



Only one way to trust her—teach her the true meaning of tamed.

Years ago, Cassie Pallard let her wild and headstrong nature cost her the best thing in her life: Brody Chambers. Older and wiser, she's back to try to heal the hurt and win her way back into his heart—and his bed.

Not so fast, says Brody. He loved Cassie most of his life, but her temper-driven desertion destroyed his faith in her and their future. If she wants his trust, she'll have to earn it. Before he opens his heart again, he plans to make it clear his love comes with strings.

And handcuffs. And a blindfold...

Warning: This one's short and hot with some bdsm, so not for the faint of heart. ☺

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Terms of Surrender
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Terms of Surrender

Becky Barker

Dedication

This one's for my personal hero, Buzz.

Chapter One

“Hey, cowboy, what’s wrong with that bucket of bolts this time?” The teasing, sultry voice came out of nowhere and slammed into Brody Chambers like a sucker punch. The come-hither cadence normally wreaked havoc on his dreams, but it had been two long years since he’d heard it up close and personal.

His heart and breathing stilled. He’d thought he was alone on the old country road, so the familiar feminine voice took him by surprise. Every muscle in his body drew tight. Lowering the wrench he’d used to tighten his rear axle, he slid from beneath the bed of his pickup truck. The shimmering afternoon sun blinded him for an instant, but then he saw her.

The first thing he noticed was hot red nail polish on sandaled feet and then long, well-toned legs. A short, tight denim skirt hugged shapely hips. As he rose to his feet, another stretch of pale, bare flesh flashed between the waistband of her skirt and a short, cropped red top. Full, rounded breasts stretched the fabric to its limits.

Cassie. Cassie Pallard. They’d grown up together on neighboring ranches. He’d loved her most of his life. A couple years ago, he’d offered her his heart. She’d enslaved him with her sexy body and wanton ways and then she’d left him to join the rodeo circuit with his best friend. The blow to his ego had been brutal. The blow to his heart shattering.

He’d never forgive her in this lifetime.

Brody continued to study Cassie with silent intensity. Her dark auburn hair was secured at her nape, but the summer heat and humidity made damp tendrils cling to her neck. The cherry red of her lips matched the color of her nail polish. The expression in her deep blue eyes was an intriguing mix of frustration, wariness and hunger. The hunger stirred a matching one in him, but he clamped a tight rein on it.

Dropping his gaze to her throat, he noticed a few familiar freckles. Her breasts rose and fell in agitation. He knew them to be soft and lush. While he watched, both nipples plumped and strained against the soft fabric. The involuntary reaction had her fair, telltale skin turning pink in embarrassment. It also had his body stirring in swift, unwelcome arousal.

The hot surge of desire infuriated him, so he lashed out in anger. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Cassie crossed her arms over her chest, causing him to shift his attention back to her face. Not for the first time, he wondered how many men had fallen victim to her wild, untamed beauty while she’d been gone.

“This is my home, too, remember?”

Brody's jaw tightened. "How can I forget? Someone in town always makes a point of mentioning how well you and Chuck are doing in the circuit. Chuck and Cassie, Chuck and Cassie..."

His best friend's part in the love triangle had wounded him as much as her betrayal. They'd been closer than most brothers. Blond, blue eyed and a natural charmer, Chuck Groves had been the ladies' man of the team. Brody had never been jealous of his buddy until Cassie ran away with him.

She started to speak, hesitated, and then started again. "I know you won't believe me—

"Then don't waste my time. I have work to do." He turned and headed for the cab of his truck.

"Brody, please! I'm really in a bind."

"Go tell Chuck," he tossed over his shoulder.

"Chuck and I split up months ago."

That gave him pause. With his fist locked around the door handle, he turned to her again. "I don't give a damn about your relationship with Chuck."

He lied. The thought of her with any other man still ate at him like a disease, an affliction that filled him with self-loathing. He hated that he still cared.

Cassie continued, "Chuck and I knew right away that we'd made a mistake."

She returned his steady gaze without flinching. Unless she'd become a better liar in the past couple years, she was telling him the truth. She'd never been able to look him in the eye and lie.

"Not according to local gossip."

"We stayed together for convenience," she insisted. "We shared living and traveling expenses, but it was strictly platonic." He made a disbelieving noise, and she quickly added, "I don't mean he was celibate. There were always women willing to share his bed. I just wasn't one of them."

Brody shook his head. She might be telling the truth, but it didn't matter. Nothing changed the fact that she'd walked out on him. His initial feelings of impotent rage had tempered to gnawing jealousy, but he figured it would take a lot more time to work that out of his system.

"It's the truth, Brody. I swear it on my life."

He locked gazes with her again. "So what does any of that have to do with me?"

He watched her swallow hard, intrigued by the deepening blush on her cheeks. She licked her lips and fire licked through his veins. He forced himself not to react.

"I came here to ask you for another chance."

Blood pounded through him, hot and thick, pooling at his crotch. His jeans were suddenly too tight, his breathing too shallow as blood roared in his ears. Despite everything she'd done, his body still craved the satisfaction only she could give him.

But he prided himself on never making the same mistake twice.

“Not interested.” He opened the truck door and started to climb into the cab, but she moved quickly, grasping his hips to stop him. Her grip was firm, her touch burning through the layers of his jeans and briefs. His body jerked in surprise. He stiffened and turned.

Cassie abruptly dropped her hands, but she stayed within touching distance. So close that he could smell her and feel the waves of heat from her sweetly feminine body.

“I’m sorry,” she quickly apologized and took a step back. She shifted her gaze from him. “I know you hate me and I don’t have any right to ask for favors...”

“Then don’t.”

She continued in a breathless rush. “I left the rodeo circuit and I’ve come home to stay. I just need a little help until I can get a job and support myself.”

The suggestion sparked his anger. Did she really think she could walk back into his life as if nothing had happened?

“Why come here?”

“I don’t have any where else to go.”

“Go to your folks.”

Her parents had retired and moved to Arizona shortly after she left town.

“They live in a tiny, one-bedroom trailer in a retirement community.”

He knew she’d never gotten along with her parents. Most of the people in her life had either condemned her for her free spirit or been jealous of her beauty. He and Chuck had been her family. At least until she’d ruthlessly cut him out of the equation. The reminder had him clenching his hands into fists.

“Not my problem.”

“I know,” she said, her tone dropping to a low whisper.

A wave of protectiveness washed over him at the wobble in her voice. Cassie had always been too proud and independent for her own good. He resented her ability to tap into his emotions and hardened himself against her small show of weakness.

Her next words were barely a whisper. “But you’re the best friend I ever had, and I don’t have anywhere else to turn.”

This time she bit her lip to keep it from trembling. Brody watched her mouth, feeling a jolt of electricity at the revealing action. The pleading had to be hell on her pride, but if she thought he’d just forgive and forget, she was dead wrong.

“I’m not asking for a handout,” she hurriedly added. “I’m willing to work for room and board. I’ll cook or clean or muck out stalls. Whatever chores you need done.”

“I don’t need any help at the house or on the ranch,” he told her coolly. But when she heaved a sigh that caused her breasts to rise and fall, another shaft of stinging desire stabbed at him.

“There’s only one thing I need from a woman like you.”

His deliberately insulting tone made her spine stiffen and brought her chin up high. She glared at him for a long minute.

“Sex?” she grumbled.

He didn’t bother denying it. “Sex.”

“Is it always about sex with men?” She made a disgruntled sound, whirled around and stomped back to her car. “Thanks for nothing!” she called over her shoulder.

Brody watched her tight little rear end swing back and forth as she walked a few yards down the road to her battered car. Damn, but he loved that sassy sway of hips, the firm, athletic beauty of her thighs and legs. The thought of hot, sweaty sex with her made his nerves sizzle. He’d been too long without a woman, and she was one helluva woman.

A reluctant sigh escaped him as she climbed behind the wheel of a banged up economy car and slammed the door. He wondered why she’d been so easily discouraged. She’d always loved sex as much as he did. Why had she balked at his offer? What had changed? His hands balled into fists. Or was it who? Had she thought Chuck a better lover? That question continued to sting his bruised ego. Loverboy definitely had more experience, always bragging about his sexual exploits. Cassie had been the one exception, the lone feminine holdout until she’d shocked everyone and left town with the Romeo bull rider.

Brody watched as she cranked the ignition of the little car. It made a grinding noise that made him cringe. Then it died. A second try netted the same grinding and dying. A third had similar results. When a fourth and fifth effort failed to start the car, he saw Cassie pound the steering wheel and heard her curses on the hot summer air.

Sometime during those last few frantic attempts, Brody decided he wanted her back in his bed. He wanted to touch and taste and wallow in her femininity. He needed to sate himself with her lush, sexy body. Determination burned within him. He’d have her, but on his terms. Once she’d surrendered that fiery independence to him, he might be able to get her out of his system for good.

He strode to her car and opened the door. She looked at him with a mix of defiance and humiliation.

“Here are my terms. What I want from you is sex and obedience. You do as I say, when I say it, and you can stay. But you stay in my bed.”

Their gazes tangled. A searing tension flared between them, as hot and hard as the sun-baked dirt road.

They’d been lovers. They’d known each other intimately. Sex wasn’t the real issue and they both knew it. He wanted obedience and he wanted to explore her sexuality at levels they’d never attempted. Passion ran deep in both of them, but neither had ever been willing to give it full rein. Now his pride demanded her complete surrender to that passion.

Silence descended in the cab of Brody's truck as he drove them to his ranch house buried in the pines. Cassie hoped for a glimpse of the gentle, caring lover he'd once been, but there was none. A hat covered his thick, coffee-colored hair and sunglasses hid his brown eyes. Anger and resentment kept his jaw locked. Tension kept them both rigid in their seats.

A twinge of guilt nagged her as she studied the man she loved beyond measure. She hadn't planned to trick him, but she'd needed to get past his prickly anger. Her old car never started when it was overheated and she'd been driving in the hot sun for several hours. Her little fit of pique had been a ruse. She'd fully intended to accept his terms of surrender, however harsh they might be, but she hadn't wanted to cave too easily.

It had taken her most of the last two years to find the courage to return. She'd hurt him badly while destroying a lifetime of trust. It took even more courage to climb into a truck where they'd made love, knowing he hated her now. It was all her fault. He'd never been anything but honest and supportive, yet she'd betrayed him. The heartache of their broken love affair weighed heavily on her shoulders, but she fully intended to right the wrong she'd done.

Her heart beat erratically as she turned her gaze from Brody to the familiar landmarks passing by. His Wyoming ranch had always been more of a home to her than her own. She felt a huge swell of emotion as they pulled to a stop near the back door of the stucco structure buried in sweet-smelling pines and evergreens. The Grand Tetons stood tall and majestic in the background. A deep blue cloudless sky completed the postcard-perfect setting. The place looked deserted, a solitary but welcome oasis in the midst of a scorching summer day.

"Millie comes once a week to clean and cook. The rest of the time I'm here alone," her unwilling host informed her.

He and Chuck had shared the house for a few years after his folks died and Chuck's mom remarried. Cassie had spent more time with them than at her own house. Now she had no idea what to expect.

Emotions in total chaos, she nodded and climbed from the truck. He hadn't allowed her to collect anything from her car and he hadn't relaxed one bit during the ten-minute ride. His rigid hostility sent a tingle of apprehension over her body.

She watched as Brody strode ahead, up the steps to the porch and then to the door. The faded jeans molded his flat stomach, narrow hips and long legs. The form-hugging green T-shirt emphasized the broadness of his chest and his muscled arms. She'd always thought him a hunk, but he seemed to have grown bigger, stronger and harder, in more ways than the physical.

He turned and looked at her, pure male arrogance and pride. His expression said this was her last chance to back out of the deal. If she followed him inside, she'd be completely at his mercy, and he didn't seem to be in a very merciful mood. He had two years full of anger and frustration to vent. The risk to her body might be minimal, but she didn't know how much torture her battered heart could survive.

She didn't believe he'd do her any physical harm. The man she'd known and trusted had been a gentle lover with a generous heart. What she didn't know is how her desertion might have changed that man. He certainly didn't seem too approachable right now.

Still, she loved him with all her heart. She never would have left if he'd loved her as deeply. She'd thought her threat to join the rodeo would elicit a marriage proposal, but her plan had backfired. He'd let her go without a fight, without a call or letter or speck of protest. Now she had to do whatever it took to make things right between them. Even if that meant submitting to his every whim until he'd been pacified.

"Are you coming?"

Cassie didn't hesitate any longer, but followed him into the coolness of the house. He tossed his hat aside and ran his fingers through overlong hair that always threatened to curl. His eyes glittered and thick brows furrowed as he studied her. She noted new frown lines around his eyes. The grooves in his cheeks seemed deeper, his overall appearance more grim. He'd never be considered handsome in a pretty-boy fashion, yet his face portrayed the strength and character of a man who could be trusted to keep his word.

After slamming the door, he spoke to her in a voice more harsh than she'd ever heard from him. "Take off your clothes. Right here, right now. No arguments or this arrangement is finished before it starts."

Her eyes widened in shock and she stared at him to see if he was joking. He wasn't. His jaw was locked in determination. His eyes were so cold that a shiver raced over her. Was he trying to scare her into leaving? Was this a test?

She'd never been a particularly modest person and he'd seen her naked before, yet she stood frozen.

"Now."

His command made her wary, but he wouldn't send her running again. In fact, now that she was back in his home, he'd have a hell of a time chasing her away. She'd yearned for him too long to let him scare her off so easily.

Cassie started to turn her back to him.

He grasped her arm. "Don't try to hide from me!"

Eyes sparkling with annoyance, she stood directly in front of him and whipped her top over her head and off her arms.

She hadn't thought his expression could get any tighter, but it did. Somehow, it made her feel more exposed than the shedding of clothes. She'd known she'd have to swallow a lot of pride if she wanted to put the past behind them. But baring herself, even physically, wasn't as easy as she'd hoped.

Quivering and unsure, she gave herself a mental pep talk. This is what she wanted more than life. She wanted Brody looking at her with that tight, needy expression, so she unzipped her skirt and let it fall to the floor.

His eyes flared with a sexual hunger so stark it dampened her defiance a bit and sent another hot tremor over body. He quickly lowered his lashes to hide his reaction. She dropped her arms to her sides.

“All of it, the bra and panties, too,” he insisted gruffly.

She understood. She didn’t like it, but she understood his need for control. Slowly, Cassie reached behind her back and unclipped her bra. It fell away from her breasts and dropped to the floor. Her nipples puckered as cool air wafted over them. The heat of Brody’s gaze had them tightening into hard nubs.

Without another word, he reached out and cupped both breasts, molding them and fondling them with his big, calloused hands. When she closed her eyes on a sigh, he brushed her nipples with his thumbs until a tremor shot through her. If this was his idea of torture, she could deal with it twenty-four hours a day. Heat speared her low in her belly and moisture collected between her legs. She stifled a moan. It had been so long. So damned long.

When she thought her legs would collapse, she reached for him.

“Don’t touch me!”

Cassie stilled. It hurt that he didn’t welcome her touch, yet she knew it would take time and patience to heal his emotional wounds.

Brody stopped his caresses and reached for her panties. With a flick of his wrist, he tore them from her body.

“Spread your legs.”

That snapped her eyes open again, but it did no good to search his hard facial features. His expression remained fierce. If touching her affected him as deeply, it didn’t show on his face. Cassie’s chest rose and fell in agitation, her breathing so rough she thought she might hyperventilate. She’d never been aroused so quickly in her life, nor felt so vulnerable. Excitement had her legs wobbling, but she opened her thighs just a little.

He stepped closer until they were just inches apart. The cotton of his shirt brushed her sensitized nipples, the heat and scent of him enveloped her. His hand slid between her trembling thighs and cupped her with shocking intimacy.

“Already wet for me, you little cheat?”

He plunged one finger into her, working it in and out, in and out, until she was gasping for breath. Then he added a second finger and drove her a little higher. Cassie’s vaginal muscles clenched and unclenched as his fingers stroked her higher. She felt her body suffuse with heat and blood rushed through her, hot, so hot. Tense and panting, she was near the point of pleading for release when he abruptly stopped and stepped away from her.

“We both need a shower. Use my bathroom and I’ll use the spare. Don’t even think about bringing yourself to orgasm. Understood?”

Cassie nodded. He wanted to torture her a little longer. Even though it stung her pride, she swallowed a sarcastic retort, reminding herself that pride meant little in comparison to the betrayal he'd suffered from his two best friends.

Her legs quivered so badly she could hardly navigate her way to his room. A quick, cool shower helped calm her nerves and her libido. Sliding a hand between her legs, she was tempted to relieve more of the tension, but that would be cheating. She never wanted to cheat Brody again.

After she'd dried, she knotted the towel above her breasts and went into his bedroom. The black and silver décor with heavy furnishings screamed masculinity. She'd never doubted he was all man. He'd often distressed her by holding himself in check when they made love, yet she'd always sensed a deeper, more passionate nature. Now she just hoped she hadn't uncaged a beast she wouldn't be able to satisfy.

The bed linens were tousled, so Cassie kicked the top sheet completely off and slid to the center of the double bed. The bottom sheet was cool and soft. Brody's scent clung to the pillow, teasing her senses and quickening her pulse again. She rubbed her face against it and stroked her hands over the soft cotton. Just that quickly, her nipples hardened and a renewed throbbing pulsed deep in her core.

She'd hoped she and Brody could have an open, honest discussion about their situation and clear the air. Now she realized they both needed the physical release and satisfaction first. Maybe then they could work on rebuilding an emotional relationship.

She'd do whatever he asked of her in the way of penitence. She'd betrayed him and battered his ego, leaving him to face the community where generations of his family had lived. He had to get that frustration out of his system before they could hope to share a loving, lifelong commitment. Her years away from him had taught her a fierce lesson about herself. She'd left in a foolish fit of temper, but all she'd ever really wanted was Brody, at any price.

The door opened and he appeared, shirtless, with tight jeans hugging his hips. His dark hair sparkled with dampness, both on his head and on his chest and the patch that arched down toward the unbuttoned waistband of his jeans. Cassie caught her breath at his masculine beauty. Broad shoulders, whipcord muscles and a strong, flat stomach made her mouth water. Her fingers clenched and unclenched, her toes curling at the sight of him. She wanted nothing more than to touch and taste and feast on his body.

For an instant, she thought her needs were mirrored in his eyes, but then he quickly shuttered his gaze with dark lashes.

"Come here."

Chapter Two

At his command, the atmosphere of the room pulsed with renewed tension. Cassie rose from the bed and went to stand in front of him. She felt the heat of a blush covering her chest and climbing up her neck.

“Turn around.”

Hesitating only briefly, she did as she was told, and he surprised her by blindfolding her with soft cotton fabric. It felt like a handkerchief. She touched it gingerly, amazed at how much her other senses prickled to attention once darkness enveloped her. Her skin tingled. She breathed deeply, inhaling the clean, soapy scent of his body. Her nerves jangled at his closeness, and her toes dug into the soft nap of the carpet.

“Put your hands behind your back.”

Their lovemaking in the past had always been very conventional, so his request surprised her, but she slowly did as he asked. His big hands settled on her shoulders. Their heat sent a quiver through her as he drew her arms back and bound her wrists with more soft cloth. Her breasts strained against the knotted towel that covered her and it slowly slid to the floor. He reached around to pluck each nipple with fingers and thumbs until her breathing grew rough. Then he gave her another command.

“Go to the foot of the bed and lie over the end of it.”

She hesitated again and Brody smacked her bare bottom with the flat of his hand, making her jump, unhurt but startled.

“Don’t keep hesitating when I give you an order or you’ll be asking for punishment,” he snapped gruffly. Leaning close to her ear, he said, “Let’s get something clear from the start. You can walk out of here at any time, but if you leave, I’ll die before I let you set foot in my home again. Is that clear?”

Cassie caught her breath at the warning and the intensity of the emotion behind it. She knew he was dead serious, and she’d tapped into a wealth of emotion she’d only seen glimpses of in the past.

He’d always treated her with kid gloves, and she’d hated his restraint. Did he secretly want to dominate her? She didn’t know much about that sort of relationship, but she was game to try. If he thought to scare her, he had another think coming. She wanted to explore all that primitive emotion.

Unused to any type of subservience, she wasn’t sure how a good little slave would behave, but did as he asked. She moved slowly and cautiously to the bed until her legs bumped into the footboard. Bending at the waist, she leaned over, pressing her face and breasts against the sheets with her rear end higher than her head.

She felt the heat of Brody's body as he moved closer. Her breath hitched and she wondered what he would do next. She'd never felt so exposed or vulnerable in her life. Wariness and anticipation warred within her. He splayed one hand at the base of her spine, and heat throbbed through her.

"I'm going to spank your bare ass. If you're not up to that, better say so right now."

His low, rumbling voice caused her to catch her breath. Blindfolded and tightly bound, uneasiness blossoming in her midsection, she refused to give in to panic.

Her cry of surprise was muffled against the sheets when the flat of his hand smacked her bare cheeks, first one and then the other. His fast, sharp slaps surprised more than hurt. She'd never been into pain with sex, yet each successive slap drove her excitement higher. Fire licked through her body.

Brody spanked her until her rear end stung, and the rest of her body shuddered with a restlessness she barely understood. She could hear the roughness of his breathing and knew the intimate contact excited him, whether it was just the touching or the ability to minimize some of the tension between them.

He cupped her hips in his hot hands and silently massaged the supple, sensitive flesh for what seemed like an eternity. Long minutes passed before he hunkered down and shifted his caresses to her thighs. Up and down, up and down, he rubbed her with rough hands but gentle, strokes. It felt unbelievably erotic, and Cassie's body wept in response.

Just when she'd begun to relax, he thrust a hand into the juncture of her thighs and began to caress her more intimately. She gasped and started to straighten, but he smacked her behind again.

"I didn't tell you to move," he grumbled.

She sank back into the mattress and struggled for breath as he drove her higher and higher. Moaning, she arched her back, pressing herself more fully against his hard fingers. Panting and squirming, it was impossible to hold still, yet Brody stopped his massage as soon as she got greedy. He spanked her for her impatience, and Cassie's muscles went limp. She sank deeper into the mattress and tried to catch her breath.

"Hot for me, little cheat?"

"Yes." Cassie couldn't deny her hunger. Didn't even want to.

"Tell me what you want."

"You, in me," she mumbled against the sheet. Her face flamed with heat at the bald admission, but she was beyond caring.

She heard Brody's jeans hit the floor and heard the rip of what she assumed was a condom packet. In the next instant, she felt his heat and hardness pressed tight against her backside. Muscles tensing, she stiffened again at the sheer intimidating size of him.

The hard strength of his erection slid between her parted thighs and she caught her breath. She badly wanted him to sink himself deep inside of her, but he teased her briefly with just his touch. Blood pounded through her veins and her pulse pounded in her head. Her body strained closer to him.

This time, Brody didn't disappoint her. He thrust into her with a sure, strong stroke that had her gasping again. Too full. Too tight. Panic assailed her. It had been so long. Her muscles clenched at his deep invasion.

"Brody!" she pleaded.

"Easy," he whispered hoarsely.

Cassie felt his simmering need and the tension in his big body, but he waited a few heartbeats while her body slowly adjusted to the size and strength of him. Then he began to move with slow, sure strokes that made her forget her brief bout of anxiety. A trembling started deep within her as she climbed higher and higher toward a climax unlike anything she'd ever experienced.

She screamed, her muscles stiffening and toes curling as a second orgasm followed swiftly after the first. Brody kept pounding into her, so she thrust against him in a matching rhythm until he shouted his release. They both collapsed, sweating, drained and panting for breath.

After a few minutes, she felt her reluctant lover ease himself away from her. He released the bonds around her wrists and her shoulders stung as blood surged through her veins again. Slowly, she eased herself forward onto the bed until she could bury her face in his pillow. Within seconds, she'd fallen fast asleep.

Brody woke her later in the night. She felt his hands on her feet and then the cool air wafting between her legs as he spread them wide to bind her feet to the bedposts. Before she could get her bearings, her wrists were also bound together and pressed against the sheets over her head.

She still wore the blindfold, but the total darkness told her it was deep into the night. She sensed rather than saw the intensity of his expression. Need radiated from him, and she knew his jaws would be clenched tight, his lips thinned and his eyes shuttered as he moved around the bed.

"Brody?"

Instead of responding to her plea for reassurance, Cassie found herself fully exposed and completely at his mercy again. The mattress dipped, distracting her as she felt his big body move closer.

His hair-roughened thighs brushed against her hips as he straddled her waist. His hard erection pressed into her belly and she knew he was as naked as she. Heat engulfed her, along with the feel of his muscled strength. His scent, the scent of a highly aroused male, invaded her senses.

Stunned, but excited, she barely caught her breath before a tickle of something soft against her breasts quickly distracted her. A feathery touch flicked over her left nipple and then her right, making her breathing falter. Then the process was repeated with slow, swirling pressure that had her arching her back.

With just the lightest touch, Brody had managed to fully arouse her. Suddenly, she was wide awake, her body straining for more of his caresses.

Soon the soft teasing was replaced with a flick of a hard fingernail across each nipple, and then his teeth clamped onto each swollen bud in quick, sharp bites. Cassie could barely breathe. His tongue soothed for a few hot, wet strokes. He pinched one while sucking the other, making her blood pulse hotly through the rest of her body.

Her hips began to undulate, but his weight and the restraints kept her from getting close enough to him. He tortured her with more sucking kisses and biting stings until she was panting and ready to beg.

She tried to bring her arms down and encircle his head, but he quickly dodged her attempts and pressed her back against the sheets. In one swift move, he bound her arms completely to the bed. Lifting her head slightly, she tried to kiss him, but he dodged her blindly searching mouth. Sighing raggedly, she dropped her head and decided to just enjoy his touch.

He made it incredibly easy to enjoy. His hands were rough, but big and warm. He cupped her breasts, molding the flesh with hard, sure squeezes until her chest heaved and her breathing grew shallow. His thumb raked her nipples and she moaned. When his hot, wet tongue lapped at the puckered flesh, primal hunger surged through her. Her hips bucked involuntarily and her moans deepened.

In response, he stretched more fully along her body. She gasped as his greedy mouth settled on the pulse at her throat. He sucked her hard while his hand slipped between her legs, driving her higher. The combined caresses had her thrashing wildly, pulling against the restraints and screaming his name.

“Brody!”

She didn’t have to wait long. His patience snapped and he joined their bodies with one swift stroke. Then he pumped into her with a fiery passion that soon had her spiraling toward another hot, intense orgasm.

They collapsed, panting, sweating, spent and temporarily sated.

When Cassie woke the next morning, she was lying on her stomach, alone in the bed. The midday sun shone brightly through the window. Her blindfold and restraints were gone. She blinked and turned onto her back.

“Ouch,” she muttered, her butt stinging with tenderness. The throb of sensitive nerves created an even deeper throb between her legs and her nipples puckered. The memory of Brody’s sometimes gentle, sometimes rough loving made her pulse race.

She had to get a grip.

The total silence of the house indicated she was alone. There was no knowing where he’d gone or when he’d return. It wasn’t unusual for him to work from dawn to dusk, so she made her way to the shower.

The clothes she’d worn yesterday were nowhere in sight. Once clean and dry, Cassie found a soft blue T-shirt in a dresser drawer and slipped it over her head. The fabric teased her already sensitive nipples and

the hem barely covered her equally sensitive rear end, yet she felt decent enough to roam through the house.

Brody didn't come in for lunch. She didn't know his evening habits, but she found a frozen casserole and baked it for their dinner. When he finally came into the house, they ate together, yet he ignored all her attempts to initiate conversation.

Cassie stopped trying. Instead, she allowed herself to feast on the sight of him. She wanted to store his every mannerism in her memory. She wanted to make mental notes about every change that had occurred in the past two years. She mourned a little for the lighthearted young man she'd left, and wondered how much of the hard, cynical man was her fault.

When they finished eating, she carried their dirty dishes to the sink and wiped the table clean. He watched in silence for a few minutes, then rose from his chair and leveled her with a steady gaze. Without a word, he reached into his pocket for a condom, and then unzipped his jeans. His thick shaft sprung free. His tone and expression were tight.

"Cover me."

Heart pounding, Cassie tore the condom packet and slowly rolled it over his throbbing erection. After she was done, he grasped her by the waist and lifted her to the tabletop. She grimaced as her bare bottom made solid contact with the cool, hard surface, and put her arms behind her for support.

"Close your eyes and keep them closed."

The T-shirt had risen to her waist, leaving her half naked, yet feeling totally exposed. Blushing wildly, Cassie did as she was told, closing her eyes and opening the rest of her senses. Her nipples peared against the soft fabric of his shirt. She gasped as Brody's mouth latched onto one at the same time he thrust into her body, pumping so hard and fast she could barely catch her breath. His wild impatience made her wonder if he'd been as horny as she had been all day.

Rough and rowdy, he reached between their straining bodies and caressed her with sure fingers that quickly sent her spiraling out of control. In another instant, he groaned his release.

Panting, Cassie dropped her head back, arms trembling along with the rest of her.

Brody quickly moved away. "I'll shower. Get out of that shirt and be naked in my bed by the time I'm finished."

The command in his tone made goosebumps shiver over her skin. She opened her eyes to see him staring at her heaving breasts and puckered nipples. His gaze lingered on the tight buds until she slipped off the table and crossed her arms over her chest.

In an instant, he pressed close, turned her, lifted the shirt and then slapped her bottom with stinging force. She squealed and jumped, the blood singing through her veins.

"Don't ever try to hide from me!" he commanded harshly. "Understood?"

His sudden flare of temper made her wary, but the sharp resurgence of arousal had her stunned and panting. She nodded her head.

“Say it!”

“I won’t hide from you!” she swore.

Satisfied, he turned and headed toward the spare bedroom. Cassie didn’t hesitate. She hurried to his room, pulled the T-shirt over her head and tossed it aside, hardly believing how aroused she was. In little more than twenty-four hours, Brody had made her his slave in more ways than one. She’d always enjoyed sex with him, but now she wanted him with a savage, insatiable hunger.

Her emotional needs weren’t likely to be fulfilled for a long while, but she told herself she could deal with a strictly sexual relationship.

When Brody came to her, he was gloriously naked. Her gaze raked his hard, lean body, her heart rate accelerating at the sight of his bold erection. Already sheathed with a condom, it made her pulse race out of control.

Her throat went too tight for words, so she didn’t utter a sound when he commanded her to come to him. She desperately wanted to taste and touch and take her time exploring his body, but it wasn’t to be. She whimpered a little when he turned her so he could blindfold her and bind her wrists. Her complaints weakened when he cupped both breasts from behind and began a new, thrilling assault on her senses. His hot mouth sucked at the curve of her throat and she felt the pull of desire clear to her toes.

They slowly moved to the bed and he pressed her back against the sheets. He took his time spreading kisses down her body. Her stomach quivered when he licked and sucked her nipples, then pressed wet kisses over her abdomen and lower. When his mouth settled at the juncture of her thighs, she started whimpering. Her legs stiffened, her back arching as her breathing grew more agitated. Her wrists were bound, but she managed to grasp hold of his hair as he drove her higher and higher. She was screaming and spiraling out of control by the time he finally locked his body with hers.

And so it went from night to night for nearly a week. The love they made was passionate and intense. Cassie had never been so physically excited or deeply sated, yet she began to feel more of an object than a participant. Brody never let her touch him. He never let her see him in the throes of passion. There was no pillow talk and none of the long, heartfelt discussions she craved.

They never kissed, and she soon realized that she wanted his kisses more than her next breath. She ached to touch him, to give him a fraction of the pleasure he gave her, but he wouldn’t allow the intimate connection.

Cassie ate and slept during the day and made love all night. She hadn’t realized how totally exhausted she was until she had time to rest. The last few months had been hell on her body and her heart. Once she’d decided to come home, she’d worked long and hard to allow herself the freedom of returning to Brody.

Back in his life, she lived in a haze of lust for days without concerning herself with much else, completely at his mercy. He supplied her basic needs and she allowed it for a while. Once she'd proven herself willing to obey his orders, he gave very few outside of the bedroom. Her car had been brought to the ranch, so she retrieved her clothes and began venturing beyond the house. It was a joy to re-explore the property and visit the horses. She spent most of her waking hours doing small chores in the barn. When he caught her talking to an old favorite mount, Brody suggested she start working the horses on a daily basis.

Considering the fact that his horses were second in her heart only to him, she couldn't have been happier with his small gesture. For a short time, the horses and the ranch were the only subjects he'd willingly discuss, but it gave them a common ground besides sex.

She knew the lust couldn't last forever and she began to worry about her lover's continued animosity. She wondered if he'd eventually tire of the sex and ask her to leave without giving their relationship a real chance. It broke her heart to think he might never forgive her. Or that he might truly hate her.

If that was the case, she knew she had to find a balance in her life between being his sex slave and being her own person. She badly wanted to be his wife and the mother of his children, but his unbending attitude didn't offer much hope for a long-term commitment.

Two weeks into her stay on the ranch, Cassie headed toward the barn. The early morning sunshine felt warm on her skin, but the nip in the air promised the approach of autumn. The Grand Tetons in the distance still held a purple-blue hue, but the peaks already had a heavy cover of snow. The rodeo season would be over soon, at least here in Wyoming.

She'd been at the top of the rankings when she'd left the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, shocking all her friends and fellow barrel racers. But she'd grown tired of the constant competition and politics behind the sport she loved. It hadn't taken her long to realize life on the road wasn't nearly as exciting as she'd hoped. It was just plain lonely. She'd spent most of her time missing Brody, and yearning for home.

As she neared the corral next to the main barn, a broad smile spread across her face. He was nowhere in sight, but three fifty-five-gallon plastic barrels had been set up in the corral. They were perfectly positioned for the cloverleaf pattern of barrel racing. It had been her lifelong passion, and he knew how much it meant to her. It was a small thing, yet her heart blossomed with hope.

"Thank you," she whispered softly, her eyes filling with tears. Brody couldn't hear and probably wouldn't appreciate the thanks, but the small gesture of caring touched her more deeply than an arena full of cheering crowds. She silently renewed her pledge to reach past his anger and prove her love beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Chapter Three

Over the next week, they settled into a routine of work and sex with a little sleep thrown into the mix. Brody gradually opened up enough to carry on normal conversations, as long as she didn't bring up the subject of their past, current or future relationship. He'd discuss the weather, the ranch and general subjects, just nothing more intimate.

Cassie continued to ride each day, focusing on Jasmine, the chestnut mare she'd been training to barrel race. She nudged the big horse into a loping canter around the corral to stretch her legs and warm her muscles. The breeze in her face, the creak of leather and the familiar rhythm of the horse's stride were second nature to Cassie, even though parts of her anatomy remained a little tender.

She loved the weightless feeling of floating atop the horse, loved the feel of powerful muscles between her thighs. Patting Jasmine's neck, she crooned to her while easing back on the reins, slowing to a trot as they rounded the corral toward the starting point behind the barrels.

Guiding Jasmine in a slow routine, she concentrated on a counter arc maneuver for training. It helped the horse learn the twisting pattern of the race. On the second round, she pushed for more speed. Horse and rider had to trust each other completely, but Cassie concentrated on maneuvers before speed. Nothing worked better than constant repetition and hours of practice.

"Hey there, little lady!" A shout from the fence drew her attention. She glanced over to see Harold Snyder, a neighboring rancher. She'd known him and his wife, Marilyn, most of her life. The couple owned one of the largest ranches in the area. They were well liked and highly respected in the community.

Grinning, she reined Jasmine and trotted over to say hello. The older man wore a dark hat on his snowy hair. Leathery skin with deep creases on his face showcased his age. He crossed his arms on the top rung of the fence and patted the mare when they drew close.

"Hi, Mr. Synder. It's nice to see you."

"My pleasure, young lady. I've always said it's a joy to watch you ride. You sit a horse better than anyone I've ever seen."

Cassie blushed at the compliment because she knew he meant it. The veteran rancher wasn't the type to throw out idle compliments. He ran one of the best riding stables in the state and was a respected riding judge. He'd taught her as a young girl and continued to train both horses and riders.

"Thanks, I love it," she said. "And Jasmine is coming along nicely. She's spirited, a natural for the barrels and enjoys the challenge."

"She's from good stock," he commented, knowing the horse's lineage because she'd been raised in his stable. "What brings you home? Just visiting? Are you between rodeos?"

Her blush deepened as Brody joined them at the fence and shook the other man's hand in greeting. Knowing how sensitive he was about the subject, she worded her answer as carefully as possible.

"I'm home for good. I realized I'm just not cut out for living on the road."

The older man's brows lifted in surprise, but he slowly nodded in understanding. "I know what you mean. I did a brief spell with the PRCA in my younger days too, but got sick of eating dust and bad chow at every dinky diner from here to California. After a few too many ratty motels and horse trailer showers, the glamour wears off real quick."

Cassie's smile widened. She wanted to hug him for his description of rodeo life. It encompassed everything she wanted to explain to Brody, if he would only listen.

"I love the riding and competition, but it didn't take me long to lose interest in traveling the circuit."

"I saw you ride in Cheyenne earlier this summer. I don't think I've ever seen you or your chestnut mare show better. She really performed that day."

A little wave of sadness washed over Cassie, but she continued to smile. She'd raised and trained her horse Dusty Rose from a yearling. She'd loved her dearly, but had sold her after her last rodeo.

"Dusty loved a challenge. Jasmine's a lot like her in that respect," she said, leaning over to pat the horse. "I think she has a lot of potential."

Brody changed the subject. "What brings you visiting today, Mr. Snyder? Need some extra hay?"

"That I do," said the older man. "My last cutting didn't bring in as much as I'd hoped. I need to get the barn filled before the weather takes a turn. I heard you had extra alfalfa for sale."

"I can spare a couple hundred bales."

"That'd be great. I'll have someone fetch it tomorrow. Just send me a bill."

The men shook hands again, and Mr. Snyder turned back to Cassie, tipping his hat. "You decide you want a job, young lady, there's an open invitation at my place."

The offer took her by surprise. As far as she knew, he'd never taken on any help with the teaching and training. It would be quite an honor to work with the best.

"Really?" she asked.

"Really." His tone and expression were serious. "I'm not getting any younger and I like your style."

Flattered, she gave him a big smile. "Thank you, I'll keep that in mind."

They watched in silence as Mr. Snyder started his truck and headed down the drive. Then Brody surprised her by climbing the fence and mounting Jasmine behind her. He lifted her out of the saddle, slid into it himself and sat her down on his lap. Warmth encompassed her as he reached around to grasp the reins.

Cassie let her hands drop to his muscled thighs, her fingers involuntarily kneading him through the heavy denim of his jeans. It was a pleasure to touch him since he rarely got close unless her hands were bound.

She dropped her head back to his shoulder, completely relaxing against his hard strength. His breath teased her ear when he spoke.

“Getting tired of working around here? Tempted to leave for greener pastures?”

The question and his grim tone took her by surprise. Panic assailed her at the thought he might actually want her to leave. “Are you trying to get rid of me?”

He nudged Jasmine toward the opening of the barn and slid one hand around Cassie’s waist. His fingers slowly tugged her shirttail from her jeans. She held her breath until he finally answered her question.

“No.”

“No what?” she demanded.

As they left the bright morning sunlight and entered the darkness of the barn, his fingers found her nipples through the fabric of her bra, deftly teasing and tugging. She felt the pull deep inside of her and sighed with pleasure. With little more than a touch, he made her body weep with need. She didn’t know how she could survive without him.

“No, I don’t want you to leave,” he said, nipping her earlobe with his teeth.

Jasmine came to a halt near her stall and Brody let the reins slip to the floor. He brought both of his hands to her breasts, shoving her bra aside so he could mold each full mound. His mouth settled on the pulse throbbing at the back of her neck. He sucked deeply and she shuddered with need.

“Brody,” she moaned his name while shifting restlessly in his lap. His erection swelled into a steel-hard column against her backside. He held her close so he could unsnap her jeans. When his fingers dipped into her panties and between her legs, she gasped and arched closer to his touch. In a matter of seconds, he had her straining toward release, her head thrown back, nails digging into his thighs as she climbed higher.

“Come for me, baby,” he whispered gruffly. “Come apart for me.” With one hand on her breast and one between her legs, he continued to stroke her higher and higher until she shuddered with pleasure, crying his name.

Her body went limp in his arms. Brody cradled her gently until her breathing quieted and strength returned to her limbs. He tucked her breasts back into her bra, then zipped and snapped her jeans. She reached between them and cupped his erection through the heavy fabric of his jeans, but he quickly shifted from her caressing fingers.

“Later,” he whispered close to her ear. “I have to go to town now, but I won’t be long. When I get back, I want you naked in my bed. Then you can ease this ache of mine.”

He'd deliberately seduced her without demanding his own satisfaction. Cassie couldn't help but wonder what had prompted his sudden need to please her. She couldn't think of it as any other way but laying claim to her body with his unselfish loving.

"Did it annoy you when Mr. Snyder offered me a job? Did you really think I'd jump at the chance to leave here?"

"You've always admired him and his work."

"I still do and I was flattered by the offer."

His tone went terse. "I'm sure he'd throw in lodging as well as a good wage."

Cassie bristled with anger. She tried to move, but he held her tight. "You said you didn't want me to go. Were you lying? Are you hoping I'll leave?"

"No, but I want you to consider your options. I don't want you staying with me unless you're still okay with my terms."

She wasn't comfortable with his terms, not anymore. How she wished she could read his mind or understand what he wanted. Was he tired of her and trying to drive her away? Or just hurting and vulnerable at the thought she might want to leave? She had to find a way to reach him. Until then, she'd continue to do whatever he asked.

There was a touch of sadness in her voice when she responded. "I'm not leaving."

Some of the tension drained from Brody's body. He shifted in the saddle and dismounted, then reached up to help her. She slid off Jasmine's back and found herself pressed between man and horse. Her arms slipped around his neck and she rose on tiptoe, planning to kiss him. But he rejected her natural show of affection and shifted out of reach. He still didn't want her kisses, still didn't want to change his terms of surrender.

Stung by the rejection, she turned her back on him and started loosening the cinch on Jasmine's saddle. He'd firmly put her in her place without words. All he wanted was sex and obedience. Tears filled her eyes and gathered in her throat.

"Do you need anything from town?"

She shook her head, but didn't speak. She wanted him to leave before she broke down and bawled like a baby. Her nerves were frazzled and her pride had already taken a beating.

"Cassie," he said her name hesitantly, as though sorry he'd hurt her.

The last thing she wanted was pity. She'd fall to pieces. "Just go!" she snapped.

He turned and left without another word. It took a few minutes to regain her composure, finding comfort in the familiar chores. She put Jasmine in her stall and quickly brushed her down, then carried her bridle, saddle and blanket to the tack room. She'd just finished up in the barn when she heard raised voices in the barnyard. Wondering about the new visitor, she headed out the door.

Brody halted outside the barn when an unfamiliar pickup truck pulled to a stop in the drive. The last thing he wanted right now was a visitor. He wasn't in the mood for small talk.

Cassie had him tied in knots. He'd thought he could keep her in his bed and out of his head, but the plan had backfired. Every day he wanted her more and his need had grown to the point of obsession. The sound of her voice at the end of a long day. The scent of her skin whenever she was close. Her beautiful smile. She just kept giving and he kept taking.

Now he'd hurt her again by rebuffing her attempt to kiss him. He wanted her touch. Wanted her kisses. Craved a deeper intimacy, but it also scared the hell out of him. What if he offered her everything she wanted and it still wasn't enough to hold her? He'd never survive another soul-deep rejection.

Brody shoved all that to the back of his mind when he recognized his visitor. Chuck. At the sight of his old friend, his temper flared, fueled by bitter disillusion plus a touch of panic. What if loverboy had come to steal Cassie again?

What if he'd just given her ample reason to leave him?

Sunlight momentarily blinded Cassie when she left the shadows of the barn, but her eyes widened in surprise when saw the cause of all the commotion.

Brody stood over Chuck's prone body. His stance was angry and aggressive, his hands doubled into fists. Chuck was shaking his head and rubbing his jaw. Brody ordered him to stand up and fight, but his friend refused.

"Brody!" Cassie yelled as she raced across the yard. She didn't want them fighting over her. She already felt bad enough for causing the rift between them. "Stop it!"

Chuck saw her and slowly started to rise. Brody drew back his arm as if to lash out again, but she threw herself against his chest. He grabbed her to shift her aside, but she clung to him like a leech.

"No! I won't have you fighting over me! It's not Chuck's fault that I got mad and left here. I begged him to take me along and practically threw myself at him. He'd have been a complete bum to leave me behind, even if it meant hurting you. If you'd given me half a chance, I would have explained that by now."

Brody's dark, angry gaze clashed with hers. She knew he wanted to blame Chuck for all their problems, but it wouldn't be fair. She clutched his arms tightly, dropping her voice, welcoming the chance to tell him what she'd wanted to say for weeks.

"It's just about you and me," she insisted urgently. "It always has been. Just you and me and our messed-up relationship. If there's an injured party, it's Chuck. I swear it on my life."

Some of the anger drained from his body, but he shot a hostile glance at Chuck. "What the hell do you want? Why come here now?"

Chuck picked up his hat, brushed the dust off it and returned Brody's glare. "I came to check on Cassie. I haven't heard a word from her since she left Houston and I was worried. You're such a damned hothead, I didn't know what you'd do when she showed up on your doorstep."

Brody made a lunge in his direction, but Cassie dug in her heels and held him back. "Stop it. It's the truth. You're both a couple of bullheaded idiots." Her insults came out harshly, but her eyes filled with tears. That, more than anything, drained some of the tension from Brody.

"I'm sorry, really sorry, that I caused this rift between you, but I can't undo my own stupid mistake. I know there's no way to make it right, but please don't fight. It breaks my heart."

The last words caught on a sob, and she pushed away from Brody. He made a rough sound of concern and tried to hold her. She twisted out of his reach and ran toward the house, leaving the two old friends to stare after her in shock.

"What the hell have you done to her?" demanded Chuck.

"What the hell did you do to send her running back to me?" Brody countered.

"Nothing. Not a damned thing," he insisted. "It's you she loves and always has. If you weren't so stupid blind, you'd realize she's the best thing that ever happened to you. All she ever wanted was to be your wife and live happily ever after with a couple of kids. But you had to go and trample on her dreams."

Brody growled his disbelief. "Her dream was riding in the rodeo."

"Only with you by her side. She's just as happy riding here on the ranch as she was in all those fancy arenas. All she ever talked about on the road was Brody, Brody, Brody. I got sick of hearing it."

"The hell you say!"

"The hell I say!"

Brody wanted to believe it. Desperately wanted to believe Cassie would choose him over her rodeo career and any man who tried to come between them. Hope swelled in his heart and blood rushed hotly through his veins, but he controlled the urge to chase after her. First, he and Chuck had some matters to resolve.

Chapter Four

The clock on Brody's bedside table showed half-past midnight when Cassie heard him stumbling up the stairs. She sat quietly in a chair as he entered the dimly lit room and began to shed his clothes. He mumbled and cursed when the process was complicated by his inebriated state. Since he rarely drank, she'd never seen him so tipsy and uncoordinated. He nearly fell on his face while trying to free his legs of his jeans. Still, she enjoyed the show as he slowly bared his awesome body. Normally blindfolded when they were together, she rarely got a chance to just look and admire his nudity.

Once Brody was naked and sprawled across the bed, she went and stood by his side. His dark lashes lifted when he became aware of her presence.

"You still here?" he questioned hoarsely.

"I'm still here." She kept her response soft.

"Chuck said you were never lovers. Did he lie?"

"You've been drinking with Chuck?" she asked in amazement. Her heart started to pound with excitement.

"Not what I asked," he mumbled. She could barely understand his slurred words. "Did he lie? He said you lived together, but never had sex."

"He didn't lie, but to be totally honest, we did try. We even thought we could get past the guilt, but neither of us could go through with it. We're just not attracted to each other, and neither of us wanted to betray you that way."

Brody closed his eyes on a heavy sigh. "Why the hell should I believe either of you?"

Because they both loved him in their own fashion. For Chuck, Brody was his best friend, the brother he never had and a trusted confidant. Brody was her life. Every day she grew more enslaved by her love for him and more desperate to reach him on an emotional level. She badly wanted to discuss their relationship and welcomed the chance, but before she could say a word, he fell asleep.

For a long time, Cassie just watched as he slept and listened to his soft snoring. She knew he was exhausted, but she wanted to make sure he was sleeping soundly before she put her plan into action.

He lay spread eagle across the bed and that suited her needs perfectly. She'd found an old clothesline on the porch, so she cut it into four equal lengths, made some slipknots and put them on his ankles and wrists. Working slowly and carefully, she managed to tie the other end of each rope around the four posters of the bed. The bonds weren't tight, but they would keep him on the bed while she had her way with him.

After tying the final knot, Cassie sat in the chair and allowed herself to doze. Dawn had spread light into the room when she heard Brody start to stir. She roused herself from sleep and moved back to the bed. As she watched, his thick lashes lifted, his dark gaze piercing her as she leaned over his prone body. He tried to move, but soon realized that his movements were limited. Anger flared in his eyes and his jaws went tight.

“What the hell?”

“It’s time we had a serious talk, cowboy,” she whispered in a soft, firm tone. “And it’s way past time for payback.”

“Untie me.” His surly command was little more than a growl.

She didn’t bother to answer. He flinched when she cupped his face in her hands, but he was helpless to evade her touch. She stroked her thumbs along the tight muscles in his jaws. His five o’clock shadow tickled her fingers.

She let her gaze drift over his strong facial features; the wide furrowed brow, his heavily lashed dark eyes, and full lips, locking each into her memory. Then she leaned over and pressed her lips to each feature, brushing light kisses over every inch of his face except his mouth. She badly wanted his kisses, but she wanted them offered rather than stolen.

When her caresses gradually meandered over his chin and down his throat, he made a sound that was half frustration, half arousal. Cassie ignored him and the vibrating tension in his big body. She had weeks of hunger built up inside her that desperately needed appeasing. Her hands fluttered to his shoulders, massaging the taut flesh, while her mouth scoured hot, open-mouthed kisses along his neck and chest.

She took her time nibbling, licking and sucking, her hands roaming along his ribcage. Her tongue tangled in the tight, curling hair around nipples before spearing them with short little lashes. His body bucked and he tried shifting out of her reach. She punished him by latching onto a nipple and sucking it until he stilled and then began to tremble. A matching tremor shot through her, but she silently vowed to ignore her own increasing arousal.

She’d dressed before starting her sensual attack. Now her breasts had swollen and her nipples strained against the restriction of clothes. She wanted to strip and rub her overheated flesh against his, but knew she needed to keep her mind on her objective.

Leaning next to his prone body, Cassie let her hair glide over his taut stomach as she continued to bathe him with kisses. His erection, hard and straining, became the object of her attention and exploration. Brody’s groan rumbled from deep in his throat. She grasped the hard muscles in his thighs with hot hands, stilling his thrashing legs while she adored him with her mouth.

When his moans became low and deep and tremor after tremor coursed through him, she eased herself from the bed. Standing next to him, she gave him one last, lingering glance.

"I love you," she told him in a voice that wasn't too steady. She cleared her throat and continued. "I love you with all my heart. I always have and always will. Nothing you can do will change the way I feel. Not now, not ever."

Tears threatened and she swallowed hard. "I made a huge mistake by leaving here with Chuck. I felt so sure you'd beg me to stay. That you'd give me a reason to stay or follow me and drag me home. You didn't do either and my pride kept me from begging. So far, pride has been more important to both of us than the future we might have if we learned to compromise."

She held Brody's steady, searching gaze. His body glistened with sweat. Tension radiated from every inch of his big frame, but for the first time since she arrived, he was listening intently.

"Untie me," he insisted, his tone gruff.

"No. I need communication, real communication. The only way you can keep me here any longer is by telling me exactly what you want from our relationship. If you just want a sex slave, I'm sure there are lots of women who'd be willing to take my place."

"You're leaving." Not a statement, but an accusation.

"If you don't say something to make me stay."

"What the hell do you want from me?" he demanded harshly. "You want trust that you destroyed? You want forgiveness for the unforgivable?"

"I want a chance. A real chance for a long-term relationship and promise of a happily-ever-after future."

"You want a future? You expect a marriage proposal after what you did to me?"

"No." Cassie sighed and moved closer to the door. Dread filled her heart and made her ache. Maybe she was making another big mistake by forcing the issue. Maybe he'd never forgive and forget, but she had to know there was a chance, however slim it might be. She had to break through the walls he'd built around his heart. Had to know if he cared at all or if she'd just been an easy lay.

"So you lied about loving me?" he barked at her.

Cassie turned back to look into his eyes. "I've never lied to you. You know I'm a terrible liar."

His nostrils flared. "If you love me, why the hell are you walking out on me again?"

She'd never really planned to leave, so his question took her off-guard.

"Is it the sex? Too much for you? Does my sexual appetite scare you?"

"Not even a little bit," she said. "What scares me is that you won't even kiss me. You won't let me look at you or touch you. That's what scares me. That you might always want barriers between us. Why do you think you have to protect yourself against me?"

"Protect!" She could tell the idea infuriated him. "You think I'm afraid of you?"

She slowly walked back to the bed and looked down at him as he tugged viciously at his bonds.

“Oh, yeah. I think you’re scared to death you’re going to care for me a little. I think you barricaded your heart and you hide behind all your frustrated anger. I think you’re a great big emotional coward.”

With an oath and a fierce tug, Brody pulled one hand from the rope and swiftly untied himself from the others. Cassie started to turn and leave, but he grabbed her and tossed her onto the bed. Then he slid over her, effectively trapping her beneath his weight.

“If I’m an emotional coward, it’s your fault,” he ground out roughly.

Cassie stared into his dark, stormy eyes. “I know,” she replied softly. She wrapped her arms around his waist, loving the feel of his smooth skin and hard, muscled flesh.

“I know I’m to blame for destroying our relationship. You’ll never know how much pain that decision cost me. But I’m ready to get on with my life. I’m ready to correct my mistakes and start planning for the future. I want a future with you. Nobody else has ever mattered to me as much as you. I swear it on my life.”

For several long minutes, Brody stared into her eyes, searching for the truth. Cassie knew he wanted to believe her, but she’d burned him badly and he didn’t forgive easily.

Tension throbbed between them. Her heart sank when Brody lifted her enough to take off her shirt and bra. In another few minutes, he’d removed her skirt and panties. A sob caught in her throat as he pressed her back against the mattress. She loved him and wanted him so badly. She’d never refuse him sex, yet he didn’t seem to want anything else from her.

When tears filled her eyes and started to overflow, he murmured a rough complaint and began to lick them from her cheeks. Cupping her head in his hands, he used his thumbs to massage her temples while he kissed away the tears. His tenderness triggered a sob from her, and that sent a shudder over him.

Then his mouth captured hers in a hard, hot kiss that stole her breath. Cassie gasped as his tongue plundered, taking her by surprise. Then she sucked it deeply into her mouth. Too long denied the pleasure of kissing, they both lost themselves in a duel of teeth and tongues and lips.

When they had to break to breathe, he grasped her head and tilted it so he could deepen the next kiss. She clutched at his back and writhed beneath him, wanting to get closer, needing his touch more than air. Needing to connect with him in every way possible and wanting to let him know how much she wanted all of him.

“Cassie!” he groaned into her mouth.

“I love you so much,” she mumbled into his.

“Be sure. Be really sure,” he warned darkly. “I won’t survive if you leave again.”

“Never,” she swore with passionate promise. “Not as long as you want me.”

Brody dragged his mouth from hers and they locked gazes. Tears blurred her vision, but she hoped he could read the truth in her eyes.

“I never stopped wanting you,” he swore.

“I need more, Brody,” she whispered. “I need the words this time.”

She watched him swallow hard. “Please. I know the words won’t fix all our problems, but I desperately need to hear them.”

He studied her intently for another heart-stopping minute. Then he dipped his head and brushed a kiss across her lips. “I love you, too. But I nearly went out of my mind when you left me. I can’t survive losing you again. Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

Cassie trembled. Her breath caught on another sob, but he swallowed it with a long, deep kiss that had their tongues tangling with deeper and deeper intensity.

“I know I’m asking a lot, but I’ll promise you a lifetime if you want it,” she finally said to him. “I know that loving each other is just the beginning. I also know we can make it as long as both of us are willing to try. I had to know you’re willing to try. The rest of it will come in time.”

“Like babies?” he asked as he brushed his mouth over hers.

Her breathing stalled as she stared at him in surprise. “You want babies?”

“I want to plant my seed in you and watch it grow. I want to sink myself into you with nothing between us. Nothing.”

“I want that too,” she whispered huskily. “I want that very much.”

He ducked his head and blinked his eyes. Cassie caught her breath at the thought that he might be fighting tears too. If his love ran as deep as hers, their future was already looking bright.

Then her thoughts scattered when his mouth found her nipple and sucked it while teasing the other with his thumb and finger. She gasped and clutched his hair in her hands, tugging as she felt the strong pull of his mouth on her nipples. Fire shot through her and she began to writhe beneath him in restless demand.

“Love me!” she cried in a frenzy of need.

“Always have, always will,” he promised throatily. Then he thrust into her and made them one.

Later, as they snuggled together in the rumpled bed, Cassie’s heart swelled with happiness. She pressed her face against Brody’s chest and cuddled closer. His arms held her to his side. His fingers lightly caressed her back and she was free to touch and taste and adore him the way she’d yearned to do for so long.

Contentment filled the bedroom, yet she had one more confession before they could start fresh. She just didn’t know how to broach the subject, hating the thought of stirring his resentment again. He solved the problem by bringing up the subject.

“Chuck said you sold Dusty Rose when you left the rodeo.”

Though phrased as a statement, his comment really held a question. She’d told him she needed a place to stay because she didn’t have any money. He wanted to know if she’d lied her way back into his bed.

“What if I exaggerated my situation?”

He took his time answering and her heart started to pound with alarm.

"I guess that's a forgivable lie, but I don't want any lies between us," he said quietly.

"I didn't actually lie," she whispered, lifting herself on her forearms so she could look him in the eyes. "I made a lot of money in the circuit and I sold Dusty Rose so I'd have enough cash to buy some property. Once I'd bought the property and came home, I really was broke."

"Property? Where?"

"I bought the Ruttgers' ranch."

"The hell you say!"

Cassie smiled, satisfied with his reaction, and settled back to his chest. The Ruttgers had been his nearest neighbors until they'd sold to her.

"I've always wanted that land." He sounded amazed.

"I know, and I wanted you to have it. I didn't know if you'd allow me back into your life, but I wasn't taking any chances. If you'd sent me away that first day, I'd have moved in next door and kept hounding you."

"Determined, huh?"

"I love you that much. It's the forever kind of love, Brody. I'm never leaving again. If you get angry and throw me out, I'll just stay next door."

"And what if we get married?"

Her breath hitched. He'd forgiven her. He'd told her he loved her and wanted her to have his children, but he hadn't proposed marriage. She so desperately wanted a proposal.

"If we get married, then I guess I'll be bringing a nice little dowry into the partnership," she whispered.

Brody rolled them over until his big body was stretched on top of hers, skin to skin. His eyes glittered in the sunlight. "Think you're going to bribe me into marriage?" he asked softly.

She gave him a siren's grin. "I think it's about damn time you ask me."

"Tell me you love me again."

She caressed his cheeks with both hands and raised her head to press a long kiss on his lips. "I love you."

"Will you marry me, Cassandra Jane Pallard?"

A deep, contented sigh escaped her. "Yes, Brody Allen Chambers, I think I will."

About the Author

To learn more about Becky Barker, please visit www.BeckyBarker.com or send an email to her at write@beckybarker.com.

Look for these titles by Becky Barker

Now Available:

On Wings of Love
Cade's Challenge

Before she leaves town, she's going out with a bang

Going For It

©2008 Elle Kennedy

Sam Taylor has lusted after ex-baseball-player Riley Scott for far too long. Now, her business bought out from under her, broke, and with nothing to lose, she refuses to leave town without getting the one thing she's always wanted. Riley. In her bed.

Riley had the reputation as a player on and off the baseball field. He's wanted Sam for years, but valued her friendship too much to let sex ruin it. Now, after a forced retirement, he's looking for a purpose in his life. Sam's bar, the Diamond, is just the thing to get his life back on track.

But before he can reveal that he's the new owner, he finds himself the willing victim of her full-on seduction. As he succumbs to her feminine charms, he begins to think maybe there's a way he can have it all—the Diamond, the woman, and the friend.

Until she finds out he's the one responsible for taking away her most treasured possession...

*Warning: This title contains sex in the shower and on a pool table (a bed does make an appearance).
Be prepared to stand in front of an air conditioner after reading.*

Enjoy the following excerpt from Going For It

"So what's on your mind?" Riley asked.

"Sex."

Huh?

He blinked a couple times. Wondered if he'd heard her right or if the lust he felt for this woman was making him hallucinate.

"Sex," he repeated, though it was hard to speak when his mouth had become the Sahara Desert.

"Yep."

Okay. She wanted to talk to him about sex? A confrontation he'd been ready for, but he was in no way prepared to talk about the subject of sex with the one woman he'd always wanted in his bed.

He swallowed, bringing much-needed moisture to his arid throat. His mouth dried out, however, the second Sam leaned forward and rested her elbows on the table. His gaze strayed to her tits. Her very perky, very *braless* tits. Lord, why wasn't she wearing a bra? The sight of her nipples poking against the thin material of her black tank top nearly caused his eyes to pop out of his head. He'd always liked her breasts, always wondered how they'd feel under his palms, how her nipples would taste when he sucked them between his lips.

"Riley?"

His head jerked up and when he met her gaze he could swear he saw a glimmer of satisfaction flickering in her eyes. What exactly was she up to?

He cleared his throat. "Sorry. You were saying?"

"What I was saying," she said with a sassy smile, "is that I want to talk about sex. Actually, scratch that. I don't want to talk about it. I want to do it."

His cock swiftly sprang up against his fly.

"Got anyone in mind?" he managed.

"You."

That one little word sucked the oxygen from his lungs and caused all his blood to pool in the southern region of his body. His cock grew even harder, like an uncomfortable slab of marble as it strained against his jeans. He was so stiff he could barely move, let alone talk.

"Is this a joke?" he finally asked.

"No joke." With another grin, this one more wicked than the first, she added, "I've been thinking about this for two years."

His hand trembled a little as he raked it through his hair. "You've been thinking about having sex with me for two years?"

She simply nodded. There was no need for words—the hot look in her blue eyes said it all. So did the way she licked her bottom lip.

"How come you, uh, never mentioned it before?"

"You didn't seem interested." She cocked her head curiously. "*Are* you interested?"

Hell yes, his dick shouted.

Don't even think about it, his conscience ordered.

Shit.

He had no idea what to say to that and the battle raging in his head wasn't helping the situation.

So instead of answering her question, he asked one of his own. "I never thought you were the casual type. What suddenly made you decide you wanted a roll in the hay with a playboy like me?"

"So you admit you're a playboy."

"Sure."

"I prefer male slut."

His mouth lifted in a faint grin. "I'm thirty years old, single, and rich. I'm allowed to be a slut. You, on the other hand, are too good for me. My rough edges would scratch the hell out of you."

"Sounds kinky."

His cock twitched, a warning that this conversation was treading into very dangerous territory. She was obviously dead serious about this, and if he wanted to leave this bar with his honorable intentions intact, he really needed to nip this in the bud. Now. Before he did something stupid.

Like fuck her.

“Don’t pretend you don’t want to,” she said, reading his mind. “I can see it in your eyes, Riley. You’re interested.”

She didn’t even know the half of it. But what she also didn’t know was that she’d just propositioned the same man who was about to profit from her financial troubles. He’d been here the night she’d informed her staff she was selling the bar. He’d seen the anger and desperation in her eyes. He knew the Diamond was her entire life, that she’d inherited it from her parents after they’d died in a car accident five years ago. She’d single-handedly run this place for years now, and he felt like a total ass for taking it away from her.

But he couldn’t ignore the reality of the situation either. Sam was broke, the bar was struggling, and even if he hadn’t bought it, she would’ve lost it anyway.

The reality, however, didn’t ease his guilt. He *knew* he should have talked to her before he made the offer for the Diamond, tried to explain why he was doing it and gotten her blessing before he did. Yet he hadn’t wanted to upset her. No, he hadn’t wanted to *lose* her. Sam’s friendship was one of the highlights of his empty post-retirement life, and he’d selfishly wanted to hang on to her, something he hadn’t been sure would be possible if he told her the truth about buying the Diamond.

He’d fought not to sleep with her for the same reason, but apparently she wasn’t as worried that sex might ruin their friendship.

“Sam...” He mustered up some willpower and continued, “This isn’t a good idea.”

“I think it’s a *great* idea.” Something raw and fiery flashed in her gaze. “You’re not going to turn me down, Riley.”

He gulped. “I’m not?”

“Nope.”

She slid out of the booth and got to her feet. The sweet feminine scent of her wafted into his nostrils and he almost shuddered with arousal. Jeez, not now. He’d fought his attraction to her for two years. How was it possible that it only took two damn *minutes* for all that restraint to dissolve?

“I’m staying in the apartment upstairs,” she said with a sensual arch of an eyebrow.

He inhaled deeply, wondering if there was a way to let her down gently but at the same time wanting nothing more than to follow her upstairs and rip her clothes off.

She sensed his hesitation and frowned. “Don’t make me beg for it.”

And there it was. All it took was one tiny pout and the word “beg” and he officially reached his breaking point. The restraint inside him snapped like a bungee cord. Every remaining drop of blood in his body skyrocketed south, pooling in his groin until he was harder and hotter than ever.

How could he possibly deny this woman something he wanted just as badly? He could practically taste her on his lips. Her sexy scent made him dizzy with lust, her braless breasts taunted him from beneath

her cotton tank top. He'd never wanted a woman this much, this fiercely, and the need squeezed at his balls and sucked the oxygen right out of his lungs.

He stumbled to his feet. Screw it. He wasn't going to fight this anymore. Tomorrow he would tell her that he'd bought the Diamond.

Tonight he would live out the fantasy he'd denied himself for far too long.

Torn between the love he has...and the love he's always wanted.

Rough, Raw and Ready

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Rough Riders Series, Book 5

Chassie West Glanzer hasn't been a stranger to drama and tragedy. A year of wedded bliss to sexy-as-sin cowboy Trevor Glanzer has brought her the happiness and contentment she never thought she'd find, and mellowed Trevor's rodeo wanderlust. Then Trevor's old roping partner ambles up the driveway—and Chassie's life changes drastically.

Trevor never expected to see Edgard Mancuso again, after it became clear he couldn't be the man Edgard needed. Now Edgard is back from Brazil to sort out their tangled past, and Trevor is plagued with feelings he thought he'd buried over three years ago. Although Trevor is hat-over-boothheels in love with his sweet, feisty wife, the sense his life is missing a piece has always gnawed at him.

Chassie's shock that Edgard and Trevor were once lovers turns to fear of losing her husband. Or worse, fear that Trevor will stay with her only out of a sense of duty. Yet as the three of them spend time together, the sins of the past blur and fade, leaving raw emotion—and unbridled passion.

Passion that could heal...or cause irreparable damage to their future.

Warning: this book contains unbelievably explicit sex, including multiple cowboy/cowgirl/cowboy ménage scenes, juicy, hot, male on male action, a bucketful of politically incorrect situations and true Western ideology

Enjoy the following excerpt for Rough, Raw and Ready:

By the time Trevor finished scrubbing the machine oil from his hands, Chassie and Edgard had returned to the kitchen.

Chassie said, "Who wants coffee?"

"Sounds great, Chass."

"There's cookies, unless Trev ate them all. The man has a serious sweet tooth."

"Then I oughta munch on you, darlin', since you're so durn sweet." Trevor nibbled the side of her jaw and Chassie squealed. He reached above her head for the coffee cups on the pegs.

Trevor turned and saw Edgard staring at them. Not with jealousy, but with longing. Simple affectionate moments had been rare between them and Trevor remembered it was one of the things Edgard had needed that Trevor hadn't been able to offer him. Why did he feel just as guilty about that shortcoming now as he had back then?

Chassie poured the coffee. Trevor automatically grabbed the milk jug from the fridge and set it next to Edgard. He snagged a spoon from the dish rack, passing it and the sugar canister to Edgard, ignoring Chassie's questioning stare.

Didn't mean a damn thing he remembered exactly how Edgard liked his coffee. Not a damn thing.

"So, Edgard, what are you doin' in our neck of the woods?"

"Reliving some old memories. I drove past my grandparents' place yesterday. With the shabby way it's looking I'm wishing I would've bought it when I had the chance." He smiled wryly. "I'm kicking myself for letting another thing slip through my fingers."

"Grandparents?" Chassie repeated, not noticing Trevor's rigid posture after Edgard's comment. "You from around here?"

"Yes. And no." Edgard relayed the story about his mother. Getting pregnant as a foreign exchange student, giving birth to Edgard before his biological father, a young cowboy, died in an accident. She'd returned home to Brazil and married Edgard's stepfather.

"Whoa. That's kind of soap-operaish, isn't it?"

"Mmm-hmm." Edgard blew across his coffee. "But it does make me an American citizen so I can come and go as I please in the good ol' U.S. of A."

Trevor listened as Chassie asked a million questions about Edgard's life and Brazil. They finished off the pot of coffee and the time passed pleasantly. He even managed to meet Edgard's gaze a couple of times.

The phone rang and Chassie excused herself to answer it.

Silence hung between them as heavy as snow clouds in a winter sky.

Eventually, Edgard said, "She doesn't know anything about me. Not even that we were roping partners. Not that we were..." He looked at Trevor expectantly.

"No." Trevor quickly glanced at the living room where Chassie was chattering away. "You surprised?"

"Maybe that she isn't aware of our official association as roping partners. There was no shame in that. We were damn good together, Trev."

The word *shame* echoed like a slap. As good as they were together, it'd never been enough, in an official capacity or behind closed doors. "What are you really doin' here?"

Edgard didn't answer right away. "I don't know. Feeling restless. Had the urge to travel."

"Wyoming ain't exactly an exotic port of call."

"You think I don't realize that? You think I wouldn't rather be someplace else? But something..." Edgard lowered his voice. "Ah, fuck it."

"What?"

"Want the truth? Or would you rather I lie?"

"The truth."

“Truth between us? That’s refreshing.” Edgard’s gaze trapped his. “I’m here because of you.”

Trevor’s heart alternately stopped and soared, even when his answer was an indiscernible growl. “For Christsake, Ed. What the hell am I supposed to say to that? With my wife in the next room?”

“You’re making a big deal out of this. She thinks we’re friends, which ain’t a lie. We were partners before we were...” Edgard gestured distractedly. “If she gets the wrong idea, it won’t be from me.”

“Maybe *I’m* gettin’ the wrong idea. The last thing you said to me when you fuckin’ *left* me was that you weren’t ever comin’ back. And you made it goddamn clear you didn’t want to be my friend. So why are you here?”

Pause. He traced the rim of his coffee cup with a shaking fingertip. “I heard about you gettin’ married.”

“That happened over a year ago and you came all the way from Brazil to congratulate me in person? Now?”

“No.” Edgard didn’t seem to know what to do with his hands. He raked his fingers through his hair. His voice was barely audible. “Will it piss you off if I admit I was curious about whether you’re really happy, *meu amore*?”

My love. My ass. Trevor snapped, “Yes.”

“Yes, you’re pissed off? Or yes, you’re happy?”

“Both.”

“Then this is gonna piss you off even more.”

“What?”

“Years and miles haven’t changed anything between us and you goddamn well know it.”

Trevor looked up; Edgard’s golden eyes were laser beams slicing him open. “It don’t matter. If you can’t be my *friend* while you’re in my house, walk out the fuckin’ door. I will not allow either one of us to hurt my wife. Got it?”

“Yeah.”

“Good. And I’m done talkin’ about this shit so don’t bring it up again. Ever.”

Chassie bounded back into the kitchen. If she sensed the tension she didn’t remark on it. “My coffee break is over. Gotta get back to the grind. What’re you guys gonna do?”

Trevor gathered the cups and dumped them in the sink. “I’ll help you finish up outside.”

“No, that’s okay. You stay and catch up with Edgard.”

“Darlin’, it ain’t every day I offer to let you boss me around,” Trevor pointed out with a teasing smile.

Edgard stood. “If it’s all right, I might stretch out. I’m bushed. Been a long morning and a long walk this afternoon.”

Trevor stared at him. Edgard had walked the twenty-five miles from town? In the cold?

“If you’re hungry later, help yourself to whatever you can find. I already showed you where the towels and stuff are in the bathroom so make yourself at home.”

“Thank you, Chassie, you are very kind.” Edgard headed for the stairs.

When he was gone, Chassie hooked her fingers in Trevor’s belt loop. “Come on, you’re my slave for the next couple hours.”

“Mmm. I like the sound of that.” He lowered his head, teasing her lips before plunging his tongue inside her sweet, warm mouth. Kissing her until her heart raced beneath his palm and her body swayed closer. Trevor pulled back so they were a breath apart. “But I get my shot at bein’ the master to your slave later, right?”

Her soft moan smacked of sexual need and instantly stiffened his cock. “No ropes this time.”

“That ain’t no fun.”

“Neither is disinfecting the birthing equipment in the barn.”

Trevor groaned. “*That’s* what we’re doin’ today?”

“Yep. Has to be done when it’s not sub-zero outside and you volunteered, bucko.”

“Lead on, master.”

She grinned. After she turned around, Trevor whacked her on the ass hard enough to elicit a yelp and she ran away from him, laughing.

Damn. He loved being married to this woman. He’d be wise to remember that.



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