

# **Outback Sizzle**

## **Alexis Fleming**

**All rights reserved.**

**Copyright ©2005 Alexis Fleming**

**No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file sharing, and email, without prior written permission from Changeling Press LLC.**

**ISBN 1-59596-209-3**

**Formats Available:**

**HTML, Adobe PDF,**

**MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader**

**Publisher:**

**Changeling Press LLC**

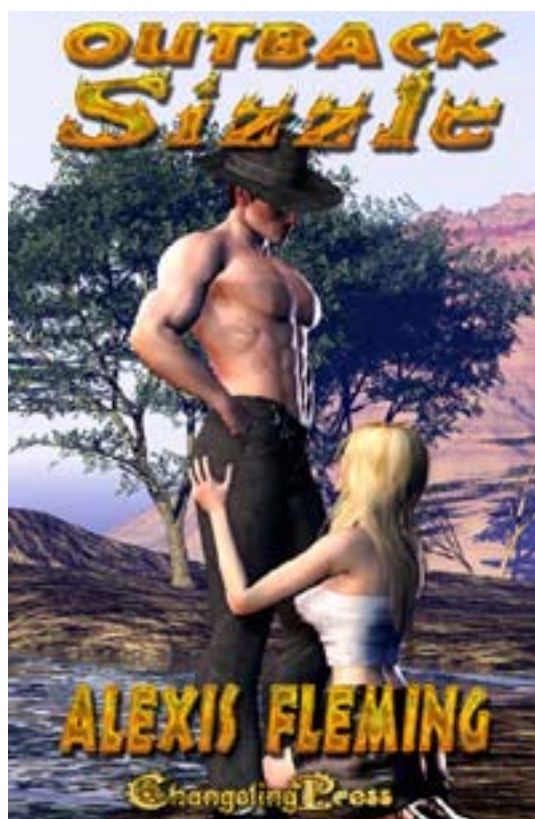
**PO Box 1561**

**Shepherdstown, WV 25443-1561**

**[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)**

**Editor: *Chrissie Henderson***

**Cover Artist: *Angela Knight***



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

## Chapter One

"What do you think you're doing?"

Cassie jerked her head up in surprise. She ignored the irritation she heard in the question, shivering as the husky drawl washed over her, inciting a response deep inside. Almost as if he'd feathered the tip of his finger down her naked spine. Goosebumps broke out on her arms and heat streaked through her blood, driving downward until it pooled in a damp swirl between her thighs and made her clit throb.

She started to wobble as she straightened up. *Oh-ohh, shouldn't have done that!* At least, not while she balanced on one leg. Before she totally lost it and landed on her fanny amid the dust and... whatever those suspicious round blobs littering the field were, she lowered her other foot.

Not that she needed to be a rocket scientist to work out what the blobs were. The smell was enough. She wrinkled her nose as the pungent odor rose to meet her. Take one field, add a stack of those brown cows all busily eating their heads off, and there you have it.

Poop! Lots of it.

"I asked what you're doing here."

She stared up at the man in front of her, eyes widening as hormones started to rampage. Her panties grew wet and her breathing sped up. Wow, Chase O'Connor was even better in the flesh than he was in a photo.

"Well, actually you didn't."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry?"

"You didn't ask what I was doing here. Just what I *thought* I was doing." She grinned at him. "Sorry I'm being so anal about semantics, but you did ask. Actually I wanted to find you, but I see you found me first." *Shut up, Cassie, you're babbling.*

"Let's try this again," he said with a long-suffering sigh. "What are you doing walking across my property, right here, right now?"

"Um, looking for you? If you're Chase O'Connor, that is." Wouldn't do to let him in on the fact she knew darn well who he was. That she'd lusted after him since she'd first seen her brother's vacation snaps of the two of them together. Or that his mom had recently sent her an updated photo.

She squinted her eyes against the sun, sorry now she hadn't taken up Maisie's offer of a hat like Chase's. It was difficult to see his eyes. The brim of his black hat shadowed the upper part of his face. An Akubra, Maisie had called it. It was made out of felt, with a wide brim to block out some of the harsh down-under sun. Every Australian wore one. Well, maybe not everyone, but certainly the ones who lived on the land.

"Your mom sent me to get you."

Forgetting the etiquette books said it was rude to stare, Cassie let her gaze roam over what she could see of his face. The shady hat obscured his eyes, but it did nothing to hide the bronze tone of his skin. Or the chiseled jaw that bespoke of a stubborn nature. Hmm, something to remember in her dealings with him.

She continued with her perusal. Sensual mouth, pressed into a tight line at the moment, but with a bit of encouragement, she could probably coax it into quite a nice smile. Just dandy for kissing. She wasn't just talking lips here! If the dampness of her pussy was any indication, her body hungered for much more intimate kisses.

He was tall, at least six feet, with broad shoulders even the checked work shirt couldn't disguise. Denim jeans hung low about his hips, tight enough to define his muscular thighs and the unmistakable bulge of an interested cock. She'd bet her ticket back to America if she asked him to turn around, she'd cop an eyeful of a delectable set of buns, shown to advantage in the form-fitting pants. She was a real sucker for a tight ass.

*Wowee, these Aussie cowboys aren't bad.*

"Why would my mother send you to fetch me?" he said, a definite frosty snap to the question.

With great reluctance, she focused her attention back on his face, only to find him conducting his own inspection. She didn't need to see his eyes to work that one out. A sensual smile -- she was right about those lips -- curved his mouth as he followed the line of her body. Well, maybe it was more a sneer, not an actual smile. She grimaced. *Geez, what's got up his butt? Why the attitude?*

She knew darn well he was checking her out. She'd been around enough men to know the feeling. A delicious shiver raced down her spine. She could have sworn he'd reached out and slid his hand across her breasts. Her nipples peaked, hard and throbbing as they brushed against the fabric of her top. She crossed her arms to hide the telltale sign. That's what she got for not wearing a bra, not that she could have done so in this outfit. A flash of bra straps with a halter-top was just plain tacky.

The sneer on his mouth deepened at her response to his visual scrutiny. Here she was, trying to be so sophisticated and she was coming off as a total moron. She rushed into speech in an effort to correct that impression. "So where are all the cow... um, stockmen and jackaroos?" Damn, she had to remember the Aussies didn't call them cowboys.

"It is the right term, isn't it? Stockmen?" She tilted her head back as he came closer. "I did read up on them before I came here," she hastened to add.

Chase paused in front of the woman and stared. For some reason, he felt he should know her. She seemed familiar, although if he'd met her before, surely he would have remembered? What red-blooded male would forget a woman who looked like this?

"You never did say why my mother felt the need to send you to find me," he said as he continued to stare at her.

She was an appealing package. Big boobs, with the most prominent nipples he'd seen in a long time. If she thought crossing her arms over her chest hid them, she was

wrong. All she managed to do was push her breasts higher, the clingy fabric of her top molding and shaping them to his advantage. Made a man want to lean down and take her into his mouth, material and all.

The striped top ended just above her navel, leaving a two-inch strip of skin exposed, just enough to show off the belly button ring she wore. The blood in his veins heated up when he thought of the fun he could have with that. His cock hardened as he visualized dipping his tongue into the indent of her navel, before traveling further to part her labia and go for the whole banquet. *Hmmm, wonder if she's into pussy rings as well?*

Now where the fuck had that come from? He didn't have time for this shit. As his jeans tightened even more over a raging hard-on, he forced himself to drag his eyes upwards to the mass of fair curls brushing her shoulders and framing a heart-shaped face. Hell, she was downright gorgeous. Trust him to be taken in by a set of great breasts. He always had been a boob man, although her legs weren't bad either. The itty-bitty skirt she almost had on showed them to great advantage.

He shook his head, struggling for a moment of clarity amid the sexual haze filling his brain. "Back to my mother and why she wanted me. For that matter, who the hell *are* you?"

"I'm Cassie Mitchell," she said as if it meant something to him.

"From America, I take it?" The accent was unmistakable.

"From Florida, but I'm out here for a bit of a break. I didn't plan on working while I was here, but Maisie -- your mom, that is -- convinced me to, not that I'll get paid or anything. So technically, I guess it's not actually work. Of course, it should have been Jason here, but he couldn't make it, so I thought I'd deliver his message in person -  
-"

"Whoa." Chase held up his hands. "Keep up this pace and I'll never make sense of it all." Did she always rabbit on like this? He couldn't make heads or tails of her conversation.

A trickle of sweat ran down his face from under the band of his hat. Using the back of his hand, he wiped it away, staring up at the sun through the shimmering heat waves. He couldn't remember a hotter summer. If they didn't get rain soon, he'd really be in the shit. Him and all the other property owners in the area.

He couldn't afford to fritter away his time, not if he wanted to ride out the drought. Damn it, that's where he should be right now, working the far paddock, not standing here ogling his unexpected guest, even if she did make his blood and his cock sit up and take notice. It pissed the hell out of him to have his day interrupted, but it pissed him off even more so because he found her attractive. He sighed. Much as he'd like to, he couldn't leave her out here. She was just as likely to get herself lost.

"Let's get you out of this sun." He reached out and grasped the woman's arm. "That fair skin won't last long in this heat." They'd taken no more than a couple of steps in the direction of the lone gum tree dominating the paddock when he heard a distressed squeal from beside him.

"Eu-ew!"

She pulled out of his hold, refused to go any further. A frown creased his forehead as he spun toward her. What the...?

Despite his annoyance at his response to her presence, his mouth twitched as he stared down at her feet.

"Poop! It's gross."

"You got that right. It's definitely shi... ah, poop as you say. A cowpat, to be precise."

Her slender foot, clad in a high-heeled strappy sandal, sat fair and square in the center of a dropping from one of the Brahman cattle he'd just moved out of this paddock. Nature at work. Unfortunately, it was a recent deposit, still fresh and steaming.

"This is your fault," she cried out as she tried to extricate her shoe from the squishy mess. "Ohhh, it feels disgusting. How am I going to get out of here? The field is full of it."

"Paddock."

"Huh?" She frowned and shook her head.

"It's called a paddock here in Australia. Not a field." He stared down at the foot embedded in the bovine calling card.

He burst out laughing, the effort to control it more than he could handle. "If you will wear fancy sandals out here, you can expect to step in or on something you'd rather avoid. Didn't anyone tell you work boots are the order of the day?" *Crazy city-bred female.*

He bent down and grasped her leg, just below the knee. "Stop pulling. The best thing will be to undo the strap and just lift your foot out."

Putting action to words, he slid his hand down to her ankle. The feel of the smooth skin under his palm did strange things to his equilibrium. Heck, it was just another leg. Why did he have the insane desire to reverse the direction of his hand and find out what type of underwear was hiding beneath such an itty-bitty skirt? Maybe one of those oh-so-sexy thongs?

*Get your mind out of the gutter, Chase.* Ignoring the rush of testosterone-fueled thoughts, he gingerly undid the strip of leather around her ankle. Straightening up, he fitted his hands about her waist and swung her around, depositing her on a clear patch of scruffy grass.

"What about my shoe?"

"You really want it after it's been in the middle of that?" Chase raised an eyebrow, fully expecting her to start ranting on about him ruining a perfectly good pair of shoes. New, too, by the pristine look of them. Well, they were pristine before she stepped into the cowpat.

There was a moment of silence before she grinned at him, the dimples in her cheeks catching his attention. It was the last reaction he expected.

Her eyes twinkled as she hopped toward him on one leg, keeping the foot minus the shoe clear of the baked earth. When she was close enough, she rested her hand against his chest for balance.



"Guess you're right." She wrinkled her nose. "I don't think hosing it off will save it now anyway. Even if it did, I think I'd always remember where it's been."

Amidst the aroma of fresh cow dung, Chase caught a drift of floral perfume when she leant closer still. It invaded his senses, curled about his brain as she slid her hands up and linked them about his neck.

Her body pressed against his, her breasts brushing his chest. Lord, if he hadn't worked out before that she wasn't wearing a bra, he was sure left in no doubt about it now. His libido immediately went into overdrive and his cock hardened in response to her proximity. He wanted to grind himself against her, find some relief for the sexual tension gripping him.

He grimaced at the instantaneous reaction. It wasn't surprising. He hadn't been off the property for months now. No woman had been this close to him for quite a while. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been on a date. Maybe it was time he did something about it. The boner in his jeans certainly thought so. He cast a glance down at the tiny blonde woman plastered to his chest, her face raised, the smile on her lips reflected in her eyes. Truth be told, he wouldn't mind spending time with Cassie Mitchell.

There was no doubt she turned him on. It had been a damn long time since any woman had made him feel so aroused. Hell, he didn't think he was capable of knocking back an opportunity like this. As long as she knew the score. As long as she didn't interfere with his work. *And* as long as she didn't turn out to be another hopeful debutante his mother had imported to trap him into marriage.

Cassie looked up at Chase from under her lashes. Thank God he hadn't picked up on her mention of Jason. It would ruin all her plans if he realized who she was. She just prayed her normal habit of speaking too fast, and a little bit of good old sexual allure, had confused rather than enlightened him. Her brother always said most men thought with their dicks and not their heads. Now to up the tension a bit.

She cast him a flirtatious glance. "I can't hop back to the house, so I guess you're going to have to carry me, you big strong cowboy, you." She held her breath as she waited to see if he was willing to play the game.

"It's the least I can do, seeing as I'm responsible for ruining your fancy shoes," he responded as he swung her up into his arms.

Cassie tightened her arms about Chase's neck as he strode across the field... um, paddock, he'd called it. She'd have to remember that. Her heartbeat accelerated at the feel of muscles rippling under her thighs. She laid her head down on his shoulder and pressed her lips close to the bronzed column of his neck. A shudder went through him, but he made no comment, just clasped her closer to his chest.

Oh, this was working out just fine. Now to see how far she could go. She couldn't believe how bold she was being, but she'd dreamed of Chase O'Connor for the last four years and she wasn't about to waste this opportunity.

"Hmm, you taste all salty." She traced the tip of her tongue around the edge of the collar of his shirt.

"That's what happens when you work hard all day in the hot sun."

"Ooh, and you're so strong. You're not even winded." *Corny, Cassie! Totally puerile.*

She grimaced. Good gracious, she was acting like a bimbo, but she'd never tried to vamp a cowboy before, or any man for that matter. She could count on the fingers of one hand the number of men she'd been involved with, including her first forays into dating at high school.

She only had three weeks to get Chase O'Connor to respond to her. Less if she wanted to enjoy the whole experience. Who knows how long he'd hold out against her? If what his mom said about him was true, she had her work cut out for her.

"You haven't actually told me who you are." He gestured for her to hold on tight while he bent to undo the fastening on the gate into the paddock. "I know you're Cassie Mitchell, but what else are you? Where have you come from and what are you doing here?" He relocked the gate behind him and started up the main road to the homestead.

This was where she had to be careful. It wouldn't do to let him know she and Maisie had been in contact for the last three years. Although his mom thought the shock value of telling some of the truth was better than trying to lie to him.

She hated lying, but if she wanted to achieve her dream of seducing Chase O'Connor, that's exactly what she had to do. Somehow, it had become more important to her than researching her thesis. Four years of being in lust with a photograph wasn't enough. She needed the real thing.

"I'm your new companion," she said.

Chase stepped into the shade of the veranda that ran across the front of the low-set homestead and removed his arm so she could find her balance on the limestone tiles covering the floor. "Say what?"

His voice was shocked to say the least. He tilted his hat back on his head and Cassie got her first real glimpse of dark brown eyes highlighted with golden flecks. She kept her arms linked about his neck, rubbed her breasts up against his chest until her nipples tightened into hard little points. Okay, so she was turning herself on, but what about Chase? It was time to spring the rest of his surprise.

"Your mom was concerned you have no social life. She's worried you have a problem... um, a dysfunctional problem in the crown jewels department, seeing as it's been so long since you've been with a woman. Your father had the same problem, you know. Your mom told me so."

"My mother... Hell, I don't believe I'm hearing this," he muttered. "My mother thinks I have a problem..."

Chase broke off, too dumbfounded to go any further. He just couldn't get his mind around what she'd said. He reached up, grasped Cassie's hands and pried them from around his neck, holding them fast as he stepped back a pace.

"Let's try this again. Tell me exactly why you're here."

With a wide-eyed, dimple-filled smile as sexy as hell, the tiny blonde twisted her hands so she was the one doing the grasping.

"Your mom hired me to be your companion for the next few weeks. Well, it's more to help you out with your problem, really."

Damn it, his mother was at it again. Trying to match him up with a woman with a view to matrimony. This time she'd picked a total stranger, for heaven's sake.

"Exactly how far does this companionship go?" His tone dropped a notch as he fought to bring his anger under control.

She stepped forward and rubbed her breasts against his chest again. He could feel the rigid nipples through the thin fabric of her blouse.

His libido reared its ugly head and his body tightened with need. Damn, he'd only just met the woman. Even knowing it was another underhanded plan of his mother's, he still reacted. Hell, it was as if his cock had a mind of its own. Maybe his mother was right. It was time for him to get back into the dating game. But a paid companion?

"What exactly did my mother hire you to do?"

"Oh, that's easy. It's my job to seduce you and make certain everything is working correctly. How do you feel about playing teacher/student? I'm the teacher and you're the student."

With that, she pulled one hand free and inched it up his leg, closer and closer to the apex of his thighs. Chase gulped, but for the life of him couldn't move away. Heat surged through his body like a tidal wave washing down the creek after the big rains.

"Just sit back and relax," she whispered as the tip of her finger brushed at his engorged cock. "This won't hurt a bit."

## Chapter Two

Chase stared at Cassie in shock. It took him a few moments to collect his thoughts. First, he had to unglue his tongue from the roof of his mouth and then he had to fight the intense throbbing in his groin. "Bloody hell, my mother hired me a woman to check out if my wedding tackle is working..."

He was lost for words. His mother went a bit crazy at times, what with her desire for grandchildren, but this was over the top. He couldn't believe she had --

"It's nothing to be embarrassed about. Happens to most men at some time in their lives."

He snorted and grabbed for her hand just as it brushed against the bulge in his jeans again. "How would you know? You're all of... What? Twenty-one, twenty-two?"

"Actually I'm twenty-five and I have a degree in psychology. Back home, I work for a medical research unit attached to a private university." She shrugged. "Sort of like a sex therapist. We're about to start a project for men who have sexual dysfunction problems."

She pulled her hand from his grasp and cupped his erection. Chase responded without thought, his hips bucking in reaction.

"Hmm, well, you certainly don't have any erectile problems. So, what is it? Difficulty sustaining it?"

He'd had enough of his manhood being maligned. The old male ego raised its head and demanded he correct her mistaken assumptions. Student be damned! He didn't need any fancy American sex therapist to teach him about the birds and the bees. In fact, he was damn sure he could teach her a thing or two.

Maybe it was time his mother learnt a lesson, too. Namely, to stop interfering in his life. He was more than capable of finding his own woman if he felt so inclined.

He dropped his hand down over hers as a sneaky idea rose to the forefront of his mind. It was all he could do to keep the grin from surfacing on his face. Why not catch two birds with one toss of the stone? Birds, in this case, meaning the female variety.

He could have a bit of fun with Miss Sex Therapist and pretend he really did have a problem. See how far she'd go, because whether here in Australia, or back in America, he'd make a bet sex therapists didn't actually get into any hands-on practical demonstrations.

Make her put her money where her mouth was -- let her play this charade out to the ultimate conclusion. He wasn't averse to a little slap and tickle. It would be interesting to say the least. One thing for certain, she definitely turned him on. The raging hard-on she had her hand around was pretty strong evidence.

He'd let his mother think he really did have a problem. Maybe it would shake her up enough to get her to back off a bit and give him some peace about settling down and raising a family.

Normally he would have had too much respect for his one remaining parent to bring a woman into the house and sleep with her right under his mother's eye. However, drastic situations called for drastic measures. His mother had set this up so she must have thought about that. Of course, *sleeping* with a woman didn't necessarily have to take place in a house. Now it was a simple matter of putting his plan into action.

Letting his hand rest over hers, he dropped his head and looked at her from under lowered brows. "This is really too embarrassing to talk about," he mumbled.

Cassie gulped as she pulled her hand away from his swollen cock and linked her fingers with his. Boy, when her brother said everything was big in Australia, he sure wasn't kidding.

She'd heard all about Chase's prowess with the women from Jason. They'd been friends for four years and Jason had nothing but admiration for the way Chase could rope in the girls. Although, according to his mother, he hadn't really been interested in

a woman for quite some time now. That hadn't stopped the local females from wanting to change his mind, from all accounts.

It wasn't just the fact that he was an affluent sheep farmer. He was a man who oozed sex appeal, enough to make any woman's hormones go on the rampage. Surely he didn't really have a problem?

It was true Maisie had told her Chase's father had suffered from sexual dysfunction problems before he died, but he was in ill health and of advanced years. It was a common problem with the aged. Not with someone as virile as Chase.

She mentally backed up a pace. Sexual problems could happen at any age. If he did need help, she had the right training. She frowned as the idea took root. The medical board back home would have her license if they heard about this. A therapist wasn't supposed to get involved with a patient.

Hang on, Chase wasn't a patient and his mom wasn't really paying her. It was just a ruse Maisie had cooked up so Cassie could do her Master's thesis on *Impotence in Men under Stress*.

Maisie had become very close to Jason the first time he'd stayed at the property in western Queensland. In fact, she'd virtually adopted him and treated him like another son. After Jason had returned home, Maisie had taken to ringing up every so often to see how he was doing.

That was how Cassie had come to know her. Cassie had continued with the phone calls. Maisie filled the hole in her heart that had appeared with the death of her mom. She sounded like a bit of a ditzy blonde at times, but Cassie loved her.

When Cassie had finished her degree, the dean at the College of Psychology had suggested she base her Master's thesis on infertility in older women or impotence in men under stress. When Maisie had heard about Cassie's thesis subject, she'd confided her concerns about her son and suggested Cassie come to Australia and use Chase's problems for the basis of her paper.

Of course, Cassie couldn't let Chase know about it. Not only would he be mortified, she had the feeling he would be flaming angry with both of them.

She felt guilty as hell for lying to him like this, but it was the only way to get close to him. She might have bent the truth a little with Chase, but she was ever honest with herself and had to admit she was maybe a little in love with him. Had been, ever since Jason started bringing home photos and video footage of the handsome cowboy.

No, not cowboy, grazier. Whatever! She'd promised herself she wasn't going home without seducing the boots right off of Chase O'Connor. Otherwise, his image would haunt her for another four years.

She raised his hand and held it to her chest. "It's okay, Chase. No need to be embarrassed and we can take this slow. There are things you can do to sustain an erection. We'll work together on it."

"It's no good. It... ah, isn't going to work." He broke off and pushed her hand against the front of his jeans for an instant. "See, I'm already losing it." With a grimace, he dropped his head further, breaking eye contact.

"I just can't... can't..." He scuffed his boots on the limestone tiles. "I didn't know about my dad. Men don't usually share those types of details with each other, but I think I must have the same problem he had."

"Hey, it's okay." Cassie felt sorry for him. It looked like he really did have a problem. The male ego was so immense no way would a macho guy like this admit he had sexual troubles if he didn't.

"Chase, we can work on this." She placed her hand under his chin and tilted his head up so she could see his eyes. "Your mom didn't say how long your father had problems, but just because he did, doesn't mean you can't overcome yours."

"You'll help me?"

"Of course I will. I also apologize for groping you. That's not the way to handle something like this."

"What do we do then?"

"I think perhaps you might be a little intimidated by me. We should lead up to the sex. Your mom tells me you're a romantic. Maybe that's where we should start.



Spend some time getting to know each other, a candle-lit dinner, a few kisses. Let's see where it goes."

Her brother wouldn't be happy if he knew what she was doing. For a start, she was lying to his best friend and she had no doubt he'd be seriously pissed if he found out she hadn't even passed on his message. Maisie still hadn't even told Chase that Jason wasn't coming this year. Would he remember Jason had a younger sister called Cassie?

Nah, she couldn't see Jason going on about a sister. They were close, but not that close. Jason's dad had married her mom after the death of their respective spouses. Where her surname was Mitchell, Jason's was Lawrence. Chase wouldn't make the connection. Just the same, she'd have to be careful.

"You'll really help me with this little problem?"

"From where I'm standing, that's no little problem, cowboy." She allowed her gaze to travel down the front of his jeans to where she could see a bulge beginning to grow again.

*Compliments are good.* She mentally ran over the checklist in her medical book for this type of male performance problem. Good thing she hadn't told Chase she was a rank beginner when it came to sexual dysfunction.

With the help of the dean at her college, she'd acquired the job at the medical research unit attached to the Eastside University. This would be her first job as a psychologist. Maisie had handed her the perfect excuse to give herself some time out before she started work in four weeks' time. And talking of time...

"You have to remember I'm only here for three weeks so we'll have to speed things up a bit."

*Gotcha.* Chase almost burst out laughing. *Ha, sucked in.* He worked hard at keeping the hangdog look on his face. He couldn't believe she'd fallen for it. This was as corny as a man telling a woman his wife didn't understand him as a reason to screw

around. He should feel rotten for stringing her along, but both Cassie and his mother needed to learn a few lessons. No better time to start than now.

"Do you think we should begin straight away?" he said in a pathetic little boy voice. "Maybe with a few kisses to get me in the mood? I don't want to waste time. My mother would like to see me married, but I can't even consider it until I have this problem whipped."

She slid her arms up around his neck and arched her body so his cock brushed against her stomach. Chase struggled to hold onto his libido.

"I think a little kiss is a perfect way to start," she said, her voice breathy. "Show me how you kiss a date good night."

Chase screwed up his face. "Hmm, are we talking about a first date, or someone I've been going out with for a while?"

"How about pretending you've been dating me for a few weeks and you're about to put the moves on me for the first time? You can --"

He didn't give her a chance to finish the sentence. Instead, he swept her into his arms and captured her mouth. Her slight gasp was all he needed. The tip of his tongue bathed her lips before sliding inside to taste her.

Heat hit him round about the same time her perfume caught at his senses and sent him into a tailspin. He pulled her closer, bent his knees and angled his body so his rigid cock nudged at the soft junction of her thighs.

God help him, he'd never reacted so fast to a woman he'd just met. Previous girlfriends had accused him of being staid and cautious before he indulged in carnal pursuits. With this woman, he was nothing but a raging bundle of sex on legs. If he kept this up, she was going to know for sure he'd lied about his nonexistent sexual problems.

He started to ease away, but felt compelled to go back for a final taste. His hands skimmed down her back and up again, to rest on the swell of her breasts. It was all he could do to restrain himself from going any further.

*"Chase O'Connor! What do you think you're doing?"*

Chase shuddered, the strident voice as good as a bucket-load of cold water dashed in his face. Talk about causing an instantaneous droop in his nether regions. He released his hold on Cassie and spun about, swallowing hard as he tried to regain his equilibrium. It took a couple of tries before he could gather enough control to answer the question.

“It’s okay, Mom. I’m just learning all about sex from my new companion.”

## Chapter Three

Chase struggled to keep his face straight. His mother, a little woman, barely reached his shoulder, but it didn't make her look any less fierce. She'd screwed up her face and thrust her ample chest forward as if she were about to wade into a fight. Hands planted on her hips, elbows angled out, she confronted him.

"Is that any way to treat a guest?" she demanded.

Chase scratched his head, a frown dragging his brow down. "I thought you hired Cassie for me?" He twisted his head and flicked a glance at Cassie. "I'm sorry, did I get it wrong? I thought she was here to help me sort out my sexual problems."

He felt like a rotten son of a bitch as he saw his mother's face blanch. For a moment, she looked like she was about to pass out. Reaching out, he grasped her arm, pulling her close. "You okay, Mom? You look a bit sick."

Now he really did feel awful. His mother was well into her sixties and her doctor had already diagnosed heart irregularities. He didn't want to be responsible for causing her a heart attack. He pulled his head back and glanced down at her face, about to reassure her he wasn't into molesting houseguests. Then he caught the grin on her face and the sly wink she tipped Cassie from under his arm.

*Why, the sneaky...* For an instant, he wanted to lash out, verbally, at his mother for her blatant interference in his life. He was a grown man, for crying out loud. Before he put his big foot in it, his innate sense of humor rose to the surface and he saw the funny side of it.

His mother was working to her own plan and he'd bet it had something to do with snaring him an American wife, just because she'd married an American. Even if his father had moved to Australia when he was a kid and had been more an Aussie

than a Yank, didn't mean he had to do the same. She'd pushed the whole American thing ever since he'd become friends with Jason Lawrence.

So, did Cassie know what his mother was up to? Or was she the only one here being conned? He suspected so. He should tell her about his mother's devious methods, but for the moment, he'd keep his own counsel and play both ends against the middle. Let Cassie think he needed help in the bedroom department and send his mother up a little in the process.

"I'm sorry if it's such a shock, Mom. I don't know how you guessed I had a problem, but I'm grateful you chose to do something about it. Cassie told me Dad had issues, too. Must have been hard for you."

"That *was* the problem," Cassie murmured, a grin on her face. "It wasn't hard at all." She slapped her hand over her mouth and her eyes opened wide as she stared at Maisie. "I'm sorry, that was unforgivable. I have this terrible habit of responding to stressful situations with humor."

"It's quite all right, my dear girl," Maisie said. "I told you about my husband so you would better understand my son. I've been known to say the wrong thing at the wrong time on occasion myself."

Chase stifled the laughter that threatened to erupt. His dear old mom was renowned for putting her foot in it. No wonder his dad had gone grey so early.

"I wish you'd told me about your problems when they first arose, Chase. We could have found you someone qualified to help."

This time, he couldn't control his chuckles. His mother's turn of phrase was priceless. Or maybe he was reading a sexual innuendo into a totally innocent statement.

"This is no laughing matter, son." Maisie poked him in the chest to get his attention. "We have to find someone for you."

"Hang on, you've already found someone for me. Cassie is perfect."

"You are not going to treat little Cassie as a casual liaison. She is --"

"I thought you employed her as my companion and she's a fully trained sex therapist. Like I said, she's perfect."

Cassie watched another wave of shock -- this time she had a feeling it was genuine -- wash across Maisie's face. She couldn't remember whether she'd told Maisie she'd finally secured herself a job at the research unit. Her first real job! Of course, she wasn't really employed as a sex therapist, but sexual dysfunction issues would certainly fall under her job description, given the project she'd be involved with.

"You really are a sex therapist?" Maisie stared at her, her eyes wide open, giving her the startled look of a deer caught in a car's headlights at night.

"I sure am," Cassie stated, "and I'm going to help your son gain some confidence in his sexual prowess."

"I thought we'd get started right away, if you don't mind, Mom. After all, Cassie has a lot to do in the next three weeks."

He dropped his arm about Cassie's shoulders and turned her toward the last door on the veranda. "Bedroom's right this way."

"Actually, I do mind." Maisie planted herself in front of him, arms akimbo. "I need to talk to Cassie. Your problem has waited this long, it can wait a bit longer."

Maisie grasped Cassie's arm and pulled her away from Chase. Cassie felt like two dogs were engaged in a fight to the death and she was the bone in the middle. She couldn't understand what Chase's mom would possibly want to talk about. Wasn't this what she'd envisioned when she'd convinced Cassie to act out this charade?

Cassie mentally backtracked. Even without Maisie's promptings, she would have tried to seduce Chase O'Connor. He was one hot dude. He turned her insides to mush every time he touched her. Just thinking about his kiss almost had her hyperventilating.

Maisie wrinkled her nose and interrupted her musings. "I think maybe our guest should have a shower." She stared at Cassie's feet and gave a loud sniff. "I do believe she found the freshest cowpat in the paddock."

Chase burst out laughing and Cassie found herself grinning in response as she caught the stench of the semi-dried cow dung that had oozed up over the top of her sandal. Good gracious, how could she have forgotten she had cow shit decorating her

red-painted toenails? When Chase had kissed her, every other thought had flown right out of her mind. Before she could say anything, Chase sketched a salute.

"We'll take up where we left off a bit later, Cassie. Right now I have a phone call to make." He glanced at his mother. "I'm letting you monopolize Cassie for the moment, but just remember, she's my teacher. After all, you did buy her for me."

\* \* \*

"Oh, my dear girl, you should have told me you're a sex therapist." Maisie clapped her hands. "Why, I couldn't have arranged it better if I'd tried."

"I was a bit worried when Chase blurted that out. You looked like you were about to faint. And I'm not really a sex therapist, but I will be working with people with similar problems."

Cassie secured the towel about her wet hair, turban style, and curled up in the easy chair on one side of the bedroom Maisie had assigned her. Chase's mom had been waiting when she'd come out of the shower and Cassie knew she wasn't going to be able to get out of the heart-to-heart the older woman had so obviously planned.

How much should she tell her? Chase was entitled to his privacy. Okay, so he wasn't a patient and patient/therapist confidentiality didn't really figure here. All the same, she didn't think he'd be too happy if he knew she'd shared every intimate detail of their encounters with his mom.

"So what do you think? Does my son have a problem? Is that the reason he isn't seeing girls?"

"Um... I really don't think I should discuss it with you." She crossed her fingers and hoped Maisie wouldn't take offence. "If Chase wants you to know he'll take you into his confidence."

"Hmm, so that means he does have a problem."

Cassie opened her mouth to deny it, but Maisie held up her hand. "Uh-uh, can't fool this old dame, Cassie, my dear." She chuckled. "I'm good at reading people and I took lessons in translating what people say into what people mean from my very clever husband. He was an absolute darling, but he couldn't twist the truth to save his hide."

She moved over to the French doors and unlatched them. The late afternoon breeze toyed with the lacy curtains so she clipped them back and stood in the open doorway. Cassie joined her and watched as Chase strode across the home paddock toward a stand of trees.

"I'd hoped I was wrong about Chase," Maisie said. "His father suffered terrible guilt because he couldn't perform any longer. His ego took a shocking beating. I don't want Chase to go through that."

"It's really only something very small and I can --"

Maisie turned to her, a grin on her face. "Oh, no, dear, the O'Connor men are never small. Certainly not in stature or... down there. I'm his mother. It's not like I haven't seen him before."

A hastily converted chuckle turned into a choking fit as Cassie tried to swallow her laughter at Maisie's outrageous comments. Lord, she loved this woman. You never knew what she'd come out with next.

"So what's the problem if not size? I saw him kissing you, so his mouth works okay. What about the rest? Anything... ah... come up to meet you when you were close to him?"

"Maisie, you realize this is a totally inappropriate conversation for a mom to be having with a woman she's just met?" Cassie shook her head and tried to keep the smile from her face. "I am not going to tell you what happens between us. Will that upset you?"

"No, dear, I trust you to do what's right. But..." She stopped and chewed on her bottom lip.

Cassie glanced out through the open doors. Chase had disappeared, swallowed up by the stand of trees and shrubs. She wondered where he'd gone.

"Cassie?"

She tilted her head to catch a concerned look on the older woman's face. "What is it?"

"Do you like my son?"



It was the last thing Cassie had expected. Primed to deliver a flippant answer, she paused. Maisie deserved the truth, or at least as much of it as she felt comfortable giving.

"Yes, I like your son." She grinned. "If your husband was even one tenth of what Chase is, all I can say is you must have had a very hot marriage."

"Oh, the stories I could tell you." Maisie chuckled. "So my Chase pushes your buttons, does he?"

"He sure does, but we have to be careful. I have the feeling he'd explode if he knew I was using him and his sexual problems as the basis of my thesis. We can't tell him I'm Jason's sister either."

"What a good thing Jason couldn't come. This is all working out so beautifully." Maisie clapped a hand over her mouth. "Oh, I'm sorry, dear. I don't mean it's a good thing Jason broke his leg. I wouldn't wish that on anyone, although it beats me why a grown man would want to muck about with Rollerblades anyway. Asking for trouble, I say."

"You haven't told Chase yet that Jason isn't coming. What are we going to do?"

Maisie plopped down on the side of the double bed and pulled her knees up, hugging them to her like a small child, her face alight with mischievous laughter. Cassie couldn't help but grin back at her. "What are you up to, Maisie?"

"How quick can you work?"

"Sorry?"

"Do you reckon you can get Chase totally compromised by the morning? After the deed is done, he wouldn't back out. He's too honorable a man. It won't matter then if he finds out you're Jason's sister."

All of a sudden, Cassie had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. She screwed up her face and mentally went back over everything Maisie had just said. Surely Maisie didn't mean that to sound the way it did?

Just in case, Cassie was all for setting the record straight. "Maisie, I have grown to love you like a mom over the last few years, even if it was a long-distance relationship, but there are a few things you need to understand."

"Go on, dear." Maisie opened her eyes wide and stared at Cassie.

"The first one is, I don't plan on compromising Chase. I want to help him. Whether or not we do the deed, as you put it, is our business. I won't sleep with your son just to please you."

"You do love him a little, don't you?"

"I do, but that's beside the point --" She paused and drew in a breath. "Oh, you are so sneaky. How can you look like a sweet old lady and be so devious?"

"Practice, my dear." Maisie's eyes twinkled.

Cassie had to struggle to keep her face straight. "Be that as it may, what Chase and I do is up to us. I don't plan on discussing it with you. Okay?"

"Perfectly okay, my dear, but do make use of tonight. Chase's room is right next door. You don't even have to go out into the corridor to get to it. You can just use the veranda."

"Maisie, for a mom, you are incredibly enlightened."

"Just looking after my son's happiness."

Cassie laughed and shook her head, casting a quick glance out through the veranda doors to see if she could catch a glimpse of Chase. He still hadn't returned.

"If you're wondering where Chase is," Maisie said with an arch of her eyebrow, "he's gone down to the billabong for a bath."

"Billabong?"

"It's the aboriginal word for a lagoon or pond in the outback." She moved closer to the open doors. "See the stand of gum trees and those scrubby tea trees? That's where the billabong is. A bit like an oasis in the desert."

"You don't have a bathroom in the house?" Cassie knew her voice was shocked, but she couldn't do anything about it. She just couldn't conceive of having to bathe

outside in the open air. Although, come to think of it, it did have possibilities if shared with a certain sun-bronzed cowboy.

“Silly girl,” she tittered. “Of course we have a bathroom in the house, but Chase likes the cool fresh water of the billabong.” She tilted her head to one side, a smile on her face. “Why don’t you go join him? It’s a perfect opportunity for you to get to know him better.”

“I just might do that. I’ve had a shower, but a swim sounds like a good idea.”

“Oh, and don’t bother with a swimsuit. Chase swims in the raw.”

Cassie gulped. Oh my God, Chase in the nude. Was she strong enough to walk away from that?

*Not bloody likely*, as the Aussies would say.

## Chapter Four

The lagoon was bigger than Cassie had thought it would be. For some reason, she'd assumed since there was a drought in outback Australia, there wouldn't be any water lying around. Certainly not a body of water large enough to swim in.

Chase hadn't spotted her yet. Arms cutting through the water as if taking part in a race, he stroked down the length of the lagoon.

She couldn't believe she'd had the balls to do this. Okay, so she hadn't done it yet, but she sure planned to. Maisie had loaned her a sarong to wrap around herself, and a big straw hat to protect her from the sun. The overhanging branches shaded most of the pool, so she'd only needed the hat for the walk down here.

Now she tossed it onto the dusty ground behind her. Taking care to make as little noise as possible, she undid the knot on the sarong and hung it over the bush beside her. Moving across to the edge of the pool, she took her first step into the water.

It was colder than she'd expected. Goosebumps pebbled her flesh, her bare nipples hardening in reaction. Her gaze trained on Chase, who had almost reached the far end of the billabong, she gritted her teeth and waded in until the water just lapped at her waist. As he reached the bank, she cupped her hands and splashed water up onto her chest.

"Brrrr! It's much colder than I thought it would be," she said in a loud voice.

Chase twisted about in the water, one arm flailing to keep him afloat. Cassie wanted to laugh at the stunned look on his face. His mouth opened and closed a few times. He lost his hold on the tufted grass on the edge of the bank and sank below the surface. This time Cassie did laugh. It was obviously much deeper over there than it was where she'd walked in.

When he came up spluttering and wiping the water from his eyes, she maintained an innocent look, as if standing naked before a strange man was an everyday occurrence for her.

"Ooh, this is lovely. Fantastic in the heat of the day, but it must be freezing in winter." She splashed more water up over her chest and watched it run down her breasts, drops collecting on the end of her nipples. "Tell me, Chase, does this do anything for you?"

"Holy shit!"

Chase gaped at the vision across from him. He closed his eyes a moment then opened them again. Yep, she was still there. Without thinking, he raised his hand to wipe at his face and had to grab for the earthy bank again as he started to go down for the second time. At this rate, he'd end up drowned. In lust, at the very least.

"I know the cold can do some funny things to a man's... physiology, but if you come over here I'll see what I can do to warm you up."

Sliding into a lazy breaststroke so he could maintain eye contact, he swam toward her, his mind fixated on two words. Breast. Stroking. His lower body began to throb, the hardness of his cock telling him there was a direct connection between his brain and what hung between his legs. God, he was one sick bastard. Who else would get turned on by the name of a swimming stroke?

Should he tell Cassie she'd been sucked in? That the whole thing was one big lie and there was nothing wrong with his... wedding tackle? If she got a glimpse of that particular appendage, he wouldn't need to say a word. She'd work it out for herself.

Lips curved in a seductive smile, she ran her hands over her breasts, lifted the weight of them into her palms and flicked at the tips with her thumb. Aw, shit! He was lost. No way in hell could he walk... er, swim away from this.

"Ohhh, Chase," she gasped in a sultry voice. "Do you know how much nicer it would be if it were your hands on my body? Don't be shy, honey. Come closer and I'll show you how I like to be touched."

He wasn't waiting around for her to ask again. He was so damn hard it was a wonder he didn't blow his load right there and then. Cold water, be damned! It was as if he had liquid fire in his blood. He hadn't wanted a woman for a long time. Just what was it about this tiny blonde American that turned him on so much?

For a moment, that flicker of recognition swept through his mind again. He tried to grasp hold of it, but the sight of Cassie playing with her nipples drove every other thought out of his mind.

His feet touched the sandy bottom and he stood still a minute to get his balance, before moving slowly toward her. What he really wanted to do was to rush over there and pick her up, wrap her legs about his waist and plunge into her waiting warmth. He had to remind himself he was supposed to be a man who had trouble keeping a hard-on. Time to get into the spirit of the game.

"I'm not certain we should be doing this, Cassie. I'd hate for you to be disappointed."

"Are you turned on, Chase?"

One hand slid down her front and disappeared beneath the water. Chase opened his eyes wide. Was she doing what he thought she was? This was one liberated lady. Sexually, at least!

"Oh, yeah, I'm turned on, but what if I can't sustain it?" he managed.

"We don't have to go all the way. We can just fool around a bit." She moved close enough to run her hand over his chest. "Would you like to come play with me, cowboy?"

He gulped as she leant down and ran the tip of her tongue across his waist, just above the waterline. Her hot little mouth worked upward, until she tongued the nipple hidden in the dark hair on his chest. He groaned as every sex-crazed gremlin in his body surged south.

Cassie had never been this blatant in her sexual needs, but with Chase, she was hotter than a firecracker on the fourth of July. The blood rushed through her veins and

her breath snagged in her throat. She wanted to devour him whole, but she'd start small and work up. She didn't want to scare him off.

"Do you like me doing this?" She linked a string of open-mouthed kisses across his chest. His bronzed skin was slightly cool from the water, but the taste of him urged her to go further. She reached up and pulled his head down, easing the tip of her tongue around his lips.

He opened his mouth to answer her and she sealed the kiss, delving deep to tempt him into play. With every thrust of her tongue, she felt his body shudder, his hands coming up to rest on her shoulders.

"Are you turned on yet, Chase?" she whispered after she'd caught her breath. Oh, my, he was one hot cowboy.

"Ah, you could say that," he muttered before he nipped at the column of her throat.

She arched her neck to give him greater access, allowing herself just a few minutes more of pleasurable dalliance before she continued the lesson. Goosebumps broke out on her arms and it had nothing to do with the cool lap of water about her torso. When she thought she'd go insane if she didn't have more of him, she pulled back, grasped his hands and lifted them to her breasts.

"Touch me, Chase. I want you to touch me."

He didn't need much prompting. He cupped her breasts and tweaked the tips between thumb and forefinger. Cassie shuddered as fire shot from her nipples, raced through her body and coalesced into a throbbing point between her thighs.

When Chase bent his head, took one aching crest into his mouth and suckled hard, her knees almost buckled. She reached out and clutched at his shoulders, her back arched. A moan escaped and she had to struggle to think.

"Ohh, Chase, that is so great. You sure don't have any problems with your mouth."

He mumbled and moved on to her other breast. Cassie didn't know how much more of this she could take. Every pull of his lips sent molten fire cascading throughout

her body making her clit throb. She loved the feel of his mouth, but it wasn't enough. She wanted more. Much more!

She traced the perfectly delineated muscles of his chest with her fingers before daring to go lower. The jutting tip of a fully erect cock greeted her. She struggled to hang onto her concentration. "See what a little adventure can do? Most people don't realize a simple change of location, of normal routine, can up the excitement factor when it comes to sex. Maybe that's all you needed."

Playing teacher when her body was a molten mass of highly sensitized nerve endings was more difficult than she'd thought it would be. She gasped as Chase copied her moves and slid his hands down under the water. He settled one low on her hips and slid the other across her stomach. Her hips bucked in reaction as he tugged at the pubic curls covering her mons.

Unable to help herself, she curled her fingers around his cock, pleased to see he hadn't lost his erection yet. Maybe this change of scene had something going for it. He throbbed in her hand, pulsing in time to the glide of her palm as she slowly eased upward and back down to the base again. She cupped his balls and gave a gentle squeeze, gratified when Chase groaned, the sound rumbling up from his chest.

"Ahh, Cassie, you're killing me."

"Ha! You love every minute of it, don't you?" she joked, trying to lighten the atmosphere. She was afraid if she pushed the emotions too high he might lose his erection. If that happened, his ego would take a beating and she'd be left so darn frustrated she just might have to indulge in a bit of manual self-gratification. No way in hell she could deal with this level of sexual excitement without the normal finale. She'd be a basket case.

Chase shuddered as the fire in his belly translated into the biggest hard-on he could ever remember having. He tried to pull back, but Cassie had him firmly anchored by his cock. If he kept on like this, she'd figure out quickly he was nothing but a liar.



Maybe he could count sheep in the hope he'd deflate some and reinforce his story of having a sexual dysfunction problem.

Nah, not going to work. She had him too worked up, the tension too high to ignore. Now how to carry this to its ultimate conclusion without giving the game away? Perhaps if he concentrated on her needs more than his own, he just might pull it off. First thing, though, he had to get her hands off his boner, otherwise he was lost.

"Cassie, put your arms about my neck," he whispered.

"Why? I'm having so much fun."

She grinned at him and licked her lips. He swooped and claimed a kiss, the taste of her on his tongue igniting pinpoints of fire throughout his body. She moaned and leant in closer, her arms sliding up around his neck to pull at his hair as she reciprocated in kind, her tongue meeting his every thrust.

Now that she wasn't holding on tight to his cock, giving her the perfect opportunity to prove his lying, he took advantage and let his own hands wander again. His fingertips skimmed her hips and slid down the top of her legs, only to reverse the procedure, this time trailing up the inside of her thighs. He cupped his hand over her pussy, parting the slick folds so he could tease her clit. She moaned and a shudder ripped through her.

"Put your legs around my waist," he said in a husky croak.

She did so, wrapping herself about him, pushing her pubic area hard against him. Despite the cold water, she was hot. So damn hot! He maneuvered his hand between their bodies and stroked along her cleft, parted her and slid one finger inside. Her hips bucked in reaction and she took up a rhythm designed to drive him crazy.

"Oh, God, that feels so good," she cried out, her body surging against his hand.

Chase eased a second finger into her silky warmth. He had to grit his teeth and rein in his own rampaging feelings as her movements quickened.

He kept his gaze fastened on her face as she rode his hand, head thrown back and her blonde hair an untidy tangle about her face. The breath gusted from her lips in

shaky little sobs as the tension built. It didn't take much brainpower to work out she was close to coming. All he had to do was watch her facial expression.

"Chase!"

"Yeah?"

"You still got that raging erection?"

He removed his hand and nudged at her pussy with the head of his cock. All of a sudden, he remembered the part he was supposed to play. "Um, it's still there, but I'm not certain how long it will last. I've been this far before and then... nothing. Poof, it's gone."

Shit, he hated lying like this, and not only because his body demanded he ravage her, plunge into her heat and take all she was offering, and then some. No, this had more to do with the fact that he actually liked her. For herself, not just the mind-blowing sex with which she could provide him.

The persistent reminder that he should know her, that he'd met her somewhere before, was a worry. A memory flitted through his mind for a second then disappeared as Cassie contorted her body and he nearly dropped her into the water.

"What --"

"I just want to feel you."

With that one simple comment, Chase felt himself swell and harden even more. Didn't she know the brain was the most powerful of all the sex organs? Talking about it was a definite turn-on for a guy. The breath caught in his throat as she ran her fingers over the head of his shaft. Fuckin' hell! He was about to give the game away.

"Ah, Cassie, maybe --"

"Ohh, you're so hard," she said as she grasped his rigid cock and positioned the head at the opening of her pussy.

Before he could say another word, he found himself sheathed in her warmth, her body stretching to accommodate him. It felt... God, he couldn't put it into words if he'd tried. It seemed like he'd been waiting for this all his life.

Chase gritted his teeth and tried to hold still, but it was impossible. Cassie clasped her arms about his neck, pulled herself up a fraction and then slid down again until she'd taken all of him. He moved his hips in time with hers, pumping hard, increasing the tempo.

"We don't have any protection," he managed to get out.

"You can pull out at the last moment. The oldest form of contraception in the world."

She reached up and nibbled at his lips. "See how much difference it can make to try for a little adventure? You didn't lose your erection this time."

No, but he was about to. He couldn't keep up the pretence any longer. His body cried out for the ultimate surrender. "It's you," he croaked. "You're such a good teacher."

He was incapable of speech after that. His body took over and he let the tidal wave of sexual tension take him. Cassie tightened her muscles about him and he felt the first of a series of spasms deep inside her. She was gasping now, her movements fast and furious. At the moment she cried out his name and he felt the imminent explosion, he drew out of her body, replacing his cock with his fingers, setting up a thrust and withdraw movement designed to push her to her climax.

She immediately slid her hand down his body and grasped his cock, her fingers moving swiftly up and down the shaft. His hips bucked and he couldn't deny his body's needs any longer.

Her cry of completion came moments before his. He hugged her close, felt her legs tighten around his waist as he struggled for breath.

"How about that?" she whispered in a fractured voice. "Success! At least we know it works in water."

Chase groaned as she moved against him. Open as she was to him, he could feel the heat of her pussy brush against him. Molten fire! Much more of this and he wasn't going to be responsible for what happened next.

He lowered her down until her feet touched the sand, keeping his hands on her shoulders as she caught her balance. She grinned up at him, a mischievous look in her eyes.

“Here endeth lesson one. You ready for lesson two, Chase?”

## Chapter Five

As they neared the homestead, Cassie clasped hands with Chase. The sky had darkened slightly in the time they'd been down at the billabong. "Looks like a storm is brewing."

"Hope so. We could do with it. We get enough rain and I won't have to feed out next season."

"Feed out?" She frowned as she tried to work out what he meant.

"That's when a farmer has to supplement the feed for the animals with hay. If I get the rain now, I have enough paddocks given over to the growing of hay so I won't have to buy it in from outside next season."

Jason had told her how the long drought affected the man on the land. For Chase's sake, she hoped it would rain.

She was pleasantly tired, muscles aching in spots where she didn't realize she had muscles. A quick glance up at the man by her side showed a small smile hovering about his mouth. A wave of selfishness washed over her for taking what she'd wanted down in the lagoon, but she pushed it away. This had been for Chase, too. He hadn't lost his erection, had managed to go all the way with her, right to the moment of climax. He should feel proud of himself.

"Feeling good?"

"Oh, yeah! You're some teacher, Ms. Mitchell."

Cassie hugged his arm to her side as they approached the veranda. If only she didn't have to pretend with him. How much nicer it would be. She could tell him she was Jason's sister...

No, that was one thing she couldn't do. She had a feeling it would be the end of this little interlude if she spilled the beans. And talking about Jason... Not that she was, but he was on her mind.

She thought back to some of the tales her brother had told her about his college buddy. He and Chase had become firm friends when Chase had traveled to America as an exchange student. Chase's father had been an American and had encouraged Chase to apply for a position at one of the American colleges.

The two of them had been roommates for the better part of two years. Even after Chase had returned to Australia, they'd remained good friends.

*What about all those tales of Chase's sexual prowess with the girls?*

The question burned a hole in her brain. The man who'd just made love to her sure didn't feel like he was impotent. She frowned. Was this problem he thought he had a new thing? Because it didn't quite fit in with the image she'd built up in her mind from Jason's stories.

She checked out the grin on his face again. This time it seemed to her it was more than just pleasure in his performance. Surely he wouldn't...

"Chase, have you seen a doctor about this performance problem you think you have? Because I have to tell you, that," she jerked her thumb back over her shoulder in the direction of the lagoon, "didn't feel like you had any issues with sex."

He halted them in front of the open door to Cassie's bedroom. Head down, feet scuffing at the tiles, he said, "Um, I think it's you, Cassie."

"What do you mean?"

"I've never met anyone like you before. You do things to me, turn my insides to mush. I've never reacted this way before."

She reached up and patted his cheek, placed her fingers under his chin and lifted his head. On tiptoes, she planted a soft kiss on his lips.

"That is so sweet, Chase." She paused for a moment before going on. "So how long have you had this problem?"

"A-a few months now. I guess I've been working too hard. Everything was okay today, but what if it... I... fail tomorrow?"

"We'll take it one day at a time. Overworking and stress can cause erectile problems in a man. Perhaps you need to slow down a bit."

"Not possible. I'm short a man or two so I have to do double the workload. It'll ease up a bit with the arrival of a new stockman. He's running late. Should have been here already."

An avalanche of guilt hit Cassie. One of the reasons Chase had to work so hard was because Jason hadn't been able to make it. He should have arrived yesterday, but Jason wasn't coming because he was tied up. Literally tied up, in traction with a broken leg.

"Maybe you could teach me and I can help out with some of the smaller jobs." The words were out of her mouth before she'd even given them proper thought. What on earth did she know about life on an Australian cattle and sheep property?

"Ah, honey, it's real nice of you to offer, but it would be too hard on you."

"I'm no weak debutante, Chase O'Connor. I can hold my own with the best of them."

She didn't need to guess at the reason why she felt so adamant about helping out. It was guilt, pure and simple. She may not have been responsible for Jason's broken leg, but if Chase had found out about it when Jason first asked her to call him, he would have been able to hire another stockman.

"I'll think about it, but for now I have to go and get dressed. You need to do the same. Mom will have dinner on soon and she'll be expecting you for pre-dinner drinks."

He leant down and dropped a quick kiss on her lips. It was over almost before it had begun. Cassie hungered for more. "Aren't you having drinks, too?"

Chase shook his head. "No, I have a graziers' meeting in town I can't get out of. So you'll have to go ahead and have dinner without me. I probably won't be home before you go to bed."

"I guess I'll see you in the morning."

Chase sketched a salute and disappeared up the corridor. Cassie shut herself inside her bedroom. Disappointment washed over her, bit deep and lodged in her heart. That's when it hit her. She sagged back against the closed door.

"Oh my God, no wonder I wanted this so much. I am totally in love with Chase O'Connor!" Not just a little bit. The whole hog.

She'd heard of people falling in love over the Internet, or through corresponding with a pen-friend, but this was ridiculous. She'd fallen in love with a photograph. A celluloid image printed on a scrap of glossy paper.

For four years, she'd lived for Jason coming home from Australia and telling her all about Chase. She'd hung on every word when Maisie had talked about her son. Now here she was, in the biggest pickle of her life.

She was in love with a man who lived on the opposite side of the world to her. Moreover, a man she had lied to and conned. All she'd planned on doing when she came here was to get to know Chase and maybe -- just maybe, if she were lucky enough -- screw the ass off of him in order to satisfy the itch that had driven her crazy for four years.

Instead, she'd found out that what she thought was lust was, in actual fact, Love. With a capital L. Now what the heck was she going to do?

\* \* \*

Chase crept down the hallway and let himself into his room, easing the door shut so he didn't wake Cassie. Normally he didn't have to worry about being so careful; his mother slept on the opposite side of the house. He flicked a glance at his watch. Midnight. The meeting had run on a lot longer than he'd expected. Cassie would have been asleep for hours by now. He felt too wired to go to bed. His mind couldn't get past the idea of her asleep in the room next door. His body wasn't helping much either.

*Wonder what she wears to bed?* The question teased at his mind, tormented him as raunchy pictures formed inside his head. His body tightened with a need that threatened to cause him bodily harm if he wasn't careful.



Within minutes, he'd stripped off his clothes and shucked down to his boxers. "Down, boy," he whispered as he glanced at the tented front of his satin shorts.

Shit, he was in trouble. He'd never felt this way about a woman before. Oh, he'd enjoyed their company. He wasn't a womanizer by any means, although there were those years at college when it seemed it was the big man thing to score as often as he could. Just the same, he was always careful to choose women who weren't looking for anything more serious than a romp in the sack and a quick fuck.

He'd been too busy to worry about a permanent relationship, even before the death of his father from prostate cancer. Running a sheep grazing and wool growing property took up a lot of time, more so when the whole area was drought affected.

Now along came Cassie and he was acting like a lovesick fool. One good thing, she was only here for three weeks. Not enough time to get serious about her. The fact that she lived and worked in America was a definite bonus. She'd be going home, signifying the end of the relationship.

In the meantime, he'd enjoy what was on offer, although how he was going to keep pretending he had a problem with impotency, he didn't know. He only had to look at her and he got hard.

A shaft of guilt caught him unawares. *What a dirty, rotten bastard I am!*

He grimaced. Lying to Cassie made him feel low.

Low enough to come clean with her?

Na-uh, he couldn't do it. She'd pack up and head home right now. No woman likes to think a man's made a fool of her. He wanted this time with Cassie. He'd just have to make certain he didn't hurt her. So, light and easy was the order of the day.

First he needed to free up some time to spend with her. Where the hell was Jason? He was supposed to arrive yesterday.

A quick flick through his address book and he grabbed the receiver off the telephone and put through a call to New York. If he didn't answer, it meant Jason was already on his way over here, probably in the air at this very minute.

"Hello."

A cheery male voice answered the call almost immediately, the American accent strong down the line.

"Jason? Where the hell are you?"

"Hey, Chase! What you doing up at this time of night? Well, night for you anyway."

"What the fuck are you doing over there? You're supposed to be here helping me."

"Didn't you get my message? My sister was supposed to ring you and tell you I couldn't come. I only got out of the hospital this morning. Was going to give you a ring as soon as I got myself settled."

Chase shook his head as he tried to make sense of what Jason had just said. Message? What message? He dragged in a calming breath and started over. "Okay, Jason, let's try this again. You were supposed to be here, but you're there. You apparently sent a message, but I didn't get it. What the hell happened?"

"I guess you could say I was showing off for a girl."

"Typical." Chase snorted. "You'll never change. You used to do the same thing when we were at college."

"Yeah and it still never got me the girls. They were more attracted to the big bronzed Aussie with the cool accent."

Chase laughed. "Hey, I'm not the one with the accent. It's you Americans who have accents thick enough to cut with a knife. So what happened this time?"

"Took a tumble on my Rollerblades and broke my tibia."

"Ouch."

"Tell me about it! I've just spent the better part of a week in the hospital having it pinned and set. I'll be outta commission for quite a few weeks. I won't be able to help out this year. Damn, I was looking forward to seeing you again."

"Sorry, mate, but you could still come for a holiday as soon as the doctors clear you to fly."

"Yeah, I might just do that."

He paused a moment. Chase could hear him breathing through the transatlantic connection. "Damn my sister. I wanted you to have enough time to find another worker to fill in for me."

Chase frowned. If someone had called, his mother would have passed the message on. Unless she forgot in the excitement of having a houseguest. She did so love to entertain. She...

The thought evaporated and another one swept in to take its place. His eyes opened wide as a possibility struck him. She wouldn't... She couldn't... "Ah, Jason, this sister who was supposed to ring. You close to her?"

"She's my step-sister. Lives down in Florida. We don't see a lot of each other, although we do try and keep in contact and I know I can call on her when the chips are down. She's younger than me. She was still a kid when we were at college."

"As a matter of interest, what does she do for a living?"

"She just got her degree in psychology. About to start a job at some medical sex unit at one of the universities here in New York, so we'll get to spend a bit of time together from now on. She's busy doing research for her Master's thesis at the moment. Something about infertility in women and impotence in men. Crazy, huh?"

Chase started to get hot. Real hot! One thing for sure, it had nothing to do with the weather. Anger swept through him. His pulse raced and sweat broke out on his forehead as he tried to resist the scenario building up in his mind. "About your sister..."

"Yeah, what about her?"

"Tiny little thing? Lots of blonde hair?"

"Yep, that's her. How --"

A full minute passed, but Chase was too busy dealing with his anger to fill in the silence.

"Fucking hell, she's there, isn't she?"

"Cassie turned up here yesterday. It is Cassie, isn't it?"

"Aw, shit! She's had a thing about you for years. Told me she wanted to jump your bones. Used to swipe all my photos of you when I came home from Australia."

Now Chase really was angry. He wanted to go into the bedroom next door, drag her out of bed and teach her a lesson about not being upfront with a guy. His own guilt reared up and smacked him in the face, but he quashed it to focus on the fact that she'd lied to him. Well, maybe not lied outright, but certainly by omission.

She'd bloody well conned him. She was writing about his supposed impotence in some paper. Darn, it would probably end up published.

"You been screwing around with my baby sister?"

Another thing to feel guilty about. He'd always made a point of not touching any of his mates' sisters. For God's sake, this was Jason's sister. Crap, how was he supposed to get out of this one?

"Ah, we might have..." *Fuck, how do you tell your best friend you'd made out in the middle of a billabong?*

"Hey, it's okay, mate." Jason chuckled, the sound filtering down the line. "No skin off my nose. Cassie is twenty-five, a grown woman. She's been running her own life for quite a while now. Who she does or does not screw around with is her business. Although, I have to say if she's been conning you without telling you who she is, she needs to be taught a lesson. Shouldn't do that to a guy."

"So you have no problems if I deal out a little payback?"

"Come to think of it, I wouldn't mind it if you two got together. Hey, I'd have a built-in vacation resort for the rest of my life. Mind you, you'd have to convince Cassie to give up her new job."

"Not going to happen, mate. I don't have time to get serious, let alone think about marriage. However, I do have a few ideas for paying your sister back for not telling me who she was."

"One thing, Chase."

"Yeah?"

"I may not be really close to her, but she's still my little sister. So don't hurt her or you'll deal with me, friends or not."

"I'll remember, and if you decide to come for a holiday while your leg mends, let me know and I'll have you flown in." Chase ended the conversation. Too uptight to sit still, he paced from one end of his bedroom to the other. No wonder he thought he should have known her. Jason had shown him pictures of her as a kid. The same blonde hair and cute face. She'd grown up, but there was enough resemblance he should have woken up. Damn, he was slow.

A smile of pure devilment crossing his face, he stepped out into the corridor and marched down to Cassie's room. So she wanted to write about his impotence, did she? He'd damn well make her work for her research material.

She offered to help him out? Well, let her. She had no idea what she was in for. Most of the casual workers in the area had probably already secured themselves positions for the season, which meant the likelihood of him picking up a casual he trusted was pretty small. Sooo...

He grinned as the idea fermented in his mind. Cassie Mitchell was about to get her comeuppance. The hard way.

## Chapter Six

"Whatssss," Cassie mumbled as a sound impinged on her consciousness and threatened to eject her from a perfectly good dream. She shoved the pillow over her head and tried to slide back into the fuzzy world of make-believe.

*Thump... thump!*

There it was again. The persistent banging that had disturbed her. What the heck was it? She tossed the pillow aside and struggled to sit up.

What the hell? Someone was pounding on her bedroom door. She dragged herself from the bed and looked around for her nightgown. At some time during the night, she'd tossed it aside. The heat in this northwestern part of Queensland had been more than she could bear, so she'd shed her night attire and slept naked under the swirling ceiling fan in order to get some relief. God help her if she'd arrived in high summer. The heat in what the Aussies classed as late spring was bad enough.

Finding the cotton gown under the edge of the bed, she hastened to drag it on before whoever it was woke the whole household. Then she stumbled over to the door and jerked it open.

"Chase?" She pushed her hair back from her face and stared. What was he doing waking her up at -- she glanced at her wristwatch -- five-thirty in the morning. Dressed in worn jeans and a checked work shirt with the sleeves rolled up to show the bulging muscles in his forearms, he rested against the doorframe, a sexy smile on his face.

"Is something wrong? It's not even daylight yet."

He leant forward and dropped a light kiss on her mouth. What a way to wake up. Cassie wanted to grab hold of him, tempt him to stay and play awhile, but he'd drawn back before she could do anything about taking the kiss a step further.

"Did you mean what you said?" he whispered.

Cassie shook her head. Okay, so somewhere along the line she'd lost the plot. What was he talking about?

"Did you mean it when you said you'd help me with some work so I would have more free time to spend with you?"

Ahh, now she understood. "I sure did. You got something in mind?"

"I could use some help today with the lambs. You game?"

"Now?" Cassie checked her watch again and shook her head. Surely he didn't start work this early?

"Have to get to it before it's too hot. The sooner we start, the sooner we'll be finished. Throw on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. Oh, and with your fair skin, better use lots of sunscreen. Mom's got a supply in the kitchen. She's already cooking breakfast. I'll see you there in a few minutes." He frowned. "You got anything else to wear on your feet besides those strappy sandals?"

"Um, I have a pair of tennis shoes. Bought them special to come out here."

"Okay, those will have to do. Your feet are so small, I don't think we could find a pair of work boots to fit you."

He disappeared up the corridor before she could say anything else. Cassie shook her head and turned back into her room. Breakfast at five-thirty in the morning? Bizarre! Her standard fare was a slice of toast and a cup of black coffee. She didn't even think she could get that down at this time of the morning. Morning? Heck, it was still night as far as she was concerned.

After a quick shower, she donned jeans and a bright red T-shirt, adding white socks and her new, snowy-white and grey sneakers. Sunscreen wasn't a problem. She'd brought plenty with her. With her fair coloring, she had to be careful.

A big yawn caught her by surprise as she walked into the kitchen. Darn, fancy getting up this early. Maisie was just serving up breakfast to Chase as she entered the room. Cassie stood at a table set for two and stared. "Oh my God, you're not telling me you're going to eat all that?"

Chase's plate overflowed with at least three fried eggs, bacon, grilled tomatoes and a stack of what were probably lamb chops, given this was a sheep property.

"We work hard on the land so we eat big to keep up our energy, and the shearing shed is too far from the homestead to come back later for breakfast." He placed his fork on the table and reached over to pull out another chair. "Sit yourself down and dig in."

Maisie started to layer the same amount of food onto the second plate. Cassie held out a hand to stop her. "I can't possibly eat that much. Eating at this hour is hard enough as it is."

"You have to have something, my dear. Otherwise you'll pass out in the heat."

Cassie gave in with a sigh. "Okay, how about one egg and a couple of slices of bacon and grilled tomato? I'm sure I couldn't handle any more than that."

It was a struggle, but she managed to finish most of the meal. Chase allowed her a final cup of coffee before he pushed his chair back and stood up.

"Up and at 'em, kiddo. Time to go."

He strode out of the room and when he returned, he carried a wide-brimmed felt hat in his hands. Before Cassie had even finished pulling her long hair up into a ponytail, he clamped it on her head. "No one goes outside without a hat on their head. Rules of the game."

\* \* \*

Cassie held on tight to Chase's waist as he drew the four-wheeled motorbike to a stop outside a large shed. If she hadn't been so darn scared of falling off, she might have enjoyed being sandwiched this close to her handsome cowboy on the ride out.

There was something slightly erotic about spreading her legs so she could clasp Chase's hips between her thighs. As it was, all she could think of was not tumbling onto the dusty track as he gunned the engine.

Her legs wobbled a bit when she alighted from the motorbike. Chase took her hand and guided her over to the building.



"This is the shearing shed. The crutching team will be here in two days so I have to get the sheep dagged before they get here. I had the boys round up the sheep yesterday. You helping me today means I can free up one of the other men to get on with the lamb marking, although I have to warn you, we'll probably have to pitch in and help tomorrow."

Cassie could hear the plaintive bleating of the sheep on the other side of the shed. Did sheep bleat? She had no idea, but it sounded right. They were sure making a lot of noise.

"You realize I don't have even the slightest idea what you're talking about, don't you?" she said. The early morning darkness, bit by bit, had given way to the sun peeking over the horizon. Pretty, but who wanted to get up at this time of the morning to see it? Ah, well, she'd offered so she might as well get on with it, and it did mean she got to spend time with Chase.

"So what is crutching and dagging?"

A slight smile flitted across his face before he answered her. "Hmm, how best to explain it? Okay, crutching is the act of clearing the wool from around the sheep's butt. Depending on whether the sheep is flyblown or not, we usually shear a double channel around the backside and down the rear legs. Sometimes we have to do a wig and pizzle crutch as well. If you're still here when we've finished crutching, you can help the guys sort through the strained wool."

She held up her hand. "Chase, this is all too much for me to take in. It's like a foreign language. Why don't you just put me to work? Let me learn on the job, so to speak. You can explain things as we go along."

"Good idea." He grabbed her hand and marched her into the shed.

There was no time to take in much. Chase collected a couple of pairs of what looked like instruments of torture -- hand shears, he called them -- and led her out the back and into a holding pen full of balls of white wool on legs.

The smell hit her. The pungent odor of sheep... and something else. As she moved forward a step, she worked out what it was. Her foot landed on a series of little black pebble-like objects that squished under her shoe.

Shit! Lots of it. Everywhere. Her nice new trainers weren't going to stay that way for long. "Eeee-www. It's a bit hard on the nose, isn't it?"

Chase handed her one set of the hand shears. "You get used to it after a while. Won't notice it by the end of the day." He clamped his hat down harder on his head. "Right, let's get on with this dagging. A shit of a job, but it has to be done."

He burst out laughing, but Cassie couldn't see what the joke was. "First of all you'll have to tell me what dagging is."

"Better yet, I'll show you." He pointed to another gate leading into an adjoining paddock. "I'll drag the sheep over there. You can do the dagging and open the gate so we can separate the ones we've done from the remaining ones. Go stand near the gate and I'll get the first one."

She watched as Chase leant over the nearest animal. He grabbed it by the front feet, deftly turned it onto its back and presented its butt to her.

"Now what you have to do is bend down and run your hands through the wool around the ass and cut off any dags. They're the hard lumps of sheep manure imbedded in the wool. Don't worry if you miss a few of the smaller ones, but we have to get rid of the larger ones. Plays havoc with the blades when the shearing is done otherwise."

A shudder rippled through her as Cassie realized what Chase wanted her to do. He wanted her to put her hand in there and pull off all the... shit? "You're kidding, right?"

"Uh-uh, has to be done. Part of the job and you did offer to help me. Our Aussie women on the land do this all the time."

He grinned at her and she had the feeling he was just waiting for her to down tools and tell him she wasn't about to play with shit all day. Nah, not going to happen.

She was made of sterner stuff. She'd show him this American woman was as good as an Aussie any day.

She palmed the shears and squatted down so she was almost face to face with the sheep's ass. The smell was gross, but she wasn't going to let it stop her, although she had to force herself to reach out and run her hand through the scraggly wool until she found the first dag. A quick snip and she moved on to the next one.

"Don't suppose you have a pair of gloves on you, do you?"

"Bare hands are better. You can't feel as well with gloves."

She snorted. That'd be right. Shaking her head, she reached out for the next hunk of wool and started cutting again.

"Oh, gross," she said as she grabbed at what was obviously a fresh deposit. It squished all over her hands. She wrinkled her nose and tried to hold her breath.

"Ah, maybe I should have had you cut off those long nails before we started."

*Yeah, right! A bit late now, isn't it, Chase, old man?* The disgusting mess was everywhere, even under her fingernails. She'd never feel clean again, but no way would she give up now. She'd show him.

Chase opened his mouth to call the whole thing off and then paused. Damn it, she'd conned him. He deserved some retribution. The look on her face was as funny as all hell as she pawed through clumps of stained and matted wool looking for the hardened clumps of... well, shit, for lack of a better word.

Another grin crept across his face. He'd let her do a few more before he took over. He could get the job done much faster on his own anyway. It was a slow business for a beginner.

He continued to watch her for another half hour, dragging and holding the sheep as she demanded a new one. Normally, he could do a full double channel crutch in ten seconds. The guys who did it for a living had it down to maybe six seconds tops. Cassie had given up squatting and now bent over from the waist, her hands extended to the sheep's rump. He figured her back must be killing her.

"How about I take over now?" Guilt suddenly overwhelmed him as he heard her retch at the smell.

"No... way. I said I'd help and I will."

"Give it up, Cassie. I'll take over." Damn stubborn woman!

"No."

She shook her head and indicated she was ready for the next animal. Chase shrugged and went to do her bidding.

When lunchtime came, she was still at it, mulishly refusing to give up. He had to admire her guts, but enough was enough. At the rate she was going, she wouldn't be able to stand up by the end of the day.

"Come on, Cassie. Lunchtime. Mom made some roast lamb sandwiches for us."

He physically took the shears from her and guided her to the water trough, handing over a chunk of soap so she could wash her hands and remove some of the deposits of the day's work. His feeling of guilt escalated when she continued the washing ritual for at least ten minutes, scrubbing at her hands until they were bright red.

When she was done, he pointed her in the direction of the patch of shade formed by the overhanging roof of the shearing shed. Two wooden boxes did duty as seats and he urged her to sit down.

"No, if I sit I'll never get up again," she said, pressing her hands to the small of her back.

The shape of her breasts drew his gaze as she arched her body to get rid of the kinks. The soft fabric of her T-shirt molded them perfectly, the outline of her nipples visible even though he could see she was wearing a bra.

He had a sudden desire to reach out and cup the weight of them. To lift and support and... Fuckin' hell, for the first time in his life he was jealous of a piece of female underwear.

Somehow, this woman had the ability to push all his buttons and turn him on without even saying a word. Never before had a female got under his skin to this

degree. He shook his head in disgust at where his thoughts were leading. *You are one sick puppy, Chase O'Connor.*

She looked sore as hell and bone weary and all he could think of was ripping the bra off and replacing it with his mouth. He should be pampering her instead of making her work like a dog.

"Come on, Cassie, have one of these sandwiches. You must be running on empty by now."

He forced a sandwich into her hand and lifted her hand to her mouth. She took a bite and when she'd swallowed it, grinned up at him.

"Hey, you're right. These are good. I didn't realize how hungry I was."

She finished off the sandwich and reached for another one. When it disappeared in record time, he handed her the plastic-wrapped selection and let her take her choice. With the last one gone, she leant back against the wall of the shearing shed and let out a long sigh as she reached for the bottle of cool water his mom had also provided.

No sooner had she finished off half the water and handed the bottle back to him than she was bending -- albeit with a few groans -- to retrieve the hand shears and heading back into the paddock.

"Come on, Chase, off your ass. Only a few more sheep and we're finished." She paused and turned back to face him, one hand propped on her hip. "Provided you don't have any more of these woolly creatures hidden away in the shed." She glared at him, her eyes squinted against the sunlight.

"I think you've had enough for today."

"Uh-uh, no way. We are going to finish this. There's only... oh, maybe a dozen left now."

At the rate she was working, it could take the better part of the afternoon. He couldn't let her do it. "No, I think you'd better stop now. You won't be able to straighten up by the end of the day."

"You going to drag the next sheep over here or do I have to do that, too?"

There was no stopping her. She was going to do it whether he helped her or not. "Okay," he sighed. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

They worked steadily for the next two hours. By the time they'd finished dagging the last animal in the holding pen, Chase felt like an out-and-out bastard for setting this up.

Cassie's fair skin was flushed bright red with exertion and heat even though he'd made her keep stopping to take in water to keep her hydrated. Heat stroke was all too common out here. No matter what he did, he couldn't make her quit. So he'd let her go on and just tried to ease the load for her as much as possible.

Barely able to straighten up, she handed him the shears, and without a word, tottered over to the trough and scrubbed at her hands. Then she climbed onto the back of the quad bike and silently waited for him to pack up and join her.

His gut tightened into knots at the tired droop of her shoulders. Every time she moved, she winced in pain and the sight of it drove a shaft through his heart.

He really was a bastard.

## Chapter Seven

Bottom lip clamped between her teeth to stop herself moaning, Cassie dragged her ass off the bike and headed into the house. It was all she could do to make her legs move. She stank of poop. Her back creaked. Her right hand curled in what she figured would be a permanent claw from holding the shears, but she'd done it. She'd proved to Chase that she was as good as any Aussie cowgirl.

Hmm, did they even call them cowgirls over here?

She shrugged. Who gave a damn anyway? She sidestepped as Maisie came out of the living room and stared at her.

"Good heavens, child, what have you been doing?"

"Working." She tried for a grin, but wasn't able to raise the energy needed to make her face muscles work. Instead, she kept moving in a slow shuffle down the hallway to her room.

Once in her bedroom, she stripped off her filthy clothes and ruined track shoes. Opening the door onto the veranda, she tossed them outside. No way could she ever see herself wearing them again. She doubted even washing could get the stench of sheep and shit out of them.

With crab-like movements, she edged into the bathroom and under a warm shower. She needed hot water and lots of scrubbing. Right at this moment, she couldn't even feel guilty about using up precious water supplies.

"Hah," she whispered. "I showed him."

In the act of lathering up the soap and spreading it over her tired shoulders, she paused. Why the heck had she been so determined to show Chase she was as good at fitting in and being productive on an Australian property as any girl born and bred here?

"Oh, no, girl, you're not thinking what I think you're thinking. We are so not going to go there."

Her back against the shower wall, she analyzed her feelings. She had needed to show Chase she could adapt. Did she want him to view her as a permanent fixture?

Holy... bloody sheep. That's exactly what she did want. So she loved the guy. Quite madly, as it turned out. It didn't mean she had to start seeing this as anything more than a fling. Uh-uh, no way. She was going back to the States after this little sojourn and she was not going to think of marriage, particularly with a man who lived clear across the world.

*Right, Cassie?*

"Darn right," she growled as she tipped a handful of shampoo on the top of her sweaty hair.

When she finally felt clean again and could no longer smell the aroma of sheep shit on her skin, she turned off the shower and blotted up the moisture on her body with a fluffy towel. Too tired to dress, she wound the sarong Maisie had loaned her about her body and anchored it above her breasts.

She glanced at the watch she'd left resting on the bedside table earlier this morning. They ate dinner early in the country, but she still had time for a lie down. With a groan, she forced her aching muscles into compliance and flopped down onto the bed. She'd just close her eyes for a second before doing some reading and maybe make a start on the planning of her thesis.

It was ages before she had to have it completed, but nothing like getting things down on paper while they were fresh in her head. Without opening her eyes, she reached out and felt around until she snagged the textbooks, notepad and pen she'd left there. She settled them on her stomach. Soon. She'd get to them soon. After she rested her tired muscles.

\* \* \*

Chase balanced the tray in one hand and tapped gently on the bedroom door. When there was no answer, he opened it and peeked inside. Cassie sprawled across the



bed on her stomach, her arms flung out as if totally exhausted. No doubt she was, and it was his fault.

At some time in her sleep, she'd knocked a pile of books over. Now they lay in an untidy heap across the carpeted floor. He'd pick them up in a moment. First, he had to deal with this tray.

Closing the door behind him, he placed the dinner tray on the bedside table and sat down on the edge of the bed. Cassie hadn't even stirred. Once again, guilt rode him like a monkey on his back.

She sure was plucky. Most city girls here in Australia wouldn't have been able to do what she had done today. It was only those raised on the land who were used to this style of life. Not even those sometimes. Many farm girls headed to the city for adventure and excitement, but most of all to get away from the bloody hard slog running a farm or station required.

He was proud of her. Despite everything, she'd done well today. Maybe with a bit of time she'd grow to like the life and consider moving across the seas permanently.

Chase suddenly felt as if a lightning bolt had hit him. He pulled his hand away from Cassie's soft skin and reared back. Whoa, boy! This was Jason's kid sister. She was here for a holiday and nothing else. As far as he was concerned, it was hands off, despite what had already occurred between them. Knowing who she was changed things. Just the same, seeing her like this was doing crazy things to his equilibrium.

"Hi."

He jerked in reaction. He hadn't realized she was awake. It took a bit of throat clearing before he could speak. "Hi, yourself." She didn't move so he bent over to look into her face. "You missed dinner."

"I must have fallen asleep."

He watched as she tried to push herself up on her arms. A series of little moans issued forth and the guilt came back and bit him on the ass. "Damn, I shouldn't have let you work on after lunch. I knew you'd be stiff and sore."

He was right. Cassie was stiff and sore, but she'd weathered worse in the past, after a fall on the ski slopes. However, she knew the perfect way to ease the stiffness. Hers, that is! She was kinda hoping Chase would be subject to a different type of stiffness.

"So are you going to make me feel better?" She remained on her stomach and waited for his reply.

"Anything. What can I do?"

"Massage."

"Say what?"

"I need a massage to loosen me up. How about putting those skilled hands of yours to use?"

"Your wish is my command."

He placed his hands softly on her shoulders, but before he could do anything more, she stopped him. "There's some perfumed massage oil in the bathroom. I think Maisie must have left it there, or a previous guest."

The mattress moved as Chase rose and went in search of the oil. A groan escaped before Cassie could prevent it. She really did need a massage. Although if she were honest, and if she could make her muscles work, she had other uses in mind for the massage oil.

Cassie bit off another moan as Chase sat down again. She really hurt, but it was worth it if it got Chase's hands on her body. The scent of jasmine teased her senses as he uncapped the bottle and trickled a line across her shoulders. She pressed her lips to the side of his bronzed arm when he leant over her and placed the bottle on the bedside table. Hmm, he tasted good. Almost good enough to force herself to roll over onto her back so she could kiss him.

Almost, but not enough. Right now, she needed the massage more than the kiss.

A long sigh slipped from her lips as he settled his hands on her shoulders and rubbed the oil into her skin. His fingers kneaded the knotted muscles up her neck then slid out to the crest of her shoulders before easing down her arms.

"Mmm, that feels so good."

"Just lie back and relax," he said. "I give a great massage."

That's exactly what Cassie was going to do. Lie here and let him minister to her.

She was almost asleep when he said, "You got that sarong tied in a knot?"

"Huh?" It took her a moment to work out what he was talking about. "No, just tucked in."

"Want to loosen it up and I'll deal with the kinks further down? With all the bending you did today, you must be as stiff as all get-out around your waist."

Cassie lifted up slightly, released the sarong and let him pull it down to her middle. When she lay down again, the outer curve of her breasts were clearly visible, but it didn't really matter. After all, he'd seen her naked before. Right now, she was just too darn relaxed to care.

Rising up, he straddled her, his weight balanced on his knees. Hands oiled up, he went to work, sliding from her waist, up either side of her spine and back down again. At first it hurt as his fingers dug into bunched muscles, but as she relaxed, the massage took on a sensual feel.

A soft moan escaped as the tips of his fingers brushed at the sides of her breasts. She gulped and tried to hold still as he repeated the movement. The guy had fingers made of satin.

He slid the sarong down another few inches. She squirmed as his hands skimmed across the curve of her backside. Lord, she hadn't realized her ass was such an erogenous zone.

"Feel good?" he whispered.

"Oh, yeah, don't stop."

"Never!" He bent down and dropped a light kiss on the small of her back.

Cassie could feel the heated rush of blood through her veins. The sound of her pulse pounded in her ears. Everywhere he touched, he left streaks of fire, molten hot and designed to flame a girl's every desire. Dampness gathered between her thighs; her clit throbbed.

She tried to press her legs together to relieve the ache, but with Chase's weight pinning her down, it was impossible. She gasped and clutched at the bed cover as he traced his fingers across her ass. It was all she could do to remain lying on her front.

Did she really want to?

No way! She was so turned on she wanted to toss him to the bed and rip his clothes off. Then she wanted to take the hard cock she could feel pressing into the back of her thighs, run her tongue from the thick base right to the top. Take him into her mouth and suck hard until she drove him crazy.

Then Chase bent down and ran the tip of his tongue over her ass. She bit her lip to stop herself from moaning. Her pulse rate spiked. Liquid heat flooded her pussy. The breath hitched in her throat as the sexual tension escalated. Her body shook with need and she knew if she didn't do something right now, she'd be down to begging him to take her.

Catching him by surprise, she made a move to shift her hips in preparation to rolling over. She grinned as he lifted his weight off her and allowed her to complete the movement. So, not such a surprise after all. He'd anticipated her move.

"Can't do the back and not the front." She chuckled and raised an eyebrow. "There must be muscles here that need some tender loving care, too." She spread her arms out and offered herself up to him, the sarong now only just covering her mound. "By the feel of it, you have the odd muscle or two that needs a bit of massaging as well."

All thoughts of joking disappeared from her mind when Chase took up her invitation and drizzled oil across her breasts. The oil struck cold against her heated skin, but it didn't last long. As soon as Chase applied his magic hands, her nipples hardened into tight little buds as if pleading for his touch. No such luck! The tips of his fingers skimmed the curves, moving closer but never quite touching.

Cassie thought she'd go mad. She squirmed on the bed, trying to follow the sweep of his hands, but to no avail. Needy little sobs broke from her mouth. Her breathing was harsh and labored. Damn him, she *was* almost at the point of begging.

Chase grinned as Cassie arched her upper body, her shoulders lifting clear off the bed. He drew the tip of his index finger across the curve of her breasts again, moving closer and closer to her nipples. The scent of jasmine, enhanced by the warmth of her body, curled about him. Ever after, he would always associate the jasmine perfume with Cassie.

“Damn it, Chase...”

He grinned and gave Cassie what she wanted. Claspings his hand around the fullness of one breast, he tweaked at the nipple with forefinger and thumb. Cassie moaned, her head thrashing on the pillow. Then, unable to help himself, he leant down and placed his mouth over her nipple, drawing it into his mouth.

God, she tasted fantastic, the jasmine-scented oil adding to the eroticism. While Cassie writhed on the bed, he moved to her other breast, lavishing the same attention on the pebbled crest. By the time he moved down her breastbone to her navel, Cassie’s breathing had disintegrated to harsh panting.

He swirled his tongue around the silver belly button ring. When he sucked the ring into his mouth, giving it a gentle pull, her hips bucked, as if he’d pulled on a cord that connected her belly button to her pussy. He went back for another go, his excitement levels rising when he received the same reaction. His cock throbbed in anticipation of things to come.

“Chaaase.”

Cassie’s voice was barely recognizable as she screamed out his name. It snatched his thoughts back from the erotic allure of doing the same thing to her pussy. His tongue stabbing into her channel. Lapping up the evidence of her desire. Driving her on until she climaxed in his mouth.

Dear God, how was he supposed to draw back from this now? He hadn’t planned on taking it to the ultimate conclusion. He shouldn’t have gone this far. This was Jason’s baby sister.

Although, right at this moment, she didn't look like anyone's baby anything. Instead, she looked like the woman who made his body cramp with need. Who drove the tension so high he was about to explode.

*Control, boyo, that's all you need.* Surely he could satisfy her needs without turning into a raving sex maniac?

Cassie took the control from him when she reached down and ran her hand across the throbbing erection pushing at the front of his trousers. He jerked in reaction, a groan rumbling up from his throat, the sound agonized, even to his own ears. Cassie just grinned.

"Honey, we can't --"

"Why can't we?"

Without conscious thought, Chase ground his cock against her hand, a husky growl torn from his throat. Shit, he wanted her so bad, but somehow he had to hang on to his control.

"You're all stiff after working so hard today."

"So are you." She moved her hand to get a better grip on his cock.

He ignored her comment. Or at least tried to. "I'd be a real bastard to jump your bones tonight," he improvised, not willing to tell her he knew who she was. He wasn't ready for that type of confrontation yet.

*And why not?*

He had no answer for the persistent question pounding through his head. He just knew he couldn't tell her, because if he did, he removed her reason for being here. Somewhere along the line, it had become important he spend as much time with Cassie as he could. No way was he going to spill the beans unless he had to.

"Did I tell you how proud of you I am? Most Australian girls couldn't do what you did today. Dump a city girl out here and she would have caved in as soon as I told her she had to handle shit." He knew he was babbling, but it was all he could think of to try to divert her.

Cassie admired a man with a strong mind and even stronger convictions, but enough was enough. If he didn't shut up and kiss her, she was going to deck him one. Never one to let an opportunity slip, she snaked her hands up around his neck and pulled his head down so she could capture his lips. He opened to her and she sent her tongue thrusting, a weak imitation of what she really wanted. The pounding of his cock inside her, stretching her, filling her, igniting nerve endings until she screamed out her release.

Keeping her lips fused with his, she reared up, twisted and pushed until he tilted over onto his side. She knew darn well he'd allowed her to do it; he was a lot stronger than she was. Lifting up, she settled over him so his bulging cock fitted snugly between her thighs.

"Sneaky," he murmured when she broke off the kiss.

"I didn't hear you complaining," she retorted as she undid the buttons of his shirt. The leather belt about his jeans was no barrier to her searching fingers. The zipper slid down as if oiled just for this special occasion. The removal of the jeans and boots she'd deal with a bit later. Right now she had something else to do.

She slid her mouth over his, nibbling at his lips again. His tongue flicked out and bathed her lips in liquid warmth. God, he tasted so good. Then rational thought escaped her as she submerged herself in the taste and feel of him, gratified when another husky groan rippled from his throat.

All Chase's good intentions flew out the window. As Cassie moved down his body, he forgot everything but what she was doing to him, how she made him feel. Her nimble little tongue burnt a path from his chest down to his navel before traveling across his stomach.

Muscles clenched. He clutched at her hair, the fine blonde strands twisted around his fingers. His hips undulated as he sought to move closer to her.

"Lift up," she demanded.

He complied, his body and mind now totally under her control. She tugged his jeans down past his knees but no further. Then she swooped, her hands grasping his throbbing cock.

"Ah, Cassie, we can't. I don't have... ahhh!"

The ability to speak disappeared when she took him into her mouth. Her lips slid up and down as she worked on his erection, soft sounds of appreciation coming from her throat. Her tongue flicked against the head of his cock, teeth gently grazed the rigid flesh. At the same time, she cupped his balls, applying enough pressure to stimulate, but not to hurt.

He almost came apart in her hands. Fuck it, when he came, he wanted his cock buried inside her. Wanted to submerge himself in her warmth. Feel her stretching around him, her muscles pulling him in and holding him captive. Fragmented breathing. Sweaty bodies. The lot, but only together.

He threaded his fingers through her hair and tugged. "No more," he begged, "or I'll come right now."

She raised her head and grinned, her tongue flicking out to run across her lips. The picture was so damn sexy he had to concentrate on not disgracing himself. At this rate, he'd be finished before they even got to the main event.

"Promises, promises," she mocked him.

"Cassie, we don't have any protection."

"Wanna bet?"

Stretching across his body, she reached for the top drawer of the bedside table and dug around inside. When she held her hand up, he saw a little foil package.

"I believe in being prepared." She chuckled before she sat back and tore at the packet with her teeth.

Before he could say anything, she rolled the condom down over his cock. Chase fought hard to remain still while she completed the operation. Hell, he was just plain hard. He'd never known the issue of protection could be so much fun.



"Cowboy, for once the poor horse gets a break. I'm gonna ride you until you drop," she said in an exaggerated Southern American drawl.

She lifted up and settled over him, her internal muscles stretching to accommodate him. Chase grabbed hold of her hips and thrust upwards until he buried himself up to his balls in her waiting warmth. Cassie lived up to her word and rode him hard and fast, her body pounding against his, her hands braced on his shoulders for support.

Her blonde hair swung about her face as she whispered, "Giddy-up, cowboy."

The tension built up inside him, pulled his muscles taut. He raised his hips to meet her every move, determined to take her along with him for the ride of a lifetime.

"Do you like to talk when you make love, Chase?"

The question, delivered in a breathy voice, took him by surprise and he suddenly remembered he was supposed to have a problem with his sexual functions. Time to recover some ground. He hated lying to her, but he couldn't walk away from this if he tried.

"Um... once, before you came along." He averted his eyes so she wouldn't see his expression. "It was a total disaster. I lost my... you know."

"We don't have to talk. Although I have to say you don't seem to be having any problems now." She raised her eyebrows and stared at him.

"It -- it's y-you," he stuttered. "I've haven't been this turned on for months now. And neither have I been this hard. It must be you."

"Hmm, could be you're more relaxed with me, seeing as how you don't really know me. Perhaps that's what it is."

*You are a rat, Chase O'Connor.*

The words hammered at his brain, almost prompting him to blurt out the truth. He opened his mouth to speak. Cassie reached behind her, clasped his balls in one hand and gave a little squeeze. He clamped his jaw shut and sucked in a shaky breath. Mind-blowing. Fucking mind-blowing!

God help him, if he didn't do something soon, he'd blow his mind all right. He reached down and parted her damp flesh. God, she was so damn hot, and the same fire was about to consume him, too. He found the hard little nub of her clit, pushing the hood back so he could massage it with his thumb. The breath gusted from her lips as she increased her pace, her movements coordinated with his.

She ground herself down hard on him as he rubbed. Breathly little sobs tumbled from her lips and fuelled his ardor. He lifted his hips and drove into her. The slap of flesh on flesh was loud in the room, mixed in with the rasp of their breathing. The musky scent of their lovemaking surrounded them. Cassie's movements grew more frenzied and as he felt the first of the spasms hit her, he thrust one more time, hard and fast.

"Cha-a-ase!" she screamed.

Her body arched, head thrown back. Her vaginal muscles convulsed around his cock, pulling him in, holding him tight. Red-tipped nails scored his chest and he reveled in it. Watching Cassie come was the most erotic thing he'd ever seen and it finally broke the rigid control he'd exercised over his own desires.

He held her hips tight and thrust again, letting the climax come, harder, stronger, more overwhelming than any he'd experienced before. The muscles in his gut clenched and for a moment he couldn't breathe as he emptied himself inside her. Cassie collapsed against his chest, her breathing as labored as his. Chase slid his arms around her and held on tight, convinced if he let go, he'd be giving up the best thing to ever happen to him.

"Way to go, cowboy," she whispered against his chest.

In that moment, Chase realized something. This was a woman he could live with for the rest of his life.

## Chapter Eight

"Wow. Sky rockets." Cassie struggled to catch her breath while she waited for her heartbeat to slow down.

"Tell me about it!" Chase laughed. "Lady, you are amazing. You must have guys lining up all over the place to come have their problems fixed."

She snuggled down against his shoulder. "Ahh, but you're the only one who gets treated to a hands-on workout. You feeling good about yourself now?"

"Sure am, ma'am." Chase propped himself up on one elbow and stared down at her. "I definitely got lucky when Mom brought you here as my companion."

Speaking of Maisie, Cassie suddenly remembered she could be wandering around out there, knowing darn well what was going on in here. A wave of heat washed up over her face. "Um, where's your mom now? She's not..."

Chase laughed. "Don't panic. She's gone to bed, wanted an early night. In case you didn't realize, dinner was over hours ago. I looked in, but you were sound asleep so we decided to leave you there. You worked darn hard today."

Cassie preened. "I did, didn't I? I thought I'd never get clean after playing in sheep manure all day."

"I shouldn't have put you through that. I don't normally make our guests work for their keep."

He had the grace to look sheepish. Sheepish? Cassie almost burst out laughing at her internal choice of words. "I wanted to do it," she said with a chuckle, "but there's a chance I was totally crazy when I agreed." She rolled over to look at the dinner tray sitting on the bedside table. "So what did you all have for dinner?"

"Lamb roast with all the trimmings, but it will be stone cold by now. Oh, and good old-fashioned bread and butter pudding."

Chase rolled to the end of the bed, stood up and disappeared into the bathroom. When he returned, he started dragging on his clothes. Cassie's mouth went dry as she blatantly stared at his exposed chest. His sun-kissed skin and the smattering of dark hair made her itch to run her fingers over the smooth flesh. Better yet, her tongue. She pouted as he grinned at her and shrugged into his shirt. She had to tell her libido to stand down before she hauled him back into bed and had her way with him again.

"You want to come out to the kitchen with me and raid the pantry? Or you want I should heat you up something and bring it back in here for you?" he said.

He rounded the bed and promptly stumbled. Cassie leant over and stared, her eyes widening as she saw her books strewn across the floor. She must have knocked them off in her sleep.

Chase squatted down and gathered them into a pile, the open notebook on top. As he stood up, he angled his head and glanced at the top page. Horror suddenly washed through Cassie. Her thesis notes! He'd see his own name written there if he stared too long. He'd know she was writing about him.

She reared up, reached over and snatched them from him. Her hands shook as she thrust them into the top drawer of the bedside table. She so didn't want him to see them. Chase was a proud man. She could only imagine his anger if he knew he was the prime subject in a dissertation on impotence in men under stress.

Cassie knew she was a coward, but she wasn't ready to get into this. It could well mean the end of her time here because she had a horrible feeling Chase would kick her ass out if he knew the truth.

"You know, I'm not really hungry." She waved her hand and tried for nonchalance. "I think I'll just have the bread and butter pudding. It looks lovely."

"You want to come out and have a glass of wine with me?"

"Um, no, I have some work to do." She needed to document tonight's spectacular romp with Chase, but she couldn't tell him that. "I... er, I have some letters to write and... um, a journal to update." *Good going, Cassie, that really sounds original.*

"I'm keeping a journal of my trip here in Australia so I need to write up today's dagging while it's fresh in my mind."

She had a feeling he knew she was lying. He stared at her, the gaze riveting, pinning her to the spot. It was as if he was trying to see into her mind, but darn it, she couldn't come up with anything better.

Chase continued to watch her, his brow pulled down in a frown. Cassie wanted to come clean, but she couldn't, and not only because Maisie was involved in this little subterfuge. Okay, so she didn't want to be responsible for him being angry with his mom, but this had nothing to do with Maisie. This was all about the feelings she had for Chase and the desire to spend as much time with him as she could.

"Fine, I'll leave you to it," Chase snapped.

Cassie winced at the hard, clipped tone. She stared at him. The smile had disappeared from his eyes, his face shuttered and closed off to her. She wanted to cry at the loss of the easy camaraderie they'd shared earlier. Surely his ego wasn't so fragile he'd take exception just because she didn't want to have dinner with him?

He walked to the bedroom door, reeled it open and started to leave. At the last moment, he paused and looked back over his shoulder. "It's lamb marking tomorrow. Breakfast at five-thirty. We'll leave straight after."

When she said nothing, he raised his eyebrows. "You did say you were willing to help me, didn't you?"

Cassie kept her mouth shut and simply nodded. Her heart bled as he swiped his hand across his mouth as if to wash away the taste of her. Then he stepped outside and eased the door shut.

She would much rather he'd slammed it. There was an air of finality in his controlled movements as if he'd buried his emotions, and thoughts of her along with them.

\* \* \*

Chase locked himself in his room. He was so fucking angry he could spit. His long legs ate up the distance as he strode across to the veranda doors. Fists clenched at

his sides, he stared out at the night. No way could he settle down to sleep the way he was feeling.

Damn it, she had lied to him. Again! He'd given her the perfect opportunity to come clean and she hadn't taken it. He chose to ignore the fact that he'd bent the truth with her, too.

Letter and journal writing, be damned. "Bullshit," he whispered. "She's going to sit there and write some great screed about my performance in bed."

He'd got a look at one of the titles of the textbooks he'd cleaned up off the floor. *Sexual Dysfunction in Older Males*.

He'd never had a woman complain about his lovemaking skills, and he sure as hell wasn't old. It would be a long time before he reached his use-by date. He'd always been upfront in his dealings with members of the opposite sex, yet here he was trying to make Cassie believe he had sexual dysfunction problems. This was his own stupid fault. Or his mother's for planting the idea in Cassie's head in the first place, but he didn't have to go along with it. What a bloody fool he was.

It had all started as a game. What red-blooded male wouldn't take advantage when a woman said she wanted to teach him all about sex? This was no longer a joke. Somewhere along the line, it had become deadly serious and he couldn't even work out how it had happened.

He hadn't meant to order her to help with the lamb marking tomorrow, but his anger had taken over. He should go back and tell her to forget about it, that he didn't plan on making her work like she had today, but she had fucking well lied to him. Be damned if he was going back in there to apologize.

Knowing sleep was futile, he left his bedroom and crept down the corridor to the kitchen. Maybe a cup of hot chocolate would settle him down enough to get some rest. He'd just put the milk on to boil when he heard a noise behind him.

"Mom! What are you doing up?"

"Couldn't sleep. Something on my mind." Her slippers making a swishing sound on the tiled floor, she shuffled in and sat down at the scrubbed table dominating the kitchen.

"Want some hot chocolate? Might help you sleep."

"Hmmp, a clear conscience would help more," she muttered. "Yes, dear, I'd love a cup of chocolate, thank you."

Chase measured out the cocoa powder and poured in the heated milk. He set one mug in front of his mother and slid the sugar bowl across to her before joining her at the table.

"So what's stopping you from sleeping?"

"You ever done something and wished you hadn't?"

He chuckled. "Story of my life." *Particularly at the moment.*

"No, I mean something so wrong you know you won't be forgiven, even if you were doing it for the person's own good."

She held up her hand as he opened his mouth to respond. "I did it for what I thought were the right reasons, but I realize it was more like interfering and now it's going like a train I can't stop it and --"

"Whoa! Slow down, Mom. I'm not getting any of this. What are you talking about?"

"It doesn't matter, dear." With a little finger pointed delicately out to the side, she lifted the mug and sipped at the hot chocolate. Placing the cup back on the table, she grinned at him and, with a lift of her eyebrows, said, "Don't suppose telling a little fib will get me kicked out of Heaven, will it?"

"Hell, I hope not or I'm in serious trouble." He reached out and cradled his mother's hand in his. "Whatever you've done, or haven't done, it doesn't matter. I love you, however outrageously you act at times."

Maisie gave a trill of laughter. "I am a bit much at times, aren't I? Now, tell me why you can't sleep. Bed bugs biting you?"

Chase wasn't a man given to flowery speeches and heart-to-heart talks with any woman, let alone his mother. His immediate instinct was to avoid the topic, but he hesitated. Somehow, it seemed important to get a handle on things as far as Cassie was concerned. Tonight, if possible.

He had a sense of time running out. Despite Cassie lying to him, he knew he needed what remained of her stay to try to deal with the tumult of emotions raging throughout his body whenever she came close. A state of affairs he needed to resolve if he wanted to retain his sanity. He'd already broken his "don't screw around with your mate's sister" rule. Not once, but twice.

Worse, he'd allowed Cassie to get under his skin. Right under until she'd buried herself in his heart. Shit, if he didn't know better he'd think he was in love with the woman.

"How do you know when you're in love?" He cast his gaze down to the table as he asked the question. Damn, asking this type of question of his mother was plain embarrassing.

"You've had lots of girlfriends in the past, Chase. Haven't you ever imagined yourself in love with any of them?"

"Nah, it was all good fun and I made certain the women knew the score. I had no intention of getting hooked up permanently with a female, at least not until I was a lot older. I mean, Dad was what -- nearly forty? -- before he got married."

"That's because he hadn't met me."

Chase watched a myriad of emotions flit across his mother's face. Love, joy, sadness and finally acceptance. His parents had been happy in their marriage and his father's death had hit her hard. He felt sorry for her loss, but he was glad she'd had the happiness before the hard times when his dad was dying.

If he did end up getting married, he wanted the same type of relationship as his parents. "How long did it take you to fall in love?"

"An instant."

"You're kidding. Right?"



She shook her head. "Na-uh, it happens like that for some people. That's how it was for us. I took one look at your dad and knew he was my future husband."

"That quick, eh?" Chase rubbed a hand across his chin as his thoughts turned to the mishmash of feelings that cluttered up his insides. "So you believe in love at first sight? You think it can happen to anyone?"

"Of course it can. Why? Have you suddenly found someone you think you could live with for the rest of your life?"

Chase held up his hand. "Just thinking is all." Thinking about how he could retrieve the situation with Cassie. She must be bloody angry with him right about now. Talk about eating and running. He'd screwed and fled, except it had felt more like making love than the biological urge screwing suggested.

"Sooo... some men actually fall in love at first sight, hmm?" he mused, a slight grin on his face.

Maisie stood up and pushed her chair in under the table. Leaning down, she dropped a quick kiss on the top of his head. "You are definitely your father's son. He knew what he wanted straight away, too." She collected her empty mug and carried it to the sink, filled it with water and left it to sit until morning.

A crafty look spread across her face. Chase stared at her, watched the slight mischievous grin that twisted her lips and made a road map of wrinkles on her lined face. "Mother, the problem keeping you from sleeping? You never did get around to telling me what you interfered in."

"Too late for talking, dear. This old lady needs to get her beauty sleep."

She blew him a kiss and shuffled out the door. Chase continued to be amazed at how fast she could move when she wanted to avoid discussing something. Not bad for an old lady.

He downed the rest of his now cold chocolate and dumped the mug in the sink alongside his mother's. He started to laugh, still thinking about his mom's problem. "Probably gone and invited another local debutante to the property in the hopes I'll fall

flat on my face over her,” he muttered as he turned the light off and wandered up the hallway to his bedroom.

He paused outside Cassie’s closed door and placed the palm of his hand flat on the timber surface. The urge to go in and wake her up to tell her the truth was almost overwhelming. He resisted and retreated to his own room.

It took no more than a few minutes to strip off his clothes and crawl into bed. He composed himself for sleep, but still it wouldn’t come. He was all too conscious of Cassie on the other side of the dividing wall. His pulse rate sped up just thinking about what they’d shared earlier. His cock hardened with need as he remembered the feel of her lips. The taste of her breast on his tongue. The pull of her body as she clenched her internal muscles around his cock. He punched a fist into the pillow and settled down to sleep, determined to put her from his mind.

For a moment, he was certain he’d accomplished it, but one thought kept returning to tease him.

*Holy shit, you just might have gone and fallen in love with a woman from the other side of the world.*

Now how the hell was he supposed to make that work? Cassie would go home at the end of her holiday. He’d be stuck here cutting shit off the butts of cantankerous sheep. When she got back to the States, some other guy would realize what a catch she was and snap her up.

It was enough to scare him witless.

## Chapter Nine

Thoughts of Chase invaded Cassie's dreams and followed her into the morning. It was still half-light when she dressed in jeans and T-shirt. Dirty track shoes in hand, she padded in her socks out to the kitchen, a slight feeling of depression nagging on the edges of her mind.

"Morning, Maisie." Cassie caught herself in a wide yawn. "Chase not up yet?"

Maisie placed a scaled-down version of the breakfast she'd tried to push on her yesterday morning in front of her. "I don't think Chase slept too well last night. I found him in the kitchen making hot chocolate. Of course, I wasn't sleeping too well either. Guilty conscience, I guess."

"What have you got to be guilty about?" Cassie picked up her knife and fork, pushed the bacon aside and started with the eggs. She didn't think she could handle anything too greasy today.

Cup of coffee in hand, Maisie joined her at the table. "I think maybe I've been an interfering old busybody. Do you think Chase is happy?"

"He's a grown man, Maisie. You're not responsible for his happiness, but if you're worried, why don't you ask him?"

Images of Chase tumbled through her mind. He'd been so sweet when he'd brought the dinner tray to her room. So solicitous when he realized how stiff she was after working in the holding pen all day.

Talk about healing hands. The massage had been wonderful. The scent of jasmine still filled the bedroom this morning. The heavy perfume was probably what had disturbed her sleep so much last night. It had curled about her brain and revived all the memories of their little romp after the massage. Little, nothing! It was mind-altering. There was nothing little about her Aussie cowboy.

Cassie placed her fork across the plate, rested her chin on her cupped hand and allowed visions of last night to return to tease her. Her heart raced and a scalding tide of heat rushed up her chest to her face. She hadn't had many relationships -- always too busy studying -- but she couldn't remember ever being as forward as to demand what she wanted. Last night she had wanted Chase, and still did.

She was no one's dummy. Neither was she stupid. Chase O'Connor did not have a problem downstairs. Okay, so she hadn't even started work as a sex therapist, but she'd read about a gazillion textbooks. Na-uh, no way did he suffer from sexual dysfunction.

So what was the explanation for his little subterfuge? Either he had misled his mom, or Maisie had lied to her. Would Maisie lie to her? She was so upfront she blurted everything out. Cassie didn't think she would be capable of keeping a secret if she tried. Which meant Chase had lied.

Did Maisie know? Did she really believe Chase had the same type of problems her husband had, or was this some sort of elaborate con? The questions whizzed through her brain and made her dizzy. She shook her head and tried to look at it rationally, but was no closer to getting answers.

Maisie had been so enthusiastic about her coming to Australia to do research for her thesis Cassie simply couldn't believe she'd bent the truth. The question now was, did she tell the kindly old woman her son definitely didn't have any trouble with his wedding tackle?

"Maisie, do you know of any reason Chase would admit to having a problem in the bedroom if it wasn't true?"

"Probably just an excuse so I wouldn't try and match him up with any of the local girls," Maisie snorted. "I do wish he'd settle down. I want grandbabies before I get planted six feet under."

She placed her mug on the table and slapped a hand on the scrubbed surface. "Bet he figured I'd leave him alone if I thought he couldn't get it up."

"Maisie!" Cassie couldn't help herself. She chuckled at the old woman's turn of phrase. Somehow, she hadn't expected someone of Maisie's generation to be so open about sex and to use the current slang for a good old hard-on.

"Hey, you don't think he's gay, do you?"

Cassie burst into laughter. No way was Chase O'Connor gay.

"My sexual proclivities are not up for discussion, ladies." Chase walked into the room and collected his plate from the warming tray where Maisie had left it. Pulling out a chair, he sat down at the table and attacked the pile of lamb chops, eggs and bacon.

"Morning, Mom," he said between mouthfuls.

Cassie stared at him as he busied himself with eating breakfast. He had the same shuttered look on his face he'd had when he'd left her last night. He hadn't even looked at her yet, and a morning greeting was obviously out of the question. What on earth was wrong with him? She knew he was angry with her, but she couldn't believe he'd be petty enough to get bent out of shape simply because she'd declined to join him in the kitchen last night. So what had she done wrong?

Besides lie to him about why she was here, hiding the fact she was writing about his supposed problems with maintaining an erection?

She winced as the little voice in her head raised the issue of her lying. She ignored it and focused on Chase. "So what's the plan for today?"

Chase polished off his last mouthful before he finally looked at her. Cassie waited to see what he'd say.

"I don't expect you to work. The weather report said the temperatures would be even higher today than yesterday. It'll be too much for you."

A nerve ticked in his jaw. Cassie wanted to ask him what was wrong, but something warned her now was not the time. She stood and gathered up her used plate, and knife and fork, and deposited them in the sink. Back to him, she rinsed them off.

"I promised to help you." *In more ways than one!* "I don't go back on my word, ever."

"What a paragon."

At the bitter, mocking tone of his voice, Cassie spun about to face him.

"What are you talking about, Chase?" Maisie said.

"Cassie. A paragon. She doesn't go back on her word. Doesn't break her promises. She doesn't smoke. I don't even know if she drinks."

Shock hit Cassie as she listened to Chase's mocking diatribe. Lord, he really did sound angry.

"Tell me, Cassie, do you have any vices? How about lying? Ever been known to trade in un-truths?"

"Chase!"

Cassie ignored Maisie's shocked interjection and stared at Chase, a frown on her face. Her conscience felt heavy. She *was* lying to him. Did he know she was writing about him? Maybe he'd caught a glimpse of his name in her notes last night. Come to think of it, that's round about when he'd shut himself off from her emotionally.

Hell, if it came down to it, she couldn't write about him because it was blatantly obvious he didn't have a problem, at least not with her, and that was another thing. He'd lied to her as well, but perhaps he did believe he had a problem. This was all getting too confusing. She needed time alone to sort this out, but not right now.

"If we're going to work today, let's get on with it." Hands on hips, chin tilted up, she glared at him. "The lambs will be waiting and you still need to teach me what lamb marking is all about."

"Chase, surely you're not taking Cassie lamb marking?" Maisie interrupted. "It's just too cruel, particularly for someone who's never seen it before."

"So what is lamb marking?" Cassie raised her eyebrows and waited, but Chase chose not to answer.

Instead, he leant down and grabbed his hat off the floor beside his chair. Jamming it on his head, he marched toward the back door. "Come on if you're coming," he snapped, his voice clipped and cold.

What a grouch. Cassie shrugged, grimaced at Maisie and followed him out of the kitchen. Chase was acting like a two-year-old. Darn him, he could wait until she'd dealt

with her trainers. Plopping down on the back veranda, she fitted her feet into the dirty shoes and tied the laces.

By the time she'd finished, he'd already wheeled the bike out and kicked over the motor. His fingers tapped at the handlebars as if he could barely restrain himself from taking off without her.

Chase O'Connor needed to learn a few lessons.

Cassie jumped on the back of the bike and trapped his hips with her spread thighs. Then she grasped his waist and pulled herself forward so she was plastered to his back. A few wiggles and her denim-covered pussy pushed against his butt, her breasts brushing his back. Darn, she wished she hadn't bothered to wear a bra today.

Amid a cloud of dust, Chase took off. Cassie had to tighten her grip about his waist, which only served to bring her body into closer contact with his.

It was all she could do to hold back her laughter as Chase sat up straighter. She could feel the tension in every line of his rigid frame. The muscles in his stomach clenched as she oh-so-casually allowed one hand to drift downward.

When her fingers brushed against the rising bulge in his jeans, he hissed, the sound almost painful. Cassie had to bite her lip to keep from laughing. There was nothing wrong with this wedding tackle, thank you very much.

He tilted his head to the side and yelled over his shoulder, "Um, I... I, er... need to tell you about lamb marking," he finished in a rush.

Cassie grinned and rubbed her breasts against his back, well aware he could feel the pebbled points of her nipples. The rush of red tinting his cheek was a pretty good indicator.

He turned to face the front again and broke into rapid speech. "We mark all our new-born lambs with a special farm brand so everyone will know they came from this property."

"Why?" she yelled over the sound of the bike.

"We still get sheep rustling sometimes. That's stealing to the layman. So we brand them. Some farmers use tattooing or mark the wool with colored chalk or paint, but the paint wears off and it has to be repeated yearly."

He swallowed hard and cleared his throat. Cassie bit her lip even harder.

"O-others p-put a little tag on the lamb's ear," he stuttered, "but I prefer to use a hole-punch with our own individual pattern on it."

By now, they'd reached the shearing shed. Drawing the bike to a noisy halt beside the run holding all the new-season lambs, he jumped off, almost knocking Cassie off her perch in his haste to get clear of her.

Cassie levered herself off the bike and stood beside it, her hands planted on her hips, all thoughts of teasing him forgotten for the moment. "You telling me you cut a hole in those itty bitty lambs' ears? Maisie's right, that's just plain cruel."

"No, it's business."

He grabbed her arm and pulled her over to the shed flanking the run. Picking up what resembled a hole-punch for a belt, he handed it to her.

"I'll restrain them and you can do the deed."

Opening the gate, he gestured for her to enter. When she stepped inside, the lambs ran at her, frolicking and gamboling about her legs. Cassie couldn't help herself. She squatted down, opened her arms wide and gathered two lambs to her chest.

"Oh, Chase, they're beautiful. Just like babies."

"Come on, we'll be here all day at this rate," he snapped. "There are only a couple of dozen lambs to be done this year. The count is down because of the drought."

She raised her head and stared at him. What the hell was wrong with him now? He sounded as angry as a nest of hornets.

Catching the first of the lambs, he positioned it so Cassie could get to its right ear. "Just fit the hand punch over the edge of the ear and pull the handles together. The hole will look something like a four leaf clover, our farm mark."

Cassie fought against the lump in her throat. She couldn't believe she was sitting here about to cut a hole in a poor lamb's ear. She depressed the handle and tried not to



jerk her hand as the lamb let out what sounded to her to be an agonized cry. Tears sprang to her eyes as blood immediately spurled from the ear and ran over her hands.

She glanced up at Chase, ready to say something else about the cruelty of the practice, but the closed look on his face was enough to dry up any words she might have uttered. This was standard operational procedure for a sheep grazing and wool growing property. Who was she to question it? Just the same, she had the feeling Chase had chosen this job for today because he knew she'd find it distasteful. She was damned if she'd say anything and give him the chance to put her down again.

"Okay, bring on the next one." She gave the lamb a furtive hug and released it.

Chase so obviously thought she'd wimp out, call it quits. He thought she was a paragon? Well, he didn't know the half of it. No way would she give up. She wiped her bloody hand on her white -- she just had to wear white today, didn't she? -- T-shirt and lifted the hole-punch to fit it over another baby ear.

The morning was well advanced when she'd finally finished marking all the lambs in the run. Chase hadn't said a word the whole time. Blood covered the front of her T-shirt. Her hands cramped from squeezing the hole-punch and she was angrier than she'd ever been in her life. She was tired of Chase and his moods.

Enough was enough. She planned on having this out, even if it meant admitting she'd bent the truth a little. Okay, so she'd lied, but she'd be damned if she was going to put up with this treatment much longer.

Scrubbing her hands on the seat of her jeans one last time, she rounded on Chase, grasped his arm and tugged him over to the quad bike.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Get on the bike, Chase."

He raised his eyebrows. "Why?"

"Just get on the goddamned bike!" She fought to control the anger whipping through her.

"There's another paddock of lambs to be done, but I guess it was too much for a paragon like you." He twisted the control on the handlebars of the bike and gunned the motor.

"Take me to the lagoon." She had to clench her teeth so she didn't start yelling at him.

He had the audacity to laugh at her.

"How like a city girl. Can't stand the sight of a little bit of blood and gore on your hands. You want to wash up, I guess."

"No, I want to screw the ass off of you until you can't think straight. Maybe then you'll be ready to be a rational human being."

"Say what?" He twisted around on the seat and stared at her.

"I'm going to fuck your brains out, Chase O'Connor." The look of shock on his face did wonders for her self-confidence.

## Chapter Ten

By the time they got to the lagoon, Chase's mouth still hung open with slack-jawed astonishment. It was a wonder he hadn't swallowed mouthfuls of the airborne dust thrown up by the quad bike. Probably had, but he just didn't realize it. Talk about shock value.

He didn't swear often himself -- well, not in front of women -- and it had been a jolt to hear the magic word coming out of Cassie's mouth. What a turn-on. He had no problems with that particular four-letter word in the right context and Cassie sure chose her moment well.

One well-planned word had wiped away the anger he'd been harboring all morning. Sexual tension ripped through him and it was all he could do to get off the bike. His cock was so damn hard it was a wonder he didn't do himself an injury.

When he was standing beside the bike, Cassie poked a stiff finger in his chest. He backed up a step, only to receive another sharp jab. "I am so sick of this on again, off again treatment."

*Jab! Jab!*

"One minute I think you really like me, then --"

"I do like you."

"Shut up, Chase. Nobody asked you." She poked at his chest again and Chase had to resist the temptation to reach out and grab her finger. The woman had nails almost as sharp as her tongue. Anyway, he wanted to see how far she'd go. Hopefully fulfill her promise to fuck his brains out?

"As I was saying before being rudely interrupted, first you're all over me like a rash then you turn all cold on me. I don't know where I am with you."

He backed up again, casting a quick glance over his shoulder to see how close he was to the edge of the lagoon. Another step and she'd have him on his ass in the water.

"Here's another thing for you to chew on. I happen to be in love with you. Have been ever since I first saw your photo."

The blood drained from his head and for a moment, he thought he was going to disgrace himself by fainting. She loved him?

"I don't care whether you like it or not, that's the way things are," she yelled. "I'm not going home either. I'm going to stay here on this property until you acknowledge there's something between us. As far as any sexual problem goes, I don't want to hear any more bullshit. There's nothing wrong with you."

"Hmm, you know about that, do you?" Chase eased closer to the water as she punched a fist into his chest.

"You think I'm stupid? I might be naïve, but I'm not dumb." Hands trembling, she started to undress. "Now get those clothes off this minute."

Holy shit, she *was* a person of her word. Chase watched her strip off her jeans and T-shirt and rushed to do the same. What man would pass up this opportunity, especially if the woman turned him on as much as Cassie did?

"Yes, ma'am," he said politely and started ripping the shirt off his back.

Cassie stood naked in front of Chase, making no attempt to hide her body. Her breasts felt swollen and heavy, the nipples puckered and hard. Heat gathered between her thighs, her pussy already wet, and she had every intention of satisfying this particular itch.

Somehow, somewhere along the way, she'd get Chase to admit he felt something for her. She just prayed she hadn't read the situation wrong. How mortifying if she was wrong.

With an exaggerated sway to her hips, she advanced on him. "You want this on the bank or in the water?"

"Ah, we haven't got a blanket. You'll end up with a scratched ass."

“Who said anything about me being on the bottom?”

Cassie backed him up even further, gratified he was willing to play the game. When he was waist deep in the water, she lunged, caught him around the neck and hooked her legs about his waist. He lost his balance and fell back, taking her with him.

They came up spitting water, but Cassie didn't mind. “I want you,” she whispered and lapped at the droplets on his lips. She did want him. Harder, faster, than she ever had before. She felt as if she'd expire if she didn't have him right there and then. No finesse. No gentleness. Just hard, powerful strokes to drive her out of her mind.

“Fuck me, Chase. Now!” she whispered. Then she nibbled at his lips and dragged him into a fiery kiss. Chase obliged, the tip of his tongue twining with hers, stabbing, stroking, but it still wasn't enough.

She reached down between their bodies and grasped his rigid cock. So smooth and hot, and she wanted it inside her, right now. Without further thought, she impaled herself on his thick length. Her body stretched to accommodate him and she whimpered with delight. She clenched her internal muscles about him, grinning when he let loose with a husky groan.

Then she started to move, establishing a rhythm that increased the depths of his strokes. The pressure built as her movements applied friction on her clit. It gathered force, made her feel like a spring wound too tight. She increased the pace, pumping up and down on his body.

His hands clutched at her ass, supporting her weight in the water. His mouth ravaged hers, the thrust of his tongue a pale imitation of what was happening in other parts of their anatomy.

When the first of the spasms hit her, she tightened her thighs and ground her body against him. Chase thrust one last time, hard and strong, crying out her name. As she felt him come inside her, Cassie lost it.

The muscles in her sheath clenched to hold Chase tight. Her clit throbbed, sensitized by their furious ride. A series of ripples started low, spreading outward, until

the orgasm consumed her. The breath snagged in her throat, making it difficult to breathe. Fire swept through her veins. Sweat beaded her brow. For a moment, she thought she might lose consciousness.

The world around her ceased to exist. Except for this one moment in time with Chase, a man she'd loved from afar for the last four years. She laid her head on his shoulder until she gained some measure of control over the harsh breaths that rasped from her dry throat.

Chase wasn't much better than she was. His breathing was so fragmented he sounded as if he had asthma. Tremors racked his frame. His hands shook as he clutched her to him and for a moment, she was worried he'd drop her into the water. She tightened her arms around his neck and rested her lips against the warm column of his throat.

When she was finally conscious of her surroundings, she lifted her head and grinned at him. "How's that for taking control, hmm?"

Chase chuckled and rested his forehead on hers. "Sweetheart, you can be on top any time you want."

"Are you finally going to admit you don't have, and never did have, a sexual dysfunction problem?"

He reared back and looked at her, still maintaining his hold. "I thought I'd kept that little fact hidden."

"Rather hard to disguise," she said with a snort. "You wield your... weapon a little too well for a man with erectile problems."

"Why, thank you, ma'am," he said as he waded toward the shore with her in his arms.

Cassie wanted to protest when he set her on her feet in front of him. He bent down, picked up his shirt and draped it around her shoulders before cupping her face in his hands. "Okay, time to come clean, because I can't stand another day like today. It hurts me to be at odds with you."

"Me, too," she whispered.

"You're right. I don't have any problems in that department. I don't know why my mother thought I did. Unless it's simply because I haven't been out with a woman in quite a while."

"Why not?" She slipped her arms into his shirt and hugged it to her. Stupid to feel embarrassed about being naked after what had just gone on, but she did.

He shrugged. "Too busy, I guess. I never came across a woman who turned me on enough to make the effort. Leastwise until I met you."

"Why did you pretend to go along with what your mom said? Was it just to make a fool of me?"

"No." He reached out and pulled her into his arms. "I thought my mother was trying to set me up. She wants me to settle down. I've resisted her, but something about you got to me. I wanted to get to know you better." He grinned. "In more ways than one."

Cassie stepped out of his arms and bent to retrieve her clothes. She grimaced as she stripped off his shirt and handed it back to him, slipping her dirty T-shirt and jeans back on. She couldn't look at him as she made her own confession. "Chase, I didn't lie when I said I loved you." She held up her hand as he opened his mouth to speak. "I don't expect you to do anything with the information, but I wanted you to know I came out here especially to seduce you and get you out of my system."

"Did it work?"

She shook her head. "No, it made it worse." She grimaced. "There's something else. I was going to write my Master's thesis on Impotence in Males under Stress and you were going to have a feature spot in it."

"I know."

Eyes wide, she stared at him. "You know? How --"

"I spoke to your brother. He told me about your thesis and given what Mom said about my supposed sexual dysfunction, it wasn't hard to work it out. I gave you an opportunity to tell me, but you didn't. That's why I was so angry."

Cassie turned to watch him pull on his jeans. "I truly am sorry I lied to you, Chase, but I'm not sorry about any of this." She waved a hand at the billabong.

"Did you mean it about staying on here? What about your new job?"

"Jobs can be found anywhere, but do you want me to stay?"

"If you promise me a repeat performance of today." He waggled his eyebrows. "I rather like a woman who isn't afraid to take the initiative."

She walked into his arms and urged his head down for another of his soul-shattering kisses. When he finally broke off the kiss, she was breathless, her body humming with sexual tension.

"Um, we have company." Chase stared over her shoulder at the vehicle approaching from the direction of the homestead. "Mother," he said, squinting as the farm utility drew to a stop beside them, his mother behind the wheel, "and if I don't miss my guess, Jason, your big brother."

"Jason?" Cassie swung about and faced the new arrivals. Her hair dripped water down her back, tendrils swinging forward to dampen the front of her bloodied white T-shirt. Her bra still rested in an untidy heap on the ground. She hadn't bothered replacing it after her romp with Chase. She was suddenly very conscious of her nipples showing through the now almost transparent fabric of her top.

She crossed her arms over her chest as Jason eased himself out of the front of the vehicle and balanced a pair of wooden crutches under his armpits. Her face heated up as he eyeballed her and she had no doubt both Maisie and Jason had a good idea what had been going on here.

"So, was I right, old mate?" he said with a mocking grin at Chase.

Chase bowed from the waist. "You were, and I have to tell you she's not going home. I'm keeping her."

Cassie held up her hand. "What the heck are you talking about?"

"I told Chase years ago he'd love my baby sister. All I had to do was get her here. It was Maisie's coup de grace with the sexual dysfunction that sold it."



"I'm confused." Cassie frowned, trying to work out what they were talking about.

Maisie rushed forward and grasped her hand. "I lied to you. It's eating at me so much I just have to tell you the truth. Chase doesn't have a problem."

"I know that." Cassie grinned, cast a sidelong glance at Chase and leant forward to drop a soft kiss on Maisie's cheek. "It's okay. Don't worry about it."

Chase stepped up and placed an arm about Cassie's shoulders. "It worked out fine this time, Mother, but no more interfering. I'll run my own life from now on."

Maisie shrugged. "I didn't really interfere. I just did what I was told."

"Huh? Who told you to pretend I had a problem to get Cassie here?"

Jason moved forward, a pleased expression on his face. "I told you at college I'd get you back one day for all those practical jokes you played on me. Meet your nemesis. I am the king!"

"You lost me, mate," Chase said with a puzzled frown.

"It was all Jason's idea," Maisie said. "He wants to move here permanently, but doesn't want to leave Cassie in America, so we had to give her a reason to want to come live in Australia. He had me ring your dad's old friend, the dean of the college Cassie attended, and get him to suggest a thesis topic to her. When she told me about it, I gave her an easy excuse to come here when I told her you had problems. Simple."

Chase looked at Cassie and started to laugh. She fell against his chest and joined him, her sense of the ridiculous getting the better of her. She couldn't even be angry with her brother, because he'd helped her achieve what she'd wanted for the last four years, even if he was the biggest manipulator she'd ever known.

"My God," Cassie gasped out, "we've been set up by Machiavelli himself."

"Don't forget his faithful minion," Maisie chimed in.

Cassie grinned at Chase. "Wanna go riding? I have a feeling I'm going to need lots of practice if I'm going to live here. Giddy-up, cowboy!"

## Alexis Fleming

Alexis Fleming's first book was a bedtime story for her children called Sammy the Snail, written and illustrated totally in crayon. She hooked her children in and created a new career for herself, a career that gives her immense satisfaction and a lot of fun. She now writes her own bedtime stories, but be warned, these are strictly adults only!

A voracious reader, Alexis' first love has always been romance, whether on this world or the next. Now she turns her hand to erotic romance, giving her readers a taste of the steamy side of love, along with a dash of comedy.

When she isn't tied to her computer creating sizzling stories, Alexis, along with her husband and a demon cat called Chloe, runs a motel situated on the edge of a National Marine Park in Jervis Bay, New South Wales, Australia. You can visit with Alexis at [www.alexisfleming.net](http://www.alexisfleming.net).