She burrowed against him, rubbing her cheek against his chest like a too-friendly barn cat. He moaned and held her a little tighter. Heaven couldn't get any better than his brawny arms surrounding her. When he grew hard under her big belt buckle, she realized how wrong she'd been. This was definitely better.

"Connie, you're killing me here. I think I'd prefer your fist." He started to push her away.

She wanted to hold onto him, but, short of pretending to cry, she didn't have a good reason. "No, you're right. I need to quit hitting people. I don't need to be making enemies now that I've lost Kresley forever."

"You haven't lost her. She married my brother and he likes you just fine."

"Mike tolerates me. He doesn't like me. Besides, they'll be busy doing the newlywed thing. You know. They won't want me hanging around while they're getting frisky. I don't even have a place to live now, since my parents are moving into a one-bedroom condo in Sun City. I'm going back to Cave Creek to be homeless."

Ray fished his hankie out of his pocket and handed it to her. "Last I knew, the newlyweds didn't have a home of their own either."

Connie hadn't thought of that. Mike lived in Ray's house. "You're

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hardly ever home so it'd almost be like living on their own."

Ray frowned.

*Why?* Connie tried to read his handsome face.

"If you really feel like you'll be homeless, when we return to Arizona, you can move into the apartment above the garage. It's not much, but you're welcome to it as long as you want."

Connie dabbed her eyes with his crisp, white handkerchief and handed it back to him. "I thought your brother Sam used the apartment."

"Sam's a big-time doctor now. Why would he want to live with me on the ranch? He's allergic to horses."

Connie huffed. "He *is* not. He's a natural with them. Did you forget he put himself through college riding bulls? You're just jealous because he has all the smarts in the family. Maybe he's too busy to come to the ranch."

"I could never be jealous he stopped riding bulls before he got hurt. Regardless, you're welcome to use the apartment as long as you like."

His offer tempted her, but it wouldn't be right unless she could pull her weight. "I can't afford it. And what about my horses? They'll need a place, too, if I'm not living with Kresley. I've made a career of depending on my friends."

"There's more than enough room for your horses, on the condition you help with the barn chores."

"You don't have enough barn work to justify boarding my two. You only have one horse. I'm sure Mike looks after his own."

"I mean the new barn. I bought the five-acre plot next to me. I have a crew there, building a new barn as we speak."

If she'd been confused before, this statement added a new dimension. "What's wrong with the old barn? It's bigger than you'll ever need."

"I plan to...actually, let's save this conversation for later. Why

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don't you tell me what made you cry like that? It's out of character."

"I'm tired of feeling like the odd man out."

"Trust me, you don't feel like a man."

Connie thought about his hard sex pressed against her only moments earlier.

When Ray crossed his hands in front of his jeans she realized she'd been staring at the evidence...of what? Did he want *her*? Or did he just get a hard-on easily?

"Is that because of me?" She looked up into his bright blue eyes to read his feelings.

He shook his head, and Connie suddenly felt even more miserable.

"Would it surprise you to hear it's not the first time you've made my cock hard?"

Connie gulped. "I guess it would." She had to use her hand to shut her mouth. "I didn't have a clue, but it makes it a lot easier on me."

"Women. A guy says hard, a woman says easy. I'm the one without a clue."

"I meant it's easier because I want to have sex with you. I'm twenty-two and have never had a boyfriend."

"All this marriage business and the brouhaha about your rape so many years ago has your emotions in an uproar. I've been telling you since it happened you should talk to someone who knows about these things."

Her rape. Every serious conversation she ever had with Ray came back to that fateful night. "I don't need a shrink. I've handled it just fine. Expect maybe the part about not having a boyfriend. I always had you."

"Not the same thing."

"I've figured that out for myself. You don't have to fall in love with me or anything. I'm just asking if you'll show me what it's all about...the right way. Tonight."

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Ray looked so uncomfortable she almost felt sorry for him. Almost. Not enough to let him off the hook.

“Tonight? My parents are having a wedding reception for Mike and Kresley. I brought you out here to ask you to go with me.”

“You’re always asking me to do things with you. You’ve never asked me on a real date.”

“Be my date for the reception.”

His invitation gave her goose bumps. “And then we can have sex?”

## CHAPTER 2

Ray glanced at his watch and then back to the front door of the ritzy hotel. Connie would be there any minute.

Connie.

Beautiful. Frustrating. Alluring. Feisty. Never boring. And, not known to be late.

The door revolved—and she appeared.

*Damn!*

Ray couldn't breathe as he did a double take. He'd never seen her as glamorous...a temptress. It made him question what else he'd missed while watching her grow. The root of his problem with Connie—her age and the years between them—had held him at bay. He was twelve years older than her twenty-two, far too old for her. To make matters worse, she'd been getting to him for a while.

She wore a short leather skirt with the hemline hitting her mid-thigh. Where had she been hiding those legs? The toned length of them

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tapered down into pale pink cowboy boots to match her pink hat.

*Cowgirl, with a kick.*

Her dark brown locks were uncharacteristically freed to fall in shining curls over her shoulders and down her back. Her big brown eyes glinted with amusement as she came nearer, swinging her hips as she walked.

“Did you make up your mind? Do I get to have sex tonight?” She hadn’t even stopped before the words came pouring out of her mouth.

Ray’s cock stood at complete attention.

“If he’s not up for the job, I’m throwing my name in the hat.”

Ray saw red. He turned his head to look behind him, just over his shoulder. *Dino Thorpe.*

“Mind your own business,” Ray growled.

“No, wait,” Connie said. “I think that’s very nice of you.”

Ray couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Connie’s ability to frustrate him hit a record high. “Dino’s the biggest horn-dog on the circuit.”

“That’s low,” Dino said and smiled widely, showing way too many teeth.

“Maybe that means he knows what he’s doing. I’m twenty-two and I’ve never had a boyfriend. I think experience is good, since I don’t have a clue how to go about having sex. I mean, I know the mechanics, but I’m sure there’s more to it.”

“Damn!” Dino whistled.

Ray wanted to sock him in the eye. What message would that send to Connie? “We’re going to be late for the reception.”

“Are you pissed at me?” Connie searched his face. “Don’t you dare think about throwing me over your shoulder again. I’m not wearing panties.”

“Oh, Lord. Is she always like this?”

Ray nodded. “Unpredictable? Yes.”

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Connie's big brown eyes snapped with amusement. "That's not fair. Kresley told me to lose the panties. She said she tried it with your brother and it worked like a dream. They had sex on their first date."

"They were already married on their first date."

"Your brother didn't know he'd married Kresley. All he knew is he woke up with six naked women and a marriage license. He didn't have a clue whose name was on it along with his."

Thorpe slapped his thigh and tipped his hat. "Six naked women? I'm hanging with the wrong crowd."

"Shut up, Dino." *No panties? She's naked under that short skirt!*

Connie moved closer. "Is something wrong with you?"

Dino clapped him on the back. "And here I thought this high-society wedding reception would be a snore."

*Naked? No panties?*

Connie grabbed hold of his hand. "Don't you dare do anything to embarrass me in front anyone again."

"I'm not the one who's half-naked."

Connie pulled him toward the room where the reception was being held. He watched as she moved to see if anything might be showing. Her long stride made the skirt rise with each step.

Dino followed closely. Ray wanted to punch him more than he'd wanted to hit anyone in a long time. Connie glanced over to Dino as though she was surprised to find him still there. She halted abruptly.

"I think I should set a time limit on this date of ours. I really want to have sex before I leave Vegas. Maybe, if you decide you're not interested in doing it, I should get Dino's room number for later."

Dino started patting his pockets. If he pulled a pen out of anywhere, that would be *it*, the final straw. Ray gave him his best kick-ass glare. "Connie, you're taking this too far. You can't just decide to have sex and expect it to happen right now."

"Yes, you can," Dino protested.



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“I’m warning you. One more word and I’ll bust you in the mouth. If anyone’s having sex with Connie tonight, it’s me.”

Connie started to jump up and down like a kid in a candy shop. Ray was about to have a heart attack. He grabbed hold of her to settle her down before she flashed everyone around. She responded by throwing both arms around his neck. He reached down to feel her skirt inching up...then she kissed him. What she lacked in experience, she more than made up for in enthusiasm. Only, with her skirt up to the cheeks of her tight, shapely ass, he didn’t want to think about kissing.

On second thought...

Connie slowed her erratic parries and thrusts with her plump sweet lips and stuck her tongue into his mouth. The crowded casino ordinarily would have cooled his jets...not this time. His cock grew harder than the horns on an angry bull.

*Naked.*

*Only a hop, skip and unzip...to heaven.*

Ray wanted her...badly. He’d thought he wanted her before, but that was nothing compared to the need building so fast he couldn’t keep pace. His breathing grew ragged and—

“Get a room,” someone hollered.

Connie pulled back, looked up at him and winked. “Let’s hurry. Maybe we can make a quick appearance, then sneak out without anybody knowing.”

\* \* \*

Everyone stared as Connie walked into the room on Ray’s arm. How many times had she gawked at one of the many women Ray had chasing after him. Now it was her turn. It felt good—extremely good.

“Everyone’s staring.”

Ray growled. “They’re trying to see up that damnable short skirt. Watch how you sit.”

“I’ve never seen this side of you.”

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“The side where I need my head examined? I’m twelve years older than you. I should know better.”

His words worried her. If he changed his mind about having sex with her, all bets would be off and the fists would come out of retirement. “Let’s pay our respects to Kresley and Mike and get out of here.”

Ray rolled his eyes, but stayed close as she made her way through the crowded room toward her best girlfriend.

“Kresley’s probably worried sick about her brother. That was a close call. No more bulls for Steve Hansen.” Connie wished there would be no more bulls for Ray either. Every time he crawled on top of one, it scared her senseless. “Kresley and Steve are devoted to one another. She’s heartbroken when this should be the happiest time of her life.”

“I admire how you’re handling everything. You haven’t said one bad word about Steve.”

Connie really wasn’t angry with Kresley’s brother. It was more a fault of Mr. and Mrs. Hansen and the cold way they parented. “I like Steve. He’s always been good to me, and I know he regrets telling his family you raped me.”

Ray reached out to stop her. “I feel responsible for his accident. I know better than anyone a bull rider needs to keep his mind on the ride. I should’ve waited to confront him about what he said about me.”

Connie shuddered. “Poor Steve. I have personal experience. If you feel responsible for him, he’d better watch out. Next thing he knows, he’ll have you as his new best friend, like it or not.”

“Maybe he will. I always thought if we weren’t competing, Steve and I would have a lot in common. You don’t think Kresley blames me for what happened, do you?”

Connie had never seen this side of him...the less than totally confident side of heroic Ray Kale. “How about if the two of us do

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everything possible to make sure Kresley knows we'll support Steve's recovery?"

"Agreed. Let's congratulate the newlyweds." Ray hugged her before heading toward his brother.

It thrilled her to have him treat her like a woman.

"You were right," Connie said pulling out the chair next to Kresley and sitting carefully. "About the skirt I mean. I think it's working exactly like you said it would."

Kresley smiled at up at Ray, who stood next to Connie. "Mike and I both wondered when you'd acknowledge your feelings for Connie."

He leaned over. "I don't play by the rules," he whispered into her ear, before sitting down beside her at the table.

Connie started to ask what he meant by that when she felt his large, calloused hand on her leg. She involuntarily lifted from her seat in surprise. He inched his chair nearer, looped his other arm around her shoulder and pulled her against him.

"What were you saying?" Kresley asked.

Connie couldn't remember what she'd been about to say. "Ray's building a new barn."

Ray chuckled. "Nice try, but you can't distract me."

"Distract you from what?" Kresley's gaze went from Connie to Ray and then back.

Ray's hand began moving up the *inside* of her thigh. The long tablecloth hid what he was doing from any prying eyes, but Connie knew for a certainty, anyone looking at her face could tell. "Ray wants to be the one to talk about his new barn."

Mike, sitting next to Kresley, leaned into the conversation. "The barn someone's building on the property next to you?"

Connie was about to correct him when Ray's hand moved higher. She clamped her legs together tightly to stop his progress.

"My property. My barn."

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Mike moved closer. "And you didn't tell me?"

"Connie's the first to know."

"Leave me out of this."

"I want *in* you...I mean, I want you *in* this." Ray nudged her legs apart and moved his hand all the way up to touch her...*there*.

Connie couldn't stop the harsh gasp, grateful Ray continued to speak over her inhalation.

"I realize I may be getting in deep here, but I've decided to expand my horizons. Explore the possibilities."

He pressed a finger into her and moved it slowly in and out. She responded by opening her legs. She didn't have a choice. The warm glow traveling throughout her body made her do it.

"What do you plan to do with another barn?" Mike asked. "You have more than enough room in the one you have."

"I need a little more space."

Connie opened her legs wider.

"For what?" Mike said.

Ray tucked two fingers inside her.

"I have a couple of fingers—things in mind."

"You're never there," Mike argued.

"What do you think, Connie?" Ray smiled. As he pulled his fingers out of her, he touched her clit. When he began to trace a circle over it, she saw stars. She didn't dare close her eyes like she wanted when both Mike and Kresley stared expectantly waiting for an answer.

She couldn't talk.

Couldn't breathe.

Everyone was waiting.

"A barn's good."

"Just good?" Ray moved his fingers faster and applied more pressure.

"Better."

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He slid from her clit to enter her again and then back. "How much better?"

"Is something going on we don't know about?" Mike asked, sounding irritated.

Connie could feel pressure building and gripped the edge of the table with both hands. She was going to come. He was making her come right here in front of people.

There was nothing she could do.

A pulse beat started thrumming so hard she wanted to pant.

"My last ride was Sunday. I'm retiring from the rodeo. No more bulls. Ever again. I'm coming...coming home."

Mike shouted his happiness and relief so loudly, no one would have a clue Connie's matching scream was because she was coming. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Ray's parents approaching, but she couldn't even begin to stop the orgasm washing through her. Over and over she pulsed while Ray fondled her clit.

"What's...?"

"Ray is finished with bull riding. No more worry about him getting hurt, except the occasional black eye Connie is always giving him."

"I'm going to kil—" Ray smothered her protest with a kiss. Connie came down from her peak with his mouth over hers and two of his fingers buried inside her. She'd be worried about him kissing her with his family surrounding them, but his fingers inside her quivering sex distracted her.

"You were saying?" Ray pulled his lips from hers and winked.

"Is it true?" Ray's mother demanded.

"Yes and no. Yes, I've hung up my spurs, and no, I don't have to worry about Connie giving me a black eye. She's promised to mind her manners from now on."

"It's about time," Mrs. Kale said.

Connie listened to the Kales go on and on, while she tried to figure

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out if his mother meant it was about time Ray stopped riding bulls or Connie stopped hitting him.

“I hope no one wants to shake my hand,” he whispered into her ear, giving her something else to worry about.

Every second it seemed someone else approached to see what the commotion was about. Most of them gave Connie looks telling her they thought it was strange Ray continued to hold her while he spoke to everyone. She thought it was damned strange he didn’t take his fingers out of her.

She might not be able to use her fists any more, but she could still use her mouth. “Now Ray can finally marry me like he promised.”

## CHAPTER 3

“I should call your bluff and make you marry me.”

Connie gave him an innocent look. “You have no one to blame but yourself. It took me two torturous hours to get away from your family and friends. More than half that time you were physically torturing me.”

Ray tried to keep his face serious. If she really was angry with him, he deserved it. He didn’t even know what had made him pull such a stupid stunt in public. He’d tortured her and then some. “I’m sorry. We’re even now for all the times—”

“Don’t say it.” Connie unzipped her skirt and let it drop to the floor of his hotel room. “No more talk.” She toed the skirt aside.

This was a new side to the woman he’d thought he knew so well. He never dreamed she could be a closet exhibitionist. “That’s an interesting look with the pink cowboy boots.”

Connie lifted a foot, crossing it over her other leg to remove her

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boot. "Get undressed."

"Anxious? I'd have thought you had the edge taken off earlier."

Ray watched her remove both boots and shrug out of her sweater. This was the truest test of his endurance. Connie Kettering had the most well-developed set of breasts he'd had the privilege to see. It didn't surprise him. They were the first thing anyone noticed about her, no matter what she was wearing. He supposed he should be grateful she hadn't picked a low-cut top to go with her too-short skirt.

She wore a pale pink lacey bra. It brought out the highlights in her chestnut hair. Her eyes searched his face and then she smiled. "I bought this with you in mind."

"How long have you been seeing me in this light?"

"Since the night you saved me seven years ago."

Ray didn't know what to say to that. She'd had a crush on him since the night he and his brother, Sam, rescued her from her attackers? She'd been only fifteen at the time.

"In that case, I'm going to stop beating myself up over this and give you exactly what you're asking for."

Her perfect lips formed an O while her eyes grew wide.

Fun.

When was the last time he had *fun* during sex? That was the problem with one-night stands and casual acquaintances. Knowing someone, caring about the person, made everything more meaningful.

He knew Connie.

He understood her.

He knew her so well it scared him to jeopardize their friendship by adding sex to the mix. If they managed to survive the initial awkwardness, they could build something more meaningful than either had ever experienced.

"Lose your pants, cowboy."

Ray laughed as he unbuckled his massive, silver championship



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buckle.

Connie fidgeted.

He took pity on her and rushed out of the rest of his clothes. That, and he couldn't wait to get his hands on her. When he reached for her, she flew into his arms. He lifted her and carried her to the bed.

He laid her down, covering half her body with his. She moaned softly and kissed his chest, while moving her hands over his back and then down over his ass.

"Oh, my."

He smiled inside. His, no doubt, was the first male ass she'd touched. Much of what they were about to do would be a first for her, except the actual act. That had been done forcibly to her at the age of fifteen. He intended to do everything within his power to keep her mind on the present.

He kissed her breast and then laved her taut nipple. The pale pink bud puckered and hardened even more.

"Oh, my. I didn't know."

He'd never been so hot and ready. He didn't dare. This needed to be about her. He gave the second breast his attention until she began to writhe under the leg he had thrown over her to keep her still.

He moved his kisses down her belly.

Lower.

The scent of her need fill his nostrils and acted as an aphrodisiac. He inhaled deeply, savoring her fragrance until his cock ached to be buried inside her.

Lower.

She began to thrash, saying something unintelligible.

He placed an open-mouthed kiss on her sweet spot. He scraped his teeth over the button, then alternately sucked and laved it until she made little squeaking noises.

Her clit grew as hard as his cock.

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Connie stopped trashing and went still, save for the trembling. He inserted a single finger inside her tight sex, moving it in and out.

Then two fingers.

Her squeaks turned to pants. He searched for her g-spot, not his best move. This time he struck gold right away. She lifted so hard, she took him with her. It was no small feat to give a bull rider a go for his money.

He eased back and she began to shimmer around his fingers. He wanted his cock inside her. Now. He moved up and she wrapped her legs around his waist. One pump and he found her.

So tight.

Ray pushed a little harder.

And...

*What the hell?*

The tightness gave way too quickly, and Connie winced and made a sound suspiciously like pain. He wanted to think about what had just happened, but found he was in deep trouble.

He couldn't think at all.

Since he'd always been fairly good at maintaining control, when it all started rushing at him too fast, he didn't have a clue.

*Slow down?*

*Move faster?*

In a second, it wouldn't matter.

Connie moaned and jerked underneath him, lifting him two feet off the bed. His last scrap of dignity ebbed as he went off like a rocket. After the longest, strongest orgasm he'd ever experienced, his ego revived. Through the thick of it he didn't know if Connie came with him, but once he floated back to reality, the walls of her sex continued to pulse around him.

He watched her eyelids flutter until she opened them and looked up at him. "Wow."

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*Yeah, wow.*

Why didn't he feel like celebrating? Why had she lied to him?

*How could she have been raped and still be a virgin?* "What just happened?"

## CHAPTER 4

The worst had happened...exactly what Connie had feared.

Sex had spoiled her friendship with Ray. Just because she slept with him, he thought she should tell him everything—information about her rape she'd never shared with anyone.

He was actually pissed she'd been a virgin. Telling him what had happened to her so many years ago would've meant she'd have to confess—the whole sordid truth. He'd hate her for sure. She couldn't take the chance.

Ray had called her room four times in the last hour, leaving messages he wanted to talk. It was only a matter of time until he showed up at the door demanding answers. She still had two hours until check-out, but she didn't dare hang around. Sooner or later he'd track her down.

She'd already stowed her gear in Kresley's dually. Everyone planned to caravan back to Cave Creek. What harm would it do if she

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went on ahead?

A knock on the door startled her. *Ray?*

“Connie, are you in there?”

*Kresley.*

As relief flooded her, Connie ran to unlock the door. Both Kresley and Mike stood on the other side. “Oh.” Now why did that surprise her? Of course Mike would be with Kresley. That’s the way it’d be from now on.

“Everyone is meeting for breakfast.”

“I’m not hungry.” Connie sounded petulant, even to herself.

Mike moved from Kresley’s side and stepped into Connie’s personal space. “Avoiding my brother isn’t going to make him go away. You don’t know him very well if you think you can hide.”

Aggression.

Connie understood aggression. She did it well. “I’m not hiding.”

“He only wants to know how you happen to be a virgin after—”

“No! He told you?” Connie didn’t understand how Ray could have shared such intimate information.

“He’s worried sick about you,” Kresley said, as if she’d read Connie’s mind. “We all are.”

“There’s nothing to worry about. Just because I had sex with Ray doesn’t give him the right to go telling everyone about it. I thought there was some kind of unwritten rule about that sort of thing.”

“Ray isn’t telling everyone. He came to Kresley because you won’t talk to him.”

“Damn straight. Not if he insists on knowing things that aren’t any of his damned business.”

Kresley pulled her husband back. “Then come to breakfast. Show him nothing has changed. He knows you’d never willingly miss a meal unless something was wrong.”

Connie took a second to think. Kresley was right, of course. She

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needed to pretend—make him think she was the same girl she was before.

\* \* \*

When Connie walked into the buffet with Mike and his new wife, Ray breathed easier for the first time since she'd walked out on him after last night. He'd been around enough skittish colts to read the signs, but he'd been angry anyway. Now he had control again and he wasn't about to make her bolt a second time.

Ray nodded to them. "Mike. Kresley. Connie."

When Connie acknowledged him, even though she wouldn't look him in the eye, he had hope. She turned to Kresley. "Where is everybody?"

"It's just the four of us."

Connie hesitated.

Ray picked at an invisible piece of lint on his sleeve. Talk about skittish...he was a tight ball of nerves. "We thought we'd make plans for the ranch. This is a big change for me and I'm nervous about it."

She opened her mouth to speak and then closed it again.

The hostess came to show them to their table and get their drink orders.

"Coffee all around," he said and headed for the food. He wanted to give her some space, show her he wouldn't crowd her. He took his time filling his plate, but she hadn't returned from the numerous buffets by the time he walked back the table where Mike and Kresley waited with heaping plates in front of them.

"Married life must be good for your appetite. I didn't see Connie at the desert buffet. She didn't leave, did she?"

"She's taking her time." Kresley said. "She's trying to show nothing has changed and is failing miserably. The old Connie would already have been back to the table with her food half gone. She doesn't chew...she inhales."

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“That’s pretty much how she tackles everything she does...with gusto and enthusiasm. I don’t think she even realizes—”

“Shh.” Kresley speared her fork into her potatoes.

Both Mike and Ray took her cue and started shoveling food in their mouths. “I bought eight Quarter Horse broodmares from Oklahoma. They’re coming the end of the week.”

“Any of them already in foal?” his brother asked.

“One. Also bought a two-year-old started this spring. A stud, been training with Jake Harper and showing a lot of promise. Jake is going to help me get the business off the ground. He’s had a setback with his divorce and this way we both win.”

“I didn’t realize Jake had gotten a divorce,” Kresley said. “Is that why he didn’t have any horses entered in Vegas?”

“The judge made him liquidate everything and give the wife half. Jake says, by the time the lawyers were paid, she took almost everything. High price to pay for not keeping his pants zipped.”

Connie huffed.

Ray wondered why. “The man made a mistake. He had too much to drink and made a bad decision. How many times have you heard me lecture about the evils of alcohol?”

“About a million, maybe more.” Connie sounded annoyed.

“What?”

“Everyone knows how you feel about booze.”

Both Mike and Kresley kept their heads down. Ray knew about their drinking contest, which had resulted in their hasty marriage. The rumors about Mike waking up in bed with six naked women were true. Connie had been one of those women and it still didn’t sit too well with Ray.

It didn’t matter Mike had married Kresley. The thought of Connie, naked in bed with his brother, drove him frigging insane at the time and still did.

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"I always thought you shared my opinion," he said to Connie. "Some others around here could benefit from moderation, too."

Mike clanked his fork on his plate. "I'm not saying I'll ever do anything like that again, but I don't regret marrying Kresley."

"Same here," Kresley added.

"That's enough talk about drinking," Connie snapped, and everyone stopped eating to look at her.

"Horses," Mike said. "It's a safe subject."

Connie nodded.

"So, when we get back to Cave Creek, Kresley and Connie will be moving in?" Mike asked.

Connie made eye contact with Ray for the first time. "How many horses do you think you'll have all told?"

He understood what she wanted from him. He wouldn't be any different if he were in her place. She wanted to validate her stay—not take charity. He could keep her busy enough for that.

"When the foals come, we'll have our hands full. And cattle to train the horses on. Then Jake will bring in paying customers with cutting horses to train. He'll need someone to ride turn-back."

"I've never ridden a cutting horse. I'd probably kill myself."

Connie didn't fool him for a second. She was interested.

"Then it's settled." He stood to reach into his front pocket. Pulling out a single key, he put it on the table and nudged it in her direction. "This is a weight off my mind. I'm investing everything I have in this. It's do or die."

She reached for the key and hesitated.

Ray's breath caught.

After a couple of moments, she picked it up and put it in her pocket. Even if it didn't work out between the two of them, Ray wanted to take care of her. He always had. Probably always would.



## CHAPTER 5

Three long weeks worse than hell on earth and now this! Connie watched Ray bending over the almost empty feed barrel. He had the finest ass she'd ever seen. And lately she'd been seeing too much of it. Starting that morning when she'd caught him naked in the shower in the barn.

The new barn had a spacious lounge with small windows cut into the walls, looking out to the birthing stalls, and a bath with a glass-front shower. Ray was in the shower when she walked in on him. To make matters worse, he didn't notice her right away. She examined every inch of him until he did.

Still leaning over the barrel, he glanced back over his shoulder to catch her. Instead of cooling her ardor by being caught staring, it ratcheted up several notches. She wanted him and now he probably knew it. To the best of her ability she'd tried to hide it, but in the three long weeks she'd lived on his ranch and worked side by side with him,

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

it had become nearly impossible.

“Keep an eye out for the vet, would you?”

Connie nodded. “Something wrong?”

“Nothing too serious.”

“Seems Doc’s over here every other day.” Now why had she said that? He’d probably think she was jealous.

“You got a problem with Doc?” Ray turned his face from her, but not before she saw him smile.

*Damn him!* He knew she was jealous of Doc. What woman wouldn’t be? Doc had looks to stop traffic, plus she was smart and successful.

The trainer, Jake, came into the barn. Maybe she could play that game, too? “Jake, I’ve been looking for you all morning.”

“You must not have looked very hard. I’ve been in the west paddock since the crack of dawn. Same place I am every morning.”

Connie tried giving a flirtatious stare. “I missed watching you exercise the mares? I looked forward to it all night long.” Connie picked up the pail she’d come for and walked out the door. *There! That’ll get to him!*

\* \* \*

Ray tried not to laugh.

Jake’s face showed his confusion.

“I think Connie’s trying to make me jealous,” Ray said.

“And she’s decided *I’m* the way to go about it?”

“She doesn’t have much experience. Next time, why don’t you play along? And make sure I’m there to see it.”

“Love sure does make people silly. Glad I’ve sworn off it forever.”

Ray winced. It wasn’t fair to drag Jake into the middle of his problems with Connie. Jake still had it bad for his ex.

“It’s my first time in love, and hopefully my last, if I can get Connie to trust me.”

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Jake smiled. "Better you than me. I don't think I'll ever trust my feelings again where women are concerned."

Ray fed the horses, feeling more optimistic than since he and Connie had made love. Every day she came a little closer to telling him why she'd lied so many years ago. And why she continued to hide the truth. If only she'd be a little quicker about it. He wanted her so badly he couldn't think straight.

\* \* \*

Connie saw Doc's truck pull up to the new barn. When Ray came out to greet her immediately, jealously ate at her. It could be worse. When Ray was a star on the professional rodeo circuit, he'd always had women chasing him.

Even though she couldn't think of a single reason why she would be needed while Doc checked out the mares, Connie headed toward the barn. When she walked through the back entrance, she saw Doc leaning over Ray as he sat at his desk in the lounge.

"Just the person I wanted to see," Connie told Doc.

Doc straightened and frowned. "Hello, Connie. Why's that?"

"I look forward to all your visits. There's so many of them."

Ray raised a brow.

Connie wanted to punch him. She picked up a halter she'd left laying on the desk earlier and slung it over her shoulder. When Ray gave Doc a knock-out smile, one guaranteed to weaken any woman's knees, Connie nearly capitulated to her anger. Her fists were itching to come out of retirement.

*Damn him!*

Connie moved closer. An expression of concern washed over Ray's face. Connie realized he was staring at her hands. Her fists were clenched.

"Old habits die hard?"

She shrugged.

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"But they're definitely dead?" Ray asked.

"As a doornail." She consciously relaxed her hands.

Doc watched the exchange with obvious curiosity.

"How 'bout I go see to the new load of hay?" Connie decided she didn't need to hang around and show Ray how jealous Doc made her. His ego didn't need any more stroking.

"Good idea. Move it behind the old hay so we use the old first."

Connie spent half an hour working out her frustration on the hay. When the last bale she tossed split open, she called a truce with herself. She sat down on a bale of alfalfa and pulled her legs up, hugging them to her chest. Now if only calling a truce with Ray could be as easy. Did she dare confide in him and tell him the whole story?

"Lord, you're driving me insane, woman."

Connie looked up to see Ray towering over her, a blanket folded over his arm. Now what had she done? Then...she saw it. The hard and irrefutable evidence, the reason he had a blanket and fire in his bright blue eyes. The hard-on stretching the front of Ray's jeans meant he was horny, nothing more.

When he dropped the blanket in the pile of loose hay scattered next to her and shrugged out of his shirt, it shocked her. Next, he sat on a bale of hay and began to remove his boots. Surely he didn't intent to—

*In broad daylight?*

*In the hay?*

"All you have to do is say no. Hell, you don't even have to say it. Just whisper it and I'll keep my pants on."

"In the hay?"

"Hay is an aphrodisiac for me." He stood and held his hand out to her. When Connie took it, he pulled her to her feet and then spread the blanket.

His desire pulled her to him like a magnet. Connie jerked the snaps on her western shirt before shrugging out of it.

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Ray stopped fussing with the blanket to stare at her. "I take it the answer is yes."

She reached behind her back and unsnapped her bra. Her girls loved to be free, especially in front of Ray. Both of them pointed at him boldly, in case he failed to notice them right away. Shameless.

He removed his shirt. His chest was covered with hair, darker than the sandy blond on his head. She remembered it being soft to touch and couldn't wait. Her memory propelled her across the space dividing them. Once she was close enough, he pulled her against him and rubbed alongside her breasts like a cat—a very dangerous one. The stubble of his five-o'clock shadow against her skin punished her and, at the same time, sent tremors of desire racing through her body, escalating her need for him.

This was a man, as masculine and strong as they come.

When he began to suckle one of the girls, she threaded her fingers through his hair and watched him. Each pull of his mouth worked magic. Connie's sex throbbed for want of him.

He moved to her other breast, while his hands worked her belt buckle undone.

"My boots."

He sat on a nearby bale and pulled her onto his lap. While he helped her, his breathing rasped. Once freed of her broken down Ropers, she stood to unzip her old, faded jeans. At least she'd worn nice underwear on the off chance this might happen. As soon as she stepped out of her jeans, Ray had his hands on her panties, easing them over her hips until they fell free.

He stood, towering over her five-feet-four by almost a foot. He reached in a rear pocket and produced a foil wrapper. He handed it to her while he finished undressing and laid his clothes on the bale of hay where he'd sat only moments earlier. She fingered the wrapper along the outline of the rubber and then opened it. By the time Ray finished

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putting his clothes down, she was ready to sheathe him.

Boy, she was ready.

Connie knelt in the hay on the blanket next to the bale where he'd laid his clothes and patted it. He sat and she snuggled in front of him, between his open legs, and took the weight of his thick cock into her hand. Her fingers didn't meet her thumb as she took measure of his magnificent sex. A glistening drop of pre-cum pearled on the dusky, wine-colored head as she looked closely.

*Beautiful.*

*So firm and softer than...different than any...just a taste.*

Connie leaned toward him and placed her mouth over the pearl of moisture. It seeped along the seam of her lips until she tested it with her tongue.

Curious.

She'd never tasted anything like it...salty, almost like tears, but thicker.

She gave his cock an open-mouthed kiss. Ray pushed her away just when she decided to go for it and take him into her mouth.

"Not now. I'm too close."

Connie felt powerful, her newfound womanhood taking on new meaning, but she wasn't naïve enough to believe the hard condition of his magnificent member had anything to do with emotions...this was just physical. Nothing new for rodeo star, Ray Kale; just business as usual. He had women at his beck and call.

She positioned the condom and began to roll it down, taking her time, just in case the opportunity never presented itself again. Once she'd fully covered his cock, Ray sighed and pulled her up and across his lap.

"We took a wrong turn and just don't seem to be able to get back on track. Are you okay with this?"

Connie kissed him to show she was more than okay. She wanted

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him badly enough to beg.

He kissed her slowly, like they had all the time in the world. Then, as if a fuse hit black powder, he engaged her. He took her where she'd never been.

Magic.

Drugging.

Still in his arms, their lips locked, he somehow managed to roll down onto the blanket with her on top of him. He pulled her legs until she straddled him with his cock caught in the middle.

She wanted him inside her so badly, she didn't know what had hit her.

*Now.*

When he pushed her back, she knew he didn't want to wait either. Once upright she went up on her knees and Ray raised his cock, aiming it at her core. The next moment he was hard inside her, and she slowly descended on him until he filled her completely.

*So full.*

She started to lift, but Ray placed both hands on the tops of her thighs to stop her.

"Just in case I embarrass myself again, I need to be sure you're satisfied."

That sounded good to Connie.

He stretched his thumb over her clit and began a rhythmic massage. She stayed still as long as she could, but, as the pressure built, she needed to feel the friction of him moving in and out of her.

Connie started to ride him.

Easy at first. Then harder. Much, much harder.

Her orgasm shattered her into thousands of shards of pleasure, but, miraculously, Ray shifted and pieced her back together. He rolled her to the bottom and slowly pulled in and out while she floated and pulsed.

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When he eventually increased his tempo, Connie could feel the pressure building again, even though she hadn't completely come down from her first orgasm. In no time at all she was coming a second time.

"I'm just getting started," he whispered into her ear.



## CHAPTER 6

Somehow Ray knew he had to get through to Connie. He'd thought he could wait her out, but their roll in the hay earlier had showed him just how delusional that was. When they came back to Cave Creek, he'd tried to make her feel safe...and to give her space, until she wanted to talk.

But Connie didn't talk. And Ray had been the one suffering.

The sound of a horn reminded him he was expecting a delivery. Ray had decided to give a feed store at the edge of Phoenix a try. Connie's mother had suggested it when she'd come to visit her daughter. Deliveries sometimes arrived late from the store he'd used for years, and he needed a reliable source of feed.

He walked out of the barn to see the deliveryman waving at someone on the other side of the barn. Ray glanced over to see Connie. Ray looked back at the man to find him walking in Connie's direction.

*Damn!*

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Ray was about to get jealous until he got a closer look at Connie's face. And fists. Not only did she have her hands balled into fists, she had them ready to use. He'd seen it too often not to recognize the sign.

The fool must have been oblivious because he kept heading in her direction.

Ray started to run. "Don't do it!"

Too late. Ray got to Connie just as she let go of a beautiful right hook. The poor guy never saw it coming.

"I thought you promised no more black eyes?" Ray said.

However, the look of sheer hatred on Connie's face stopped him from saying more.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"I'm driving for Mom and Dad's feed store. Making deliveries. Christ, Connie, I think you might've blinded me."

"Did you know I'd be here when you took this delivery?" Connie didn't wait for an answer before she turned her wrath on Ray. "Why the hell did you order feed from my aunt?"

"Your mother—"

"I should've known," Connie interrupted. "My family is insane." Connie raised her fist again. "But *you* knew better."

"Christ, Connie. It was years ago. I was drunker than a skunk."

Ray saw red. There was no premeditation involved. Ray didn't even know his own intentions until Connie's rapist was lying unconscious at his feet.

Connie stared down at the inert body. "Do you think you killed him?"

"Do you want me to?"

Connie looked up. "No, I don't think so. This feels pretty damned good. I just wish I could've hit him that hard."

"Who is he?"

"My cousin."

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“Your cousin?” Ray didn’t know what to think.

“Yeah, my pig of a cousin. Don’t worry you made a mistake. It was him.”

“Connie...”

“Don’t say anything to make me cry in front of him. I’ll tell you everything once he’s gone. And don’t you dare accept that feed. I’ll go pick it up somewhere else, if it comes to that. Those people are insane.” Connie turned her back and walked toward the house.

Ray didn’t wait for Connie’s cousin to come to. He went for a bucket of water.

“What the hell...” he sputtered as Ray doused him.

“Get back in your truck and get the hell out of here.”

“I’m calling the police. You assaulted me. I’m going to make you pay.”

“Go ahead and call the police. They should’ve been called seven years ago when you raped Connie.”

“She told you about that, did she?”

“She didn’t have to. I was there. I’m the one who broke up your little party with her, pervert. No wonder she never wanted to talk about it. Her own cousin.”

“It’s her word against mine. No one believed her then and they won’t now. Besides there’s probably a statute of limitations or something.”

“Get the hell out of here before I *am* arrested...for murder.”

“What about the feed? It’s a big order. Mom will make you pay.”

“Let’s see her try.”

Ray reached down, grabbed the idiot by the collar and escorted him all the way to his truck. He went easily, no screaming and kicking. Ray wished he’d have given him reason to pop him a second time.

After Connie’s cousin sped away, Ray steeled himself. This wouldn’t be easy.

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\* \* \*

Her secret was out.

Connie stepped into the steamy hot shower. She felt dirty just seeing her cousin, Wayne. Her stomach lurched.

She began to scrub the pain away.

"You have the water too hot."

Ray's voice startled her.

"The water's fine. Leave me be for a while."

The glass shower door began to slide open. "It's too hot for *me*."

Connie rubbed the water out of her eyes to find Ray perched to enter the shower with her. "At least take your boots off."

Ray started undressing so fast, she almost laughed.

Almost.

"I've wanted to shower since we made love in the hay. Itchy."

"We made love...is that what it was?" she asked as he joined her under the spray and took her into his arms.

"Making love? It was for me. I love you."

Connie gulped. Did she hear right? "You love me?"

"I've always loved you, but now I'm *in* love with you. Hopelessly, crazy in love."

Connie eyes started to sting. She hadn't cried when facing her cousin down. *Why now?*

"Aren't you going to say anything?" Ray asked.

Connie knew what he wanted to hear. "I love you, too. I've always been *in* love with you." She linked her hands behind his neck and pulled his head down as she stood on the tips of her toes. She needed to kiss him. He complied with breathtaking technique.

Ray Kale wasn't just a rodeo star. He was a damned good kisser! Connie didn't have any experience, but she knew. Just like she knew she could trust him with her heart. He'd never purposely hurt her, never let her down.

## *CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS*

And she could trust him with the whole story.

Later.

Connie slid her leg up the outside of his thigh and pressed her sex against his hard cock.

“I don’t have protection.”

“Do you need it?”

“You tell me. This could rush our wedding plans.”

“What wedding?” Connie wanted an answer, but he started to push inside her.

Stretching her. Filling her.

The pleasure was so intense, she experienced a high so sublime it nearly rendered her unconscious. Ray reached down to lift her and pushed her against the back wall of the shower. He held her and began to pump into her.

“Each time gets better,” he groaned. “Perfect. Unbelievable.”

Connie couldn’t agree more. This time...she belonged.

She’d come home.

Found her place in life.

The pressure built and her release began deep inside and radiated to every cell in a flash of ecstasy. It continued in waves. Connie held on while Ray took her where she’d never been.

Paradise.

## CHAPTER 7

Connie snuggled in Ray's arms as the sun rose over the top of mountain. The window by Ray's bed opened up to an incredible view. It would be easy to find her way to his bed each night in hopes of waking to this panoramic vista.

And that wasn't the half of it.

They'd made love most of the night, only falling asleep once they'd exhausted themselves.

"Good morning, sleepy head."

Connie shifted in the bed to see Ray looking at her. "What sleep?"

"This feels like a whole new beginning for me...us." Ray pointed to the sunrise and smiled widely. "The first day of the rest of our lives."

Connie needed to get it over with before Ray's rose-colored glasses made her permanently mute. She knew he wouldn't press her. Ever. But he needed to hear about what he'd interrupted that night so long ago.

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"The night my cousin raped me, we'd been drinking. Both of us."

Ray frowned.

"I know how you feel about drinking too much. I'm a perfect example that you're right. I was so drunk, at first I didn't even realize my cousin had his hands on me *that* way."

"Connie, you don't have to do this."

"I want to."

Ray kissed her and pulled her into the nest of his arms.

"Kresley always thought it was one of the older gang who'd been playing spin-the-bottle. She never even thought about my cousin, even though he and one of his sleazy friends took us to the rodeo. He'd just got his driver's license and my aunt had bought him a new car. He loved to show off and we needed a ride. I never thought he'd do what he did."

"Why didn't your parents throw him in jail?"

"I didn't talk right away. It was almost a month before Mom wormed it out of me. She went to my aunt with my story and my cousin denied it. To make a long story short, my aunt demanded I be taken to a doctor to prove he never touched me."

Ray looked away. Connie understood why. She'd had an intact hymen the first time they'd made love.

"The examination was even worse than the rape. My aunt insisted on being in the room with me and my mother allowed it. When the doctor told her I was still a virgin, she began to scream at me. It was horrible. After that, I didn't want to talk to anybody."

"When Wayne raped me, he didn't stick his cock in my vagina. He rammed it into my rear. I couldn't tell anybody. It was too embarrassing."

"I'm going to kill him. What about the other guy? The other one was holding you down. Did he do anything?"

Connie hugged him and buried her face against his wide chest. She

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could feel the anger in him. “My cousin’s sleazy buddy...I tried to get him to speak up about what happened, but he denied it. He held me down, but he didn’t have a chance to do anything else before you came to my rescue. As far as killing my cousin, trust me, he’s not worth it. Over the years he’s shown what kind of person he is. He’s been in and out of trouble. Last I heard he was in jail for felonious assault.”

“Your parents never believed you either?”

“My mother looked up to her sister. My aunt had a successful business of her own and used her money to make people think and do as she wanted. No one in the family dared cross her. My cousin came by his nasty disposition naturally.”

“I wish you’d have told me sooner.”

“Me, too. Telling you wasn’t nearly as bad as I thought it would be.”

“There’s nothing you can’t tell me. Except maybe ‘no.’”

“No?”

“No...to a Christmas wedding. I want to hear you scream yes. I think I know how...” Ray began to kiss her. He lifted her out of his arms and began to move lower with his kisses.

“A Christmas wedding?”

He moved to her breasts and alternately nipped and kissed.

“A Cave Creek cowboy Christmas?”

Ray began to kiss down her stomach and then lower. And...

“Yes. Yes. *Yes.*”



## CHAPTER 8

### *Christmas time at Cave Creek*

Connie didn't care if her husband-to-be wasn't supposed to see her before the wedding. She couldn't take it a second longer. "Are they here yet?" she asked, peeking around the edge of his bedroom door.

Ray turned away from the mirror where he was adjusting his tie. The sharp intake of breath told Connie he appreciated what he saw. His blue eyes sparkled with a mischievous glint, one she'd come to know well. "Are you supposed to be in here?"

"Kresley isn't back yet. I don't understand why it was so important for you to have Steve at our wedding. What if they get caught in traffic?"

"Relax, sweetheart. I didn't want to worry about Steve while I'm on my honeymoon. I want to concentrate on my new wife."

Connie didn't have to be told how troubled Ray was about

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Kresley's brother. He kept close tabs on everything Steve did. "I know a way to take the edge off these wedding day jitters."

"Tsk, tsk." Ray loosened his tie and slowly pulled it off. "If I'm not supposed to see you before the ceremony, I don't think I'm allowed to touch you either."

Connie smiled inside. "Just keep your eyes closed and I'll do all the work. Damn, why didn't I think of this before I got into this contraption?"

\* \* \*

"Jingle balls, jingle b-balls, jingle all the way-ye."

Kresley turned in her seat to roll her eyes at him. "If you weren't my brother, I don't think I'd like you much right now. The doctor would ream your ass if he knew you're drinking like this. You've worked too hard to recover from your accident to blow it by ruining your health with alcohol."

"I think some might argue it wasn't an accident. Riding an angry bull with horns harder than my head was intentional. The part where I landed on my ass was the result of my own stubbornness, pure and simple." Steve tried to sit straighter in the rear seat of his brother-in-law's truck. If he concentrated harder, he could fool her. She'd never know he was almost wasted.

In truth, he liked seeing her golden eyes heat with anger since it happened so seldom. His mother's eyes were unusual, but Kresley's were in a class of their own. All the Hansen boys—and there was a mob of them—had inherited their father's looks, with eyes so dark, the blue seemed black at times, but Kresley looked like their mom.

"I haven't had so much to drink, bright eyes. Lighten up. It's the holidays. Time for good cheer and letting bygones be bygones."

She searched his face as though trying to see if meant what he'd said. "Steve, this night is important to my husband. His brother, Ray, and my best friend, Connie, are getting married. This is the most

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important day of their lives. If you're going to do something to embarrass me, you can go home to Mom and Dad's instead."

"I can take a hint. You wouldn't wish Mom and Dad on your worst enemy. I'll be careful to mind my manners."

"I'm surprised you agreed to come. You never care for Christmas."

"Technically, it's still three days until Christmas. Did you think I'd miss the event of the season? A Christmas wedding...it's so sentimental." Why the hell *had* he agreed to this? Both the bride and groom hated his guts...with good reason. Ray and Connie had kept in close touch, but Steve wasn't fooled. They did it for Kresley, not because they gave a shit about *him*.

Kresley rolled her eyes a second time and turned her face forward again. The light from the setting sun glowed around her, making her look like the angel he knew her to be. How his mother had managed to raise such a sweetheart was a complete mystery. The two of them might look the same, but their personalities were exact opposites.

"I have your word you'll behave?"

"Give the guy a break," Kresley's husband, Mike said. "No one cares if your brother had a couple of drinks."

Steve huffed. "What about *your* brother? He's almost a teetotaler. We called him 'the preacher' on the rodeo circuit."

"Ray drinks an occasional beer or two. He just doesn't care for the way so many in our crowd tend to drink until they end up in trouble or worse. Prefect example—look what happened to your sister and me!"

"That's not fair." Kresley's voice had a stern tone, but the smile on her beautiful face as she looked at her husband told another story. His sister and Mike Kale looked good together. Her almost white-blonde hair and his sandy blond would guarantee a bunch of towheads when they got around to starting a family.

"Easy for you to say," Mike said to her. "I'm never going to live it down. Everyone knows how I woke up in bed with six naked women

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and a marriage certificate with my name on it.”

Kresley giggled. “And you didn’t know which one of us you’d married.”

Steve listened to the two of them and mentally shuddered. *What a way to get hitched.* “No way am I drunk enough to crawl in bed with six naked women. Your ego would have to be bigger than your—”

“Steve, go back to singing ‘Jingle Balls,’ why don’t you.”

Steve was about to do that when they pulled into Ray’s, and the soon-to-be Connie Kale’s driveway, already lined with mostly pick-up trucks. Steve had wondered what his old rival had done to fix up his place now he was a *retired* bull rider.

Who knew what a difference a few months had made in their lives? No more bulls for both of them for a while.

Steve would rather have gone out in blaze of glory like Ray, instead of on a stretcher. “Whoever heard of having a wedding in a barn? That’s what comes from marrying a tomboy.”

“Ray’s new barn is nicer than most people’s houses.” His sister’s tone told Steve he’d misspoken again. Kresley probably didn’t like the comment about Connie.

“If I didn’t thank you two for coming to the airport to pick me up, I am now. I don’t think I could’ve stood how Mom pushes me. She thinks I should be out of my wheelchair...no questions asked.”

“My brother, Sam, says you’ll walk again, probably sooner than later. It’s a given. However, he also says you think you can return to bull riding.”

Steve wanted to punch his brother-in-law for tattling in front of Kresley. “It was just something in the back of my mind. Mom and Dad think it’s a good idea.”

Kresley growled. “Keep it in the back of your mind where it belongs. Mom and Dad are clueless sometimes. They were too proud of your fame. You’re home now and this is where you should stay.”

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

"There's part of your fan club waiting to see you," Mike said and then chuckled.

Steve looked out the window to see two of Kresley's friends, the twins, Zandra and Zoe Boyd. The two of them had been trying to get into his jeans for as long as he could remember. Out of respect for his sister, he'd never dated her friends.

"Let me warn you in advance that they're more determined than ever to have their way with you. I told you in Vegas, their goal in life is to get you into to bed with the two of them."

Steve remembered.

She'd said it the night before his accident. "It's just a game they've always played. If I called their bluff, they'd run for the hills. Especially now. No one treats me like the man I used to be." Steve knew from experience how the sight of him in a wheelchair affected his old crowd. Beautiful women didn't throw themselves at him any longer.

Mike parked his dually and the twins ran in their four-inch heels and short, short skirts to open Kresley's door.

"Is he here?" one of them demanded.

Steve never had been able to tell the two of them apart.

"I'm first," the other one said.

*First at what?*

"Welcome home, cowboy. Zoe and I are your dates this evening. And don't you go messin' with any other girls because we can get mighty jealous."

Where had he heard that before? A line from *Gone with the Wind*? This was Cave Creek, Arizona...not the Deep South, and he sure the hell wasn't Rhett Butler, although he'd been told he bore a resemblance. "Kresley, did you have a hand in this?"

"Who me?"

Steve ducked his head down to get a closer look. "Okay, but I'm warning you two. I've been in the hospital for months. Many long

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

months without a woman...do you get my meaning? I'm talking long...*hard, damned hard* months."

Kresley laughed harder. "You poor, delusional, baby. Take it easy on him, girls. He thinks he's scaring you. There's nothing quite as sad as a man who doesn't have a clue."

Now Steve wished he hadn't had quite so much to drink. "Nothing scares me, except settling down with one woman. That's not about to happen with twins now, is it? They're the perfect date."

"Your sister has thrown you to Santa's six-foot elves." Mike laughed as he opened his door to get out. "Merry Cave Creek Christmas."

"Six-feet-four in those high heels. Jingle balls, j-jingle balls, jingle all the way-ye-e."

For a fraction of a second, Steve experienced normalcy, like his life wasn't in the crapper.

Damn.

It felt good.

The sensation vanished when Steve watched Mike retrieve his wheelchair out of the back of the truck. The sight of that damned contraption would send them running in the opposite direction in their skimpy dresses and sexy heels. Wouldn't it?

"I get to push him first," one of women told Mike and grabbed for the handles as soon as he unfolded it. She sounded anxious.

*Lord!*

Both of them were dressed in one-piece, red leather dresses, looking as though they'd been spray-painted onto them. Both towered above his sister and Mike. When one of them bent to examine his chair, Steve could see she wore a sexy garter belt to hold her stockings. It was the kind of lacy garter in an old-fashioned, pin-up-girl poster. The other twin probably wore the same. They were like interchangeable, golden blonde-bombshell bookends.

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*His* for the night?

"This is going to be great." The gorgeous twin moved away from his chair and reached for his door. She swung it open and gave him a bright smile.

"A highlight in my otherwise boring year."

The second twin moved closer to look over her sister's shoulder and draw her beautiful face into a frown. "No bitterness allowed tonight...or whining. You were at the top of your game. A genuine cowboy hero...a bull rider extraordinaire. How many men can say that? If you never ride again, you've done more than most."

And this was supposed to make him want to spend time with her? She might look like an Amazon sex goddess, but she'd already managed to piss him off. He looked from one to the other and back again. How the hell could he tell this one apart from the other twin? He'd show one of them the time of her life and leave this one wanting. How dare she talk to him like that?

"You need a hand?" Mike asked as he wheeled the chair next to the truck.

Ordinarily, yes.

Now he wanted, in the worst way, to do it himself without help.

"I can do it," the words coming out of his mouth surprised even him. *I can?*

"You've had too much to drink," his sister argued. "You haven't changed at all. Still stubborn, and probably still a bully, too."

"Let him do it. He's a big boy."

*Her* again.

He hardly knew her. *Which one was she?* What had he ever done to piss her off?

And why did Kresley call him a bully. Didn't she understand, as the oldest he'd always been responsible for his younger brothers? No, she didn't have a clue. She was the golden girl in more ways than one.

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Eight years younger than Steve, she didn't know how alienated their parents were from the boys they'd given birth to one after another. From the moment she was born, everything had been about her. Steve had to become a nationally ranked bull rider before his parents paid any attention to him.

He looked for leverage in the back seat of Mike's Ford. Steve had the upper body strength, if he could just get hold of something. And, on a good day, his legs weren't a complete waste.

"At least take hold of my arm," Mike insisted. "I won't help. I promise."

Somehow, after several bumbling attempts, and turning a deaf ear to his sister's nagging, Steve managed to get into the chair on his own steam. Afterward, he experienced a sense of elation, as if he'd run a marathon and came out the winner.

The nice twin grabbed hold of his chair and began to walk. "We'll meet you guys in the barn. Zoe and I are going to give Steve a private tour of the property. We thought we'd start with the pool."

So now he had a name for the evil twin—Zoe.

Just what Steve *needed*, a private tour of Ray Kale's digs? *This ought to be good. Ray had always been the one to beat.* Now, he had everything: the woman, the house, the barn and the horses. He had it made. Steve didn't have squat.

"So this is Ray Kale's place. I can't believe my sister lives here with her husband. We Hansens always thought of the Kales as the enemy. What a difference a few months makes."

"Don't tell me *you* still harbor resentment over the lie *you* told everyone about the Kale boys raping Connie. Don't you have that backwards? The Kale family should hate your guts. Instead, because you're Kresley's brother, they'll welcome you with open arms."

"What did I ever do to you?"

Zoe raised a perfect brow. "You caused a lot of problems for



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Connie. She didn't deserve it. But I'll bet you she won't hold a grudge since she knows it would hurt Kresley."

Steve didn't have to be told everything was about Kresley. This time he couldn't complain. If not for his sister, he wouldn't dare show his face back in Cave Creek. "All Connie had to do was speak up. She's the one who allowed me believe the Kales were involved in her rape. Besides, I never said a word to anyone outside my family."

"Now that the truth is out, your family is taking a lot of heat over this."

"Did you bring me out here alone to torment me where nobody could see? You should be doing this in front of everyone. They'd all enjoy it." The pool loomed ahead and he wondered if she intended to throw him in and end his misery. "It may be eighty degrees out, but I don't feel like swimming."

"Zoe, leave him be or you'll spoil all our fun." Zandra tapped his shoulder to get him to look up at her. "If we did what we're planning to do in front of the wedding party, we'd be arrested."

This one had a way of pulling him out of the black hole the other one pushed him into with every word out of her mouth. He smiled and started to breathe easier. Despite the bravado he'd displayed for Kresley, returning to Cave Creek—coming home—scared the shit out of him.

Zoe walked off to the side of him, several feet away where he didn't have to strain his neck to see her. "I still haven't decided how much fun it'll be. This is your idea. You don't really need me."

"Nonsense! You know it's better when we share. Right this way, cowboy. We're going to start the evening out with a little gift for you. It's a special, welcome-home Christmas present. If you've naughty instead of nice, it won't be your last."

They wheeled him inside the pool house and turned the lights on dim. Steve looked around and didn't see anything in a brightly wrapped

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box.

Or did he?

He looked back at the stacked blondes, standing side-by-side in their dazzling red dresses. Christmas red. Could he get that lucky?

One of the twins turned her rear to her sister, who reached upward and Steve heard the sound of a zipper. The other did the same, but they both held their dresses in place. Then like they'd synchronized it, they began to slowly peel the leather down and step out of the dresses.

Certain his eyes were bulging out of his head, Steve reminded himself to breathe. The two of them presented a sight he'd never forget as long as he lived, which the way his heart slammed against the wall of his chest, wouldn't be too long now. Blood gushed to his cock and it expanded faster than the speed of light. Sitting suddenly became uncomfortable and he tried a quick adjustment.

"Here let me do that." Zandra approached in her sexy Christmas green bra and triangle of lacy panties under her garter, all the same color, to make the offer to help.

Steve didn't know why, but he could tell her apart from her sister without a moment's hesitation. Something about Zoe was completely different from Zandra. He had no doubt who was who.

Zandra bent down by his legs and reached for his championship belt buckle. She gave it a gentle tug to release it.

"I wonder how many women have touched that buckle. It's probably seen more action than all the cowboys here combined."

*Her* again.

"Zoe, stop *now*. You'll make him lose his hard-on and spoil our fun."

So Zandra liked the games and Zoe went along for the ride. He may not be able to do much, but he still had some tricks up his sleeve.

Didn't he?

## CHAPTER 9

With a twin kneeling on either side of his wheelchair and his cock thrusting into the air between them, Steve couldn't wait to see what they'd planned. Then both of their faces came toward him at the same time and they began to lick, starting at the bottom of his shaft and moving upward very slowly.

Fireworks went off inside him. He gripped the edge of his armless chair for dear life. They'd only begun and the sight of two pink tongues, wiggling out of their cherry-red, plump lips and simultaneously flicking his hard cock, had him ready to explode...the damned mother lode.

One of them stopped and then the other did. His balls loosened.

"How are you doing up there, cowboy?" Zandra asked.

"I'm about to embarrass myself."

"Nothing to be embarrassed about yet. The record is only forty-five seconds. Can you hang on for that long?"

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“You two *time* this event?”

Zoe held up a stop watch. Where the hell had she hidden *that*? “It’s only been eight seconds so far. I stopped it when Zandra started to chat.”

Steve understood eight seconds better than most. It’d felt like twice that long.

Zandra winked at her sister. “It’s more fun if they know there’s a record to break.”

“Should I start the clock over?” Zoe held the watch, her thumb poised to start again.

“Put it back to zero and we’ll just tack eight seconds on the end.”

These two were crazy. Certifiable.

And he liked it!

“Ready. Set. Go.”

Both of them came at his cock again with their tongues fluttering. *Holy shit!* If he’d been ready to go the first eight seconds, how the hell could he last another forty or so?”

They moved at a leisurely pace, alternately kissing and licking. Zoe scraped her teeth hard enough he wondered if she might bite. They were only halfway up when Steve swore he saw celestial lights streaking across the room. Mount Vesuvius would erupt any moment between their beautiful blonde heads and all he could do was watch.

He sure as hell couldn’t stop it!

All this time, he’d believed eight seconds on the back of an angry bull was hardest thing he’d ever done. “Shit.”

Three-quarters of the way.

*Shit!*

He could see their lipstick trailing all the way up. He’d remember this for as long as he lived.

Seven-eighths.

*Shit. Shit.*

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*How long has it been?*

Then they were there, each touching her tongue to the ridge of his glans. And he thought he couldn't walk? Right about then, he swore he could have pole vaulted.

"Who gets the cherry?"

Did he hear right?

"Me." Zoe.

*Zoe?*

When her tongue flicked out to capture the drop of cum on the top of his cock, he almost lost it. It took all he had to hold off exploding into her mouth.

*How long has it been?*

"Did I win yet?"

He couldn't last another second.

Zoe didn't stop there. She began to suck while her hazel eyes stared at him. As she took him almost completely into her mouth, she damned near lifted him off the chair. His balls were so tight, they sent earthquake-like tremors zinging through every fiber in his body. Steve erupted with more force than he knew possible. Nothing had ever been like this.

Nothing.

\* \* \*

Zoe milked every last drop out of his big, fat cock and then licked her lips while her sister smiled at her.

"What's his time?" Zandra asked and winked again.

Zoe didn't really want her sister to know he'd kept coming and coming, until she had to swallow several times. Why? All of this had been Zandra's master plan. Zoe had had a crush on Steve for so long, it embarrassed her to admit it. Zandra had said if the two of them did this together, he'd never guess about Zoe's crush.

*Zandra didn't like him, too, did she?* Zoe hated being paranoid

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about her own sister.

What else could she have done? Kresley said his accident had crushed his spirit even more than his body. Since that fateful day, his dark blue eyes had seemed filled with pain, the kind that came from constant hurtful feelings and thoughts.

*Was it all about the wheelchair?*

Zoe didn't think so. Her heart hurt. Did she feel sorry for him?

*Hell, no!*

Steve Hansen had been more successful in his career than ninety-nine percent of the cowboys out there. If he hadn't gotten hurt, he'd have become a legend. She remembered in Vegas when she and Zandra tried to get him to do this very thing. They'd been naked when they pretended to walk in on him. He'd just looked away and laughed.

He could afford to laugh then. Women had flocked to him like bees to honey. He'd practically had to beat them off and he'd told them so with his condescending attitude.

"I'm almost glad you got hurt. It may make you realize you're no better than anyone else. Maybe now you can grow a man's heart."

"What the hell? At least let go of my cock when you talk to me like that. Lady, you're crazy."

Zandra gasped. "Why would you say such a thing? That's not like you."

Tears started to sting at the back of Zoe's eyelids. Why had she? She didn't go off on people for no reason. She had a sneaking suspicion all of this meant more to her than she'd imagined and it didn't sit well with her. She wasn't ready to admit it to herself, let alone to her sister.

And especially not to *him*!

"Merry Christmas." Zoe grabbed her dress from the floor as she stood and started for the door before she did anything else to ruin any chance she might have with him.

"What's wrong? I thought we'd..."

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Zoe turned to glare at her sister, effectively stopping her. "I'll catch up with you two later."

Zoe slid into her dress and then tried unsuccessfully to zip it. A few moments later she felt a tug. "Thanks, sis."

"Any time."

That voice didn't belong to her sister.

Zoe jerked around to see Steve standing behind her.

"How did you do that?"

"The exercise machine. I used it to pull myself up and took one of those faltering steps I'm so famous for." His hand lingered at her neck.

He stood close enough she only needed to move to initiate full body contact. If she weren't wearing heels, he'd be taller. She could smell liquor on his breath. Could that be the reason he'd condescended to letting them have their way with him? She got mad all over again.

Zoe turned and, just as she thought, their bodies touched. It shocked her to feel a bulge against her hip when she looked into his midnight blue eyes. She couldn't help being impressed at how quickly he got a hard-on again. The man had an uncanny ability to humble her. Everything about him was *more*. With his dark eyes and dark, shaggy hair, he could be a model. Standing there with his jeans unzipped, thin and muscular, he exuded male potency.

"Kresley must be adopted because she's nothing like you or your brothers. She has a sunny disposition, where you go around with a storm cloud hovering over your head."

"I think I've earned it."

"Feeling sorry for yourself again? There are plenty of people in wheelchairs with no hope of ever getting out of them at all. Get over it."

Zoe had now had enough. She didn't figure she'd win...Zandra's silliness had probably fixed that for good. Zoe decided she needed a brain transplant for going along with it. "I need to get to the barn. I'm a

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part of the wedding. You, too, Zandra.”

Thankfully, Steve didn’t try to stop her from leaving. Zoe walked into the barn to see three of Ray’s four brothers standing by the preacher. Kresley motioned to her.

“It’s time. Where have you been?”

“I got distracted by your brother. Oh, my...” Zoe couldn’t believe it. Three of the Hansens came filing through the door. “I didn’t realize your family and the Kales had mended fences.

Kresley blanched as she jerked around to see her family. “Mom and Dad are probably here because Steve has finally come home. I wish they’d leave him the hell alone. He’s like a status symbol to them. I hope there’s no trouble. Matt probably came along to make them behave.”

*Maybe Steve’s haughty attitude had more to do with his parent’s aspirations than his own.* Zoe had often wondered about the strange relationship Mr. and Mrs. Hansen had with their offspring. Could there be hope for him?

“There’s Zandra. Let’s get this show on the road.” Zoe went to get her flowers, a bouquet of poinsettia and holly. Zandra was first up the aisle with John Kale, next came Zoe and Doctor Sam Kale, and then the maid of honor, Kresley. Kresley’s husband, Mike, was the best man.

While Ray and Connie repeated their vows, Zoe resisted the compelling urge to look for Steve. Ray and Connie made a great couple. The way they looked at one another as they became man and wife was storybook perfect. Zoe couldn’t help wanting what they had found.

After the ceremony, Zandra immediately pulled Zoe aside. “You aren’t going to believe what happened earlier. Someone saw us give Steve a blow job.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me. Who?” Zoe shook her head in frustration. “Zandra, I can’t believe I let you talk me into this. And all



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that baloney about timing him and pretending we'd done it before. Why do I let you get me involved with your crazy schemes?"

"Slow down, slow down. Don't go nuts on me. It'll work. I know it will," Zandra said.

"Who saw us? Does Steve know about this?"

"Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it. I'll make sure our voyeur keeps his mouth shut...permanently. Look, Kresley is motioning she needs you." Zandra took off.

Glad to get away from Zandra's drama, Zoe made her way to where Kresley stood with her family. Zoe didn't even want to know what Zandra meant by *permanently*. As she drew nearer, she could see Steve there also. At first she hesitated, then decided she needed to know everything she could if she planned on getting him to love her. She really wanted to know how much of his attitude belonged to him and how much was influenced by his family.

Kresley reached for Zoe's hand. "Mom and Dad aren't staying, but they wanted to see Connie get married. Connie used to live with us."

"Mr. and Mrs. Hansen, it's nice to see you." In all the years Zoe had been friends with Kresley, she'd rarely seen the two of them together. Kresley's father was busy making money and her mother worked full-time spending it. Everything about them shouted wealth and privilege. Kresley's mother was an heiress and her father owned a construction company.

"We're having a little gathering tomorrow evening to welcome Steve home. Kresley said to be sure to invite you." Kresley's mother smiled at her daughter. However, she didn't look at her son in the chair next to her as she mentioned the party to welcome him home.

"You must be excited to have your son home again."

"Steve won't be here for long. He's going to get better and go back to being a star," Mrs. Hansen said.

Kresley hugged her brother. "I don't want to hear it, Mom. As far as

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

I'm concerned, Steve's home to stay. I need my big brother, especially now."

"Nonsense. What's there in Cave Creek for him? And why do you need him all of a sudden?" her mother asked.

Kresley smiled, her arms still locked around Steve. "Later. This night is about Connie and Ray."

Zoe watched with interest. Kresley's hug seemed like a defensive gesture, a warning to leave her brother alone. *So Kresley sensed her mother's ambiguity, too?*

Steve hugged his sister back and smiled up at Zoe. "Zoe thinks Kresley must be adopted because she's nothing like me or my brothers."

Mrs. Hansen's face hardened as the smile she'd had earlier for her daughter was replaced by a frown.

"It was a joke, Mom," Steve said.

"It's not funny."

Mr. Hansen appeared to reach for his wife's hand. In a move so slight Zoe wondered if anyone else noticed, Mrs. Hansen moved away from him. At the same time, Steve's brother Matt walked up to join them.

"Look, there's Dale and Bette. I've been wanting to talk to Dale." Mr. Hansen walked away and Mrs. Hansen started to follow without a word.

"Was it something I said?" Matt asked, when his parents walked away without acknowledging him.

Zoe had her answer. This family needed some shaking up. If Steve's mother could be rude, so could she. "It's not you, Matt. Your mother doesn't care for my sense of humor. Sorry, Mrs. Hansen, I'm not as funny as I normally am. I'm worried about someone seeing Zandra and me give Steve a blow job."

## CHAPTER 10

Steve quickly learned the meaning of hell on earth. Never an easy woman to deal with even under the best of circumstances, his mother went on a tirade. When she demanded he leave with them and he'd politely declined, the situation went from bad to worse. He didn't exactly know what he was going to do, but he didn't want to go home with them.

Now his mother had sulked through several glasses of wine, while his father stayed busy flirting with every woman there.

"Why don't you stay here on the ranch with me?" Kresley suggested when she and Matt got Steve away from them.

"Here?" What a crazy idea. "This is your brother-in-law's place, not yours."

"Nonsense. Ray won't mind. He and Connie are going to Hawaii for a two- week honeymoon. You can stay above the garage in Connie's old apartment until you figure out what you're going to do."

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“The apartment above the garage? Did you hear yourself? Did you forget I’m in a wheelchair?”

Kresley turned red.

“You can move in with me,” Matt said. “I have a new place close to the college...a studio apartment. It’s not much, but I get by. If you hadn’t paid my tuition for the year, I don’t know if I could’ve made it.”

“You’d have done just fine. Tempe, huh? Surrounded by college kids.”

“I’m not exactly a kid either. I’ll be twenty-eight next month.”

“Right now twenty-eight seems like a kid to me.”

“You’re two years older than me, not fifty.”

Kresley started bobbing up and down. “I know! I’ve got it. You can stay in my fifth-wheel. It’s parked behind the old barn. It’s hooked up to electric and septic since the girls use it to stay over every now and then. It’s so narrow inside you should be able to use leverage to get around. You can sleep on the couch if it comes to that. We can get Mike to rig up a ramp.”

Steve nodded. He’d helped Kresley buy her horse-trailer with living quarters, so it wasn’t like charity. Sooner or later he’d have to admit he’d come home because he was out of money...flat broke. Every cent he’d saved had been eaten up by hospital bills and costly therapy sessions. He had enough for groceries and then he didn’t know what.

“I agree with Kresley. You don’t need to deal with family drama while you’re recuperating. There’s plenty of time for that later,” Matt added.

Kresley touched him on the shoulder. “Here comes Zoe again. Don’t give her a hard time.”

“*Me...give her* a hard time. You guys heard what she said to Mom and Dad. Zoe has bigger balls than I do.”

Zoe approached. “Have you seen Zandra? She’s disappeared. I need to find out who was spying on us.”

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“You mean someone really saw us together?”

Kresley growled. “It really happened? Zoe wasn’t just yanking Mom’s chain? How could you?”

“You’re blaming me? I’m in a wheelchair.”

“Will you quit with the whining?” Zoe said. “Why did I ever think I wanted to sleep with you?”

“Technically, that hasn’t happened yet.”

“And it’s not going to if you don’t stop playing the wheelchair card. It’s getting old and beyond boring.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

“I need to talk to your brother alone.” Zoe grabbed his chair and started wheeling him away before Kresley could complain.

“How about you take me out to Kresley’s fifth-wheel? I want to see if I can move around in it.”

“Are you planning on staying a while?”

“I thought I might.”

“Good. I think Kresley would have a good influence on you.”

As soon as he saw the trailer, Steve knew it wouldn’t work. “Never mind. I don’t think I can do it.”

“You haven’t tried yet. It’s a nice trailer. Kresley said you bought it for her.”

“I helped.”

“You did more than help.” Zoe stepped up into the doorway and did a half turn. “I’ll get Mike to put up some boards leading up here. As easy as your chair maneuvers, I think it’ll work for you. I’m not sure about getting up into the gooseneck to the bed, but you can sleep on the couch. It’s comfortable enough. I’ve slept on it many a time.”

“You’ve got it all planned for me.”

Zoe smiled. She had a great smile once she finally got around to it. “Not everything, but if you’d let me, I’d like to help.”

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“Why are you being nice all of a sudden? Not that I’m complaining mind you. I’ve seen the other side of you and I much prefer this one.”

“I shouldn’t have said what I did to your mother. You have every right to be angry with me, but you’ve been a gentleman about it. I’m sorry. Truly sorry.”

“What do you think you can do to help me...if I needed your help?”

“For starters, I can help you inside the trailer and then bring your wheelchair in to see if you can go from the couch to the bathroom and back.”

“Let’s give it a try.”

It took some time and effort, but being mauled by a six-foot blonde Amazon had fringe benefits. She didn’t seem to mind either from the way her hands lingered in places that would make most women blush. His cock, at half-mast from the time he saw her, got almost as hard as it had earlier in her mouth.

Somehow, in one night, Steve had once made it in and out of his chair twice because of her. If he made it in or out of his chair a single time in a day on his own steam, he gave himself kudos. When he’d stood and taken a step to zip her earlier, Superman couldn’t have felt better. What would she have him doing next?

Once inside the trailer, for the third time he made it back into his chair. Funny how getting in and out of wheelchair validated him. He used to ride bulls, for crissakes. Steve wheeled from one end and then back again, forward motion to go to the rear where the tiny bathroom was and reverse to go back. Everything along both sides of the trailer, the built-in table, the stove and sink was close enough to use for leverage if he decided to walk.

“I can do this.”

Zoe smiled again and gave a single nod. “No doubt. It might be hard to entertain here, but other than that...”

“I don’t plan on entertaining.”

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

“You could’ve fooled me.” Zoe got up from the table where she’d sat to get out of his way. “How many times do you suppose I’ve propositioned you in the past?”

Steve thought about it. “More times than I can count. You and Zandra went out of your way to torment me.”

“Why didn’t you ever accept our invitation...until tonight, that is?”

“I take my responsibilities as big brother seriously. I didn’t want to do anything to jeopardize my sister’s friendships. I’ve never messed with any of her friends. I don’t believe in getting involved with anyone who wants more than I can give.”

Zoe stared purposely at his crotch and then smiled. “You have a lot to give.”

“I’m talking commitment. I didn’t want or need a long-term relationship.”

“You still feel that way?”

“More now than ever. Right now I need to concentrate on getting better and getting back on the bulls.”

She sighed as if he’d disappointed her.

*Didn’t she realize it was the bull rider who’d attracted her in the first place?*

“If you couldn’t ride bulls again, what would you do?”

“I haven’t considered it,” he said. “Not an option.”

“Humor me.”

Steve didn’t want to have this conversation. He’d refused to have it with himself. “I don’t know anything else.”

“Exactly *what* are you looking for that you think you can’t find anywhere but on the back of wild-ass bull... Never, mind if you knew the answer to that question, I doubt you’d be going back to the rodeo. Remember the pictures you took of Kresley a couple of years ago when she placed second at Cheyenne?”

“Sure. They came out great.”

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“Better than great.” She sounded genuine.

“Just a fluke.”

Zoe moved nearer. “Maybe. I’m not in a mood to argue with you about it right now.”

Steve couldn’t stop the chuckle he’d rather have suppressed. He didn’t want to get her mad when they’d finally started to talk normally. “You could’ve fooled me. You’ve been hanging around Connie too much.”

“It seems strange to see my friends getting married. I always figured I’d be first since Zandra and I are the oldest.”

“By a year or so?”

By five...I’m twenty-seven.”

Steve started feeling uncomfortable. This was the reason he stayed away from his sister’s friends. He didn’t know if he ever wanted to get married. Unlike his sister, he didn’t have a rose-colored view of the institution of marriage.

“Will you *please* get over yourself.” Zoe brought his focus back.

“I’m all I’ve ever had.”

Zoe frowned. “You don’t really believe that, do you?”

“The last time my family got together was in Vegas, and it happened by accident rather than design. I’m still close to the twins, Matt and Kyle, but Marc and Tim don’t have much to do with family any more.”

“You aren’t telling me anything I don’t know. As much as I like talking to you, quite frankly, you have unfinished business.” She sat on the couch next to his legs and twisted until her back was to him. “Just once I’d like you to make the first move. Fat chance of that happening.”

Steve hesitated. He wanted her, but he didn’t want forever. He had a feeling, despite what happened earlier, Zoe wanted to settle down. On second thought, what woman would marry a man who fooled around with her twin sister?



## *CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS*

It was safe.

He reached over to unzip her.

She didn't waste any time. She stood and peeled out of the dress. She moved in front of him where the dress brushed over his knees as it fell to the floor.

He felt it!

Everyday the feeling got stronger in his legs.

She released her sexy green bra in the front and her breasts seemed to explode toward him. His fingers itched to touch them. They were a perfect handful, with small coral nipples pointing toward him.

She reached down to touch her stocking. He wanted to say stop. Before he had a chance, she fished something out of the top and held it out to him.

A rubber. She had a rubber in her stocking? He laughed. "I'll never look at you in the same way again."

## CHAPTER 11

Zoe ached inside for him. She'd never wanted anyone so much in her life. Given a choice of his cock or her next breath, his cock would win. Her breathing became out of control...erratic. Her heart pounded against her ribcage and the butterflies in her stomach almost made her nauseous. And, by a miracle, she managed to hide it from him. She released the elastic holding her thong in place and heard him suck air. He wanted *it*, but would he ever want *her* more?

"Come sit on my lap. See what I have for you."

"Lock and load, cowboy."

He chuckled softly, then reached down to lock the wheels on his chair with his large, condom covered hard-on sticking out toward her.

"This is where my long legs are going to come in handy."

Steve nodded, but he didn't take his heated gaze away from her breasts. The moment she straddled his lap, facing him, she expected him to make a grab for them, but he surprised her. He brought his hand

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

up to her face and ran it along her throat urging her toward his mouth.

*Yes!*

She'd wanted his kiss for so long.

The anticipation sent her soaring and she'd already been airborne for some time.

His hand moved behind her head...a gentle pressure in case she needed persuasion? *Not likely*. She'd made up her mind almost two years earlier. She understood how much he needed her, and now maybe she could convince him.

His mouth was firm, yet pliant, moving slowly over hers. She allowed him to take the lead. When his tongue ran along the seam of her lips, she opened to him. He tasted of scotch whiskey and mint. She hadn't seen him drinking, but earlier she'd smelled it on his breath.

Then, like magic, his technique stopped her from thinking...at all.

Zoe's need for him was like a hungry beast. Steve worked such magic with his kisses, and his fingers and palms on her breasts, she was ready to explode and he hadn't even touched her sex. He released her mouth and moved down to her breasts.

She held his curly dark head between her hands as he laved first one nipple, then the other. She'd wanted him for so long and it was better than she imagined. The sensations rocketing back and forth from every lick and touch were otherworldly.

*Yes!*

His hand moved down her stomach, and her insides clenched and tingled in anticipation. When he touched her clit, she lifted involuntarily and he gave a smoky chuckle. Steve stopped kissing her breasts to look up at her with blue eyes so dark they seemed black. "You're making this unforgettable."

Then he zeroed in on her clit again. "Unbelievable." While he continued to stare at her, he inserted a finger, drawing it in and out and then back to her clit. He did it a second time with two fingers and then

## *CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS*

back to her clit.

“I’m going to come.”

“We can’t have that.” He laughed. “Climb on and take me with you.”

Zoe rose while Steve directed his cock to where it belonged. She immediately experienced slow clenching contractions as she lowered herself over the large, rosy head. Now she’d finally see if all her hard work would pay off.

“Shit. That feels...” Steve moaned.

More engorged and sensitive than ever before, the entire experience took her by surprise. She alternately pushed out with the walls of her sex as if resisting his entrance and then immediately clenched tightly. She continued the pushes and clenches until he was fully seated inside her. She’d read about it in a book about the perfect orgasm and had exercised her muscles for months in anticipation of this chance with Steve.

“Whatever you’re doing, don’t stop.”

“I couldn’t stop if I wanted to.” Each constricting clasp of the walls of her sex brought her to the edge and she hadn’t begun to move up and down on him. The next unyielding clinch sent her tumbling over the brink.

However, she soon discovered the sensations to be only the beginning, as continuous internal contractions took her without any conscious effort. While fully seated, she squeezed his cock through the most magnificent, exquisite orgasm known to womanhood.

She wanted to scream.

So she did...

\* \* \*

Steve’s complete attention focused on what Zoe did to him with her internal movements. Intensely pleasurable didn’t begin to describe it. Words hadn’t been made for what she was doing to him.

## *CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS*

The level of his arousal soared higher than he knew possible, and for the first time, he understood a high state of arousal didn't necessarily mean speed or strength. He relaxed into it and freed to his conscious mind to take him where he'd never been...never even imagined possible.

Sex before this had been all about pelvic thrusting...this was... internal muscles...almost ethereal.

Could he ever experience this again?

He understood it was about the predicable clenches of her tight pussy. Each time he willed himself to relax, his arousal soared higher. He used his weak genital muscles to push out and she rewarded him with a moan.

He had control, too. Not much, but he could get better.

"I can get better at this." He alternately relaxed and pushed with muscles he hadn't used even before his accident. Her sweet pussy reacted by squeezing the length of his cock still harder.

"I can't live through better," she whispered. "This is unbelievable. I'm going again."

## CHAPTER 12

Zoe needed to apologize to Mrs. Hansen while Steve told his sister he planned to stay in her trailer. Sex with him had shown her that she needed to do whatever it took to make him hers...forever.

Nothing or nobody could stop her—the man didn't stand a chance.

"What's come over you? You're positively glowing! I'm the only one allowed to glow at *my* wedding."

Zoe gave Connie a quick hug and a peck on the cheek. "I'll remember your wedding for as long as I live. I don't know how to thank you."

"Did you finally rope your cowboy?"

"Not exactly, but I have him thinking—maybe questioning what he previously believed about relationships."

"So I heard. You've managed to *one up* Kresley and Mike. I didn't think anyone could have a stranger first time. Somebody caught you and your sister giving Steve a *blow* job?"

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

“You can’t be serious. Who’s the gossip? Kresley wouldn’t talk and their mother was humiliated when I told her. She wouldn’t go bragging about it.”

“You told his mother? Remember, I used to live with Kresley. Her mother doesn’t tolerate any funny business, especially from her sons. I heard about what happened between you two because Steve’s father is bragging. I think maybe he wants a similar experience. I saw him chasing after your sister several times.”

“This is worse than I thought. Would you just shoot me, please?”

“Better you than me. Since I retired my fists, I have a hard time expressing my anger. I guess I could pop Mr. Hansen in the eye for you, but then you’d have to help me explain it to my new husband.”

Zoe smiled despite the news. She had the best, most supportive friends a girl could want. “I don’t want you to use your fists on Steve’s dad. Damn my mouth.”

“There’s Mrs. Hansen. If she has any idea what her husband is doing, she must be miserable.”

Falling in love with Steve had been easy, but his family wouldn’t be. Zoe headed toward Steve’s mother, trying to think of what to say to make amends.

“Have you by any chance seen Steve?” the woman asked as soon as Zoe drew close.

The question effectively stopped her from apologizing. She could feel her cheeks flushing. Boy, had she seen him!

“Is that all you do? You’ll never catch a husband acting like a slut. Steve won’t marry you, you know.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that, Mother.”

Zoe hadn’t seen him wheel up and, from the sour frown on his mother’s face, neither had she. Zoe couldn’t breathe. *Why did he say such a thing?* Zoe’s heart hammered in her chest in response. Had he said it just to get his mother’s attention? He didn’t really plan on asking

## CAVE CREEK COWBOY CHRISTMAS

her to marry him, did he?

*No way.*

Not after a single night...no matter how great they were together.

Steve's mother looked horrorstruck. "What are you saying? Surely you don't mean to—"

"What I do with Zoe is none of your business. You don't get to have an opinion about my love life. Let alone express it."

"What has happened to you? What happened to the little boy I raised as if..."

The woman stopped talking, leaving Zoe confused.

What was the end of the sentence?

*As if...*

*...he was my own?*

*What else could she have said? As if...what?*

Steve huffed. "I grew up. I'm a man and have been one for a long time now."

Zoe searched his handsome face. Didn't he realize his mother's words had been beyond strange? She glanced up from Steve to his mother. "I want to apologize for what I said earlier."

"About Kresley being adopted. I should hope so. Anyone can see she's mine."

"I'm apologizing for my inappropriate announcement about giving your son a blow job."

"Oh that. It doesn't surprise me. It's what men do with easy women."

"Enough, Mom. Zoe isn't easy."

Zoe looked at him, glad for a reason not see the woman's haughty face. It hurt to have his mother think she was an easy slut, but she deserved it. She should have never said what she did. "With you, I am. No doubt about it."

Steve smiled back and winked.



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"I think I'll go get some refreshments before I say something else to make your mother hate me." Zoe started to walk and then hesitated.

She had to do it. "I don't understand why you'd be more upset over a joke about adoption than your son having sex with two women." Zoe didn't wait for an answer from Mrs. Hansen. She headed to the spacious living quarters in the barn, where the newlyweds had set up a buffet.

"Are you having a good time?"

Over her shoulder, Zoe saw Matt Hansen approaching. "I may be having too good a time. I just hope I haven't done something stupid."

"Why don't any of you cowgirl's do something stupid with me?"

Zoe liked Matt, always had. "Don't whine. I'll see if I can find someone for you. In fact, I know the perfect girl and so do you—Bev."

Matt turned three shades of pink. Now what was *that* about?

"Bev is the perfect girl, but not for me. I expected she'd be here tonight."

Zoe made a mental note to ask Bev why Matt would think she's was too perfect. "She's on a ski trip in Aspen and she couldn't cry off. It's her parents' anniversary and she'd planned a big party for them long before Connie and Ray's wedding plans surfaced. Her mom and dad have a winter home in Aspen. And a summer home in Hawaii, and the big house on side of the mountain here in Carefree."

"Money should marry money."

Was Matt crazy, too? With an heiress for a mother, didn't that qualify as money?

"Bev has a trust fund with more money than I could earn in lifetime working part-time in Dad's construction company."

"You've evidentially given this some thought, Matt. You don't plan to work part-time for your father forever, do you?"

Matt turned pink again. "Bev and I come from different planets. Once I graduate this spring, I don't plan on working for Dad at all.

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Enough about me. Let's talk about you. What's going on between you and my lucky brother?"

"I've had a crush on Steve for a long time. I've done everything but stand on my head to get him to notice me. Tonight I succeeded. Only my sister had a lame-brained idea if we both um—well...we...this is truly embarrassing."

"So what you said to Mom was true?" He chuckled, his dark blue eyes dancing with amusement. He pounded his chest with his fist. "The lucky bastard... Your sister thought he'd never suspect one of you had serious designs on him, if you both got busy?"

"Are Zandra and I *that* transparent? It worked and he let me get close to him a second time. And then later he defended me when your mom called me a slut."

"Good Lord, I hope you don't run away when you learn what fun it is dealing with our strange family. We're the poster family for dysfunctional. It's one of the reasons I'm planning on being a psychotherapist."

"It's that bad? Why didn't Kresley ever complain?"

"Kresley's always had it easy, and I hope that doesn't change for her."

Zoe shuddered. "That sounds cryptic."

"The winds of change are blowing and it's long past time."

"I don't think your mom got pissed because my sister and I pleased your brother. She was more worried about a silly comment I made about Kresley being adopted."

"Kresley's not adopted."

"I know that. I was only teasing."

"I don't think I should be having this conversation...I'm feeling more than a little pissed with my parents right now. Take care of my brother."

"I plan to if he'll let me." Zoe didn't know what else to say.

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Matt's face showed something was bothering him. She only hoped he wasn't worried she might hurt his brother. "If it helps to reassure you, I love him. The only heart at risk is mine."

\* \* \*

Steve watched Zoe talking to Matt. They looked good together and Steve didn't like it. Not one bit and that surprised him. Matt would be the last person to make a move on a woman Steve wanted. But Steve had the sneaking suspicion his uneasiness had more to do with emotions than physical needs. Since when did he form attachments, not to mention it had only been a single evening? *Impossible.*

"They look good together."

Steve glanced up at Kresley. "What woman wouldn't want our brother? He's the nicest one in the family, next to you. He's got a promising future when he graduates."

Kresley smiled. "She wants you. Hasn't she made it clear? She's wanted you for as long as I can remember. It's been tough having such handsome brothers."

"If she wanted me, why would she and her sister..."

"Zandra's idea, no doubt. She probably thought she was helping. It worked, didn't it?" Kresley giggled. "If I remember correctly, I think it was Zandra's idea all six of us go to bed naked with Mike after he passed out cold. She has a zany sense of humor."

"One day she's going to meet her match."

Steve heard a chuckle and turned to see Jake Harper standing near. Ray's trainer tipped his hat and moved away smiling. "Cave Creek is a hard place to keep a secret."

"I hope you've come home to stay. I talked to Ray and you're welcome here as long as you'd like. I have a Christmas present for you." Kresley walked toward the twelve-foot tree, brightly decorated with Southwest ornaments and chili-pepper lights.

"It's not Christmas yet."

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She reached for a small package under the tree. “Three days. I can’t wait. I want you to have this right away so you can use it. It’s from all of us, the boys and me.”

When she returned holding the present toward him, he had a funny feeling...was it a twinge of Christmas spirit? Nothing he’d expected had happened. Everyone seemed genuinely happy to welcome him back. Kresley handed him a good-sized box, then held a finger to her lips. “Shh. Mike is about to toast the newlyweds.”

“As best man, I need to say something to Ray and Connie. And Kresley knows how much I hate to talk, so she’s twisted my arm.” Kresley’s husband, Mike stood next to the tree as he spoke. A second later, Ray and Connie joined him.

Kresley reached over to hold Steve’s hand.

Mike cleared his throat and fidgeted. “We have a lot to be grateful for this Christmas. This has been a banner year for five of us, the Cave Creek cowboys. It started when Ridge got back together with Holly and surprised us all. Next came Brett and Alicia, and then Tam finally got the courage to tell Bobbie Jo he carried a torch for her. Kresley blind-sided me in Vegas and I’ve never been happier.” He gave Kresley a wink.

“Now tonight, my big brother and Connie have joined us. Ray, I wish you and Connie many years of happiness. You both deserve the best life has to offer.”

Cheers and clapping sounded. Mike raised his hand to show he wasn’t finished. “Most of you already know Ridge and Holly are expecting an addition to their family.”

“Big surprise there,” Holly’s ranch manager said loudly. “They didn’t come out of the bedroom for a couple of months.”

Ridge swept Holly into his arms and kissed her until the crowd started to cheer again.

*What would it feel like to have some you could depend on?*

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*Someone you could kiss publicly and not feel foolish.* Ridge and Holly made it seem inviting.

Could returning to Cave Creek be an opportunity for Steve to start a new life? One that included a special woman to share it with him?

“Kresley and I also have news to share. We’re expecting, too.”

Kresley squeezed Steve’s hand. He watched her face glow with happiness as she looked at her husband. He’d never had a woman look at him that way. The thought suddenly appealed to him. A hand touched his shoulder.

“Congratulations. You’re going to be an uncle. You’ll make a good one.”

Steve looked up into Zoe’s eyes as she smiled widely at him. “There must be something in the water here. I think I’m catching this... whatever it is.”

“I caught it when I saw the picture you took of Kresley in Cheyenne a couple of years ago.”

“That’s why you mentioned the picture earlier?”

Kresley tugged at the hand she still held. “Open your present.”

“You’ve already given me the best present a brother could ask for.”

“Well said.” Zoe patted him on the back.

“You let me find out with everyone else that you’re expecting?”

“Mom, don’t ruin Kresley’s surprise.”

“Don’t interfere. This is between Kresley and me. It has nothing to do with you.”

“Just hold—”

Kresley gave his shoulder a squeeze he took as a cue to allow her to handle their mother. “I’m sorry if you feel slighted, but Mike’s parents are hearing it for the first time too. They aren’t complaining.”

“That’s different. Sons aren’t the same.”

Kresley shook her head. “I don’t think the Kales would agree with that. This is their first grandchild. You already have one.”

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Steve wanted to hear his mother's answer to that.

"I never get to see my first grandchild."

"And whose fault is that? I've never heard you express an interest in seeing her."

"Honestly, Kresley, Kyle never even married the girl. She isn't really a part of our family."

"Kyle's daughter is. You've never even seen her."

"How about if you and I go help me live up to my slutty ways. Let's give your mom reason to be more pissed with *us* than Kresley." Zoe didn't wait for him to answer. She risked his mother's ire and started to wheel him away.

"We're leaving right now," his mother said. "You need to come with us."

Just like his mother to make assumptions. "I'm staying here with Kresley and Mike," he said as Zoe kept moving.

Zoe leaned down and whispered in his ear, "I almost feel sorry for your mother. Is it true she's never seen Kyle's baby?"

"This is news to me. I didn't know things were that bad between my parents and Kyle." It had been a night for revelations. Nothing had been as he anticipated. He held his present in his lap and let Zoe take the lead. Getting along with his mother had always been a trial, but Zoe didn't seem to mind. When she headed back to the pool house she managed to surprise him again. "I expected you to go back to the trailer."

"I don't want to get too comfortable. We have the rest of the night for that."

"I'm not sure how comfortable we'll be on the couch. I don't know if I have the energy to make it into the gooseneck. You've already had me out of this chair more times in one day than I do in a week."

"Didn't you learn anything?"

"I get your message loud and clear. I don't need to get out of this

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chair or move at all to have great sex with you.”

Zoe wheeled him into the pool house and over to the exercise equipment, where earlier he’d pulled himself out of the chair to zip her dress.

“I want to be completely honest with you,” she said.

“Okay.” In truth, he hoped she didn’t spoil things by telling him something he didn’t want to hear.

“Zandra thought if we did what we did to you, then you wouldn’t guess I have a crush on you. I went along with it because I was afraid I’d scare you off if I approached you one on one. But I think you should know I want you to stay here and give me a chance to show you how good we could be together.”

“You’ve come along when I least expected.” Steve wanted to be completely honest with her as well. “I find I’m anxious to see what’s next. Not just the sex, even though it’s better than I thought possible. I want to see if it’s possible to find what my sister has found.”

“It’s only going to get better. Caring about the person makes it easier to free inhibitions.”

Steve patted the seat of the exercise bench in front of him. “Why don’t you jump up here and let me test your theory?”

## CHAPTER 13

With Steve's mouth on her clit and two fingers tucked inside her, Zoe climbed toward an orgasm in no time at all. She tried to slow her breathing...anything to make the pleasure last longer.

"You taste like peaches."

*Thank you, thank you, thank you!*

Steve's words couldn't have come at a better time. Instead of cresting, she was able to hold off and float with his fingers twisting inside her. If he'd give her another second, she might even be able to talk out loud. "Your sister said you like peaches. The sex-cream comes in several flavors."

"So I was a foregone conclusion." He moved his fingers a little faster. "I'm easy."

Zoe gripped the sides of the bench. "I wanted to be prepared."

When his mouth laved her from clit to core and he removed his fingers to substitute his tongue, she lost it. She exploded while he



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licked her juices.

“Steve!”

Zoe bolted upright, pulling at her dress. Someone outside was hollering for Steve. If they opened the door, she’d be giving them a show not soon to be forgotten.

Steve reached for her as she jumped from the bench. “It sounds like Mike.”

“Go see what he wants while I check to make certain I’m presentable.” Zoe watched Steve wheel toward the door, but before he reached it, the door opened.

“I need your help. All hell is breaking loose. Your brother is ready to kill your mother and Kresley is in the middle of it.”

“What’s wrong with these people? This is a wedding, for crissakes. Not to mention Kresley’s pregnant. Don’t they know they shouldn’t upset Kresley?” Steve turned to look back at Zoe. “Are you coming?”

He wanted her with him? After everything she’d said and done to irritate his mother? “I’m right behind you.”

Mike grabbed the handles of Steve’s chair and took off like a shot. Zoe had a hard time keeping up in her high heels.

They found Kresley and Matt with both their parents inside the main house and away from the festivities in the barn. The sound of angry voices as they approached warned Zoe it wouldn’t be pretty.

“You and Dad need to get out of here. We should’ve had the courtesy not to come to this wedding in the first place,” Matt said to his mother.

“How dare you speak to me about manners? I had nothing to do with the story Steve made up about Connie and Ray.”

*Connie’s rape again.* Zoe’s heart hurt for Steve. This was the last thing he needed to hear.

Matt huffed. “Do you really believe that? You have everything to do with it. All of us were raised in a house where secrets and lies were

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an everyday part of life. We grew up believing everyone lived like us.”

“Matt, let’s not do this now,” Mr. Hansen said.

“No, Dad, I’m not letting Mom push this off onto Steve’s shoulders. He’s done his best to keep this family together and now he needs us.”

Steve moved his chair between his mother and Matt. “What I did was wrong. I blamed the wrong people for what happened to Connie. Thankfully, I only told family and didn’t spread the lies.”

Kresley started to cry, making Zoe wanted to comfort her, but she couldn’t leave Steve’s side.

“Mom, don’t take it out on the boys,” Kresley said between sobs. “You’re angry with *me* for not telling you about the baby.”

“I gave you everything. How could you slight me like this?”

“And why is that?” Matt asked. “Why did you and Dad give all your love and attention to Kresley and none to your sons?”

“That’s not true,” Steve said.

“Classic denial. You know it’s true. You kept us together the best you could, and when you got hurt, this family went to hell. You did the best you could, but you’re not responsible for us...making it up to us for having parents who didn’t give a shit about us.”

Kresley started to cry harder.

“Do something,” Mike said to Steve.

Zoe couldn’t take it. “No! This isn’t something Steve can fix, nor should he have to.”

“Why don’t we take a walk and cool off?” Mr. Hansen said to Matt.

“I’m cool. I’m just sick and tired of all the lies. Mom’s hassling Kresley and I’ve had enough.” Matt looked at Zoe. “You want to know why Mom came unglued about your comment about Kresley being adopted? Because it isn’t Kresley who’s adopted, it’s us...all five of us. Hard to believe, huh?”

“Steve, Kyle, Marc, Tim and me...all us boys were adopted from Dad’s sister, who gave birth to us one after another and didn’t have the

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money to keep us together when her husband died. Or at least she thought she didn't. And Dad had more than enough money to make it worth her while to give up five rowdy boys."

Mrs. Hansen gasped. "You make it sound horrible. I took you in and claimed you as my own."

"You gave us a home, but we were never your own. Now, after all these years, I finally understand why," Steve said to his mother. He turned to Mike. "All this commotion can't be good for the baby. Take Kresley out of here. We'll deal with this later when tempers aren't flaring."

Zoe could see Steve was right. Kresley's face reflected her emotional pain. Her brows were drawn into a tight line and her face was pale and pinched.

Mike didn't argue. He took Kresley's hand and led her away.

"Don't bother with the details. All I want is a yes or no. Is it true?" Steve demanded.

"We gave you a beautiful home, a world you'd never have stepped a toe into if not for our generosity."

Zoe gasped at his...at Mrs. Hansen's words. The woman's attitude spoke volumes about the way Steve and his brothers must have been raised.

Mr. Hansen sighed. "It's true. I'm your uncle, not your father. That doesn't mean I love you less than any father would."

Steve stared at him and didn't respond.

"I don't accept that." The harsh tone of Matt's voice rallied Zoe to move.

"Why don't you continue this conversation later, when *everyone* has calmed down? Matt could you come with Steve and me? Please?"

No one argued. Zoe grabbed the handles of Steve's chair, grateful he hadn't locked his wheels. She started to walk, at first uncertain where she was headed.

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On the way out of the barn, they met Mike coming toward them. “Kresley sent me to make sure her brothers were okay.”

“Tell her I’m staying in her trailer and we’ll talk in the morning. We’ll get through this together. Frankly, it’s a relief. Now I understand why nothing was ever normal in our crazy family. It’s a tough one, but it makes sense.” Steve gave Zoe a smile before turning his attention to Matt. “How did you find out?”

“Your accident in Vegas is when I knew for certain. Kresley donated blood the same time I did. When they remarked about her unusual blood type, I knew something was up. At first I thought she was adopted, but once I started a serious search, it was easy to find the truth.”

“Is our birth mother still around? I didn’t even know Dad had a sister.”

“She died a couple of years after Kresley was born,” Matt said. “I have a feeling there’s a whole boat-load of shit we don’t know. But what you said is true. This is a relief. Now, if we can get you out of that chair, the healing will start for all of us.”

“Don’t make this about Steve.” Zoe couldn’t hold back. “Your family can heal without Steve walking as an incentive.”

“I didn’t mean it like that. I only meant I want Steve to get better.”

“I am. Zoe’s had me doing cartwheels this evening.”

“Then you better not let her get away.”

“I don’t intend to.”

Matt’s frown changed to a thin smile. “I’m heading out. I plan on calling Kyle, Marc and Tim tonight. Maybe we can make plans to all get together for Christmas.”

“Be careful what you wish for. A Cave Creek Christmas can change your life. I’m living proof.”

## CHAPTER 14

Zoe awakened to the sound of hammering outside the trailer door. “Go away.”

Steve pulled up onto on his elbow. “Is that what I think it is?”

“I think your sister is anxious for you to stay. It’s sounds like they’re building you a wheelchair ramp.”

He leaned over and kissed her. The touch of his lips ignited a passion so strong it made her willing to jump his bones then and there, no matter who was outside the door. Even after a night filled with lovemaking, she needed him. A knock stopped her.

“You two awake yet? It’s almost noon.”

“Kresley, go away. We’re busy here,” Steve said.

“You were probably busy half the night. This won’t wait.”

Steve shrugged.

Zoe got up taking the top blanket with her, while Steve grabbed for the sheet. “Is this what living with your sister means?” Zoe unlocked

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the door and Kresley opened it.

“Breakfast’s in an hour. Matt’s up at house helping me cook. You left this laying in the pool house last night.” Kresley held out Steve’s present toward Zoe.

Zoe looked past Kresley to see Mike building a ramp. “Will Mike be finished in an hour?”

“I’ve already worked on this for two hours in the barn. It’ll be done in half that time,” Mike said. “Am I keeping you two from something important?”

“Open your present, Steve,” Kresley said.

Mike stopped hammering and moved to stand next to her. Zoe’s heart skipped a beat. Mike Kale really cared about Kresley’s brother. She handed the present to Steve.

“What is this that you’re so anxious to have me open it?”

“Don’t argue...just do it.”

Zoe couldn’t wait either. The present had been her idea.

Steve took his time. Zoe’s fingers itched to rip the wrapping away. When he finally opened the box and looked inside, he didn’t say anything.

“Well?” Zoe said. “What do you think?”

“It looks expensive.”

“You have another present under the tree that goes with it,” Kresley said.

“Another present?”

“You haven’t answered me.” Zoe wanted to hear exactly what he thought.

“It’s digital?”

“The latest and the best digital camera available. Your other present is a computer program to use with it. This should get you started.”

“Get me started, huh? I don’t have a computer.”

“You can use the one in the office while you help me with the

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accounts,” Kresley said. “You were always better with numbers than I am.”

“You’ve got this all figured out.”

Zoe linked her fingers through his. “You wouldn’t want your pregnant sister working too hard. She needs you.”

“I see...it’s the two of you ganging up on me.” Steve smiled.

“No, it’s three of us,” Mike said. “Kresley’s making a mess of Ray’s books.”

Zoe wanted to kiss Mike for his generosity.

“What would Ray have to say? We used to be adversaries.”

Mike rolled his eyes. “Ray suggested it. He figures it’s the only way he can replace Kresley.”

Kresley punched her husband. He retaliated by sweeping her into his arms and kissing her.

“All this happiness can be dangerous. Makes a man think anything is possible.” Steve looked at Zoe while he spoke.

Her throat closed. Tears started to sting the back of her eyelids. She wanted so much to be a part of his happiness...his life.

He pulled her hand, still linked in his, to bring her down on the sofa-bed next to him. At the same time, she heard the trailer door close. “Now where were we? I think you were kissing me like a wild woman and I was about to give you what you were asking for.”

“Don’t you want to play with your new camera?”

Steve pushed it aside and leered at her.

“Are you sure?”

“Don’t you think I understand what you guys are all doing? You think you know me better than I know myself. If that’s true, you’d know what I want right now.”

“Me?”

“I definitely want you.” He pulled her to him and kissed her.

His lips, at first seemed to reflect his desire. Then everything

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changed and she wasn't certain how or why. Steve's cheeks were wet as he kissed her. The emotion he poured into the kiss took her breath away. Then she caught fire. She burned for him.

His tongue began to explore her mouth, thrusting in and out like she wanted his cock to do inside her pussy. She wanted him right then. No words. No thoughts.

She threw her blanket aside and rolled over on top of him. He was hard and ready for her. She didn't ask. She directed him to the ache needing to be filled. She took him and began to ride. She forgot about the technique she'd been perfecting all night long. She forgot about everything except the pressure escalating inside her so fast she went right over the edge. Her orgasm was intense, white hot. There was so much heat and lightning, it took a second to realize Steve was coming with her.

Zoe collapsed on him, spent beyond comprehension. Only a tingling afterglow inhabited her boneless body. She didn't have the energy to speak, to move.

"I feel used," Steve said and chuckled.

"Get used to it."

He hooked his finger under her chin and lifted until she looked into his midnight blue eyes. "I don't think I'll ever get used to you, but I'd like the chance to try."

Zoe's happiness felt like the orgasm she'd just experienced, white hot and intense. "Merry Christmas. You've come home."

"Merry Christmas."



## **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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