

A photograph of a man's bare, muscular torso on the right side of the frame. On the left side, there is a corset with white laces and a patterned fabric. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the man's physique and the textures of the corset. The background is dark and moody.

BARBARA SHERIDAN

*Sweet  
Medicine*

A Total-e-bound Publication



[www.totalebound.com](http://www.totalebound.com)

Sweet Medicine

ISBN # 978-1-906328-16-0

©Copyright Barbara Sheridan 2007

Cover Art by Anne Cain ©Copyright June 2007

Edited by Claire Siemaszkiewicz

Total-e-bound books

This is a work of fiction. All characters, places and events are from the author's imagination and should not be confused with fact. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, events or places is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form, whether by printing, photocopying, scanning or otherwise without the written permission of the publisher, Total-e-bound eBooks.

Applications should be addressed in the first instance, in writing, to Total-e-bound eBooks. Unauthorised or restricted acts in relation to this publication may result in civil proceedings and/or criminal prosecution

The author and illustrator have asserted their respective rights under the Copyright Designs and Patents Acts 1988 (as amended) to be identified as the author of this book and illustrator of the artwork

Published in 2007 by Total-e-bound eBooks 1 The Corner, Faldingworth Road, Spridlington, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, LN8 2DE, UK.

### **Warning:**

**Warning:** This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-sizzling*.

# **SWEET MEDICINE**

**Barbara Sheridan**

## *Dedication*

To Anne for the gorgeous cover and to Claire for helping  
breathe new life into Lucy's story.

## Chapter One

### Warburton, Indian Territory

#### Early Spring, 1898

"Seth is dead, Lucy."

Lucy Willis stood and began to unfold and refold the freshly washed laundry. "I know he's dead, Star. I watched your husband execute him."

The sharp words hit their target dead centre. Star Hillhouse dropped her bone china teacup. It struck the edge of the pine table and shattered, sending a spray of hot chamomile tea across the front of her lace-trimmed blouse. She gave her stepsister an angry look, her eyes darting towards the door leading to the back porch. "Lucy, please. Jason didn't want to shoot Seth. He had to. You know that." Star paused and removed the shards of china from her lap. "Jason still has nightmares about that day," she said softly.

Lucy sighed and retrieved a clean towel from the nearby linen drawer. "I'm sorry, Star," she said as she blotted up the tea. "I know being ordered to execute Seth tore Jason apart." She set the damp towel aside then sank down onto the pressed back chair she'd been sitting on earlier, regretting both her words and the tone with which she'd said them.

Star patted Lucy's hand. "I don't mean to push you so, but I can't help it. You've been a widow for five years and you're only twenty- three. You should think about accepting some of those offers to step out you've gotten. A lot of men around these parts would show more interest if you'd only give them half a chance."

Before Lucy could tell her stepsister — again — that she had no desire to "step out", she was interrupted by her son, Joshua and Star's daughter, Nita, who burst into the kitchen bickering as they invariably did. Star soothed Nita's injured feelings and handed each child a cookie from the plate in the centre of the table, then sent them out to the barn where her husband was tending to

a new foal.

Star waited until the children left the back porch before speaking. "As I was saying, it's high time you let yourself live again. Lord knows I'm not suggesting you need a husband to feel complete, but a little male companionship would be good for you, and for Joshua, too."

"No, Star, I—" Lucy was interrupted again; this time by the shrill cry of her new nephew.

After Star left the room, Lucy took a gingersnap from the plate on the table and crumbled it as she thought. She did the same to a second cookie and then a third, debating the decision she'd been putting off for weeks.

She didn't want to go on being "poor young Widow Willis" whom everyone was anxious to either marry off or protect. She expected such behaviour from her parents and a few friends, but not her sister. Star, with her strong opinions on women's independence should understand, but she didn't.

Though sorely tempted by the prospect of leaving Warburton and its dull, placid future behind, she was hesitant to throw her young son's life into such upheaval. And yet, the more Lucy thought about it, the more she felt she had to do something drastic to enrich her own life.

"Perhaps I'll head out to the pasture and graze. Some days I feel like a dairy cow." Star quipped when she returned to the kitchen a short time later. She stopped in her tracks upon seeing the mound of cookie crumbs in front of her stepsister. "Granted, they aren't as good as yours, but...."

Lucy looked down, blushing. "I'm sorry. I'll clean it up."

"Leave it." Star sat next to Lucy and took hold of her hand. "What's the matter? I haven't seen you do that in ages."

Lucy gave Star an embarrassed smile. "Not since Joshua was born and I wondered how I'd support us."

It had been frightening to be so alone with a child to raise. At times Lucy still felt like the lost girl who'd cried herself to sleep on her husband's side of the bed. She didn't like that feeling. She didn't like it at all. Her attention returned to the present when Star spoke.

"Don't you dare be too proud or too embarrassed to ask for help if you need it. No one has

to know; not Mother or Daddy, or even Jason. I've got a tidy nest egg from my articles and my share of the profits from the newspaper. Whatever you need is yours. Pay me back if and when you can."

"It isn't that," Lucy said. "I've been thinking of teaching full time instead of tutoring. I'm thinking of accepting Christine Ames' offer to teach at the Indian school over in Sweet Medicine."

Lucy was astounded when Star's expression went blank and an uncomfortable silence descended over them like a damp shroud. Many people had raised objections to her considering the job at the Cheyenne reservation school, *That's not the name of the school so I would think only Cheyenne needs the cap* but Star had been her strongest supporter. Until now. This made no sense. Star was half Choctaw, her husband a fullblood, as was Lucy's late husband, Seth.

"Star, if you say I shouldn't waste my time because they're uncivilised 'Blanket Indians' –"

"That's patently ridiculous, Lucy, and you know it. If they don't wish to find a way to mix their heritage with the 'modern world' that's been thrust upon them, they're only making it harder on themselves." Star paused. "I'll miss you. And what about Corby and Sabrina?" she asked, referring to her husband's widowed cousin and his young daughter whom Lucy had been looking after since birth.

Lucy smiled sadly as she thought of leaving the handsome sheriff and his little girl behind. "I care about Corby, of course, but there's no grand passion between us the way there is between you and Jason."

"What Jason and I share physically is wonderful, but it isn't everything, Lucy. You and Corby have been friends for ages and Josh loves him. Perhaps if you gave it more of a chance."

"I did," Lucy confessed. "Corby and I made love once, but something was missing. I felt sort of – empty – afterward."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"There's nothing to say."

Star pushed some of the cookie crumbs around with her index finger. "I have the feeling you've already decided. When will you go?"

"Soon. Can you look after Josh while I run into town and wire Christine?"

"Of course. I'll have Jason drop him off at your place after dinner."

As she left the telegraph office that afternoon, Lucy couldn't help but wonder what awaited her in Sweet Medicine and what had driven the previous eight teachers away in the short span of two years.

However, her questions and vague worries melted away once she returned to her little farmhouse and dug out the crate of teaching supplies she'd never really used.

She'd been bursting with ideas but had put a teaching career on hold when she married Set Willis the man she'd loved since they were children.

Lucy's reminiscence came to an abrupt end when a knock sounded on her front door. She welcomed her brother-in-law's cousin inside.

Corby Hillhouse took his usual seat on the right side of the old velvet divan. "I just ran into Jace and he told me you decided to take the job way over in Sweet Medicine."

Lucy sat opposite him. "It isn't so far, just the other side of the territory."

Corby's friendly grin faded. "Still, it's rough over in Oklahoma, especially for a woman on her own with a child to take care of."

Lucy's high spirits drooped although she kept her pleasant expression. "My friend Christine said Sweet Medicine is a decent place for its size. They have a school and a church and a well-stocked mercantile, and a nice hotel."

"We have all those things here," Corby reminded her. I know."

Lucy felt the same strained silence that had fallen over herself and Star and it took her spirits down. She stood and began to pace the small room. "I do wish everyone would stop trying to make me feel guilty. I want a change. I *need* a change. Josh and I will be fine. I'm not deserting you all, I just need — something. Maybe this is it. Maybe its fate that made Christine keep offering me the job when the other teachers quit. I might have taken it before now, but you needed a wet nurse for Sabrina."

Corby got up and came to her. "You're more than a baby nurse to me and I think you



know it." He took her hands in his. She pulled away. "I like you, Lucy. I always have. I'd be proud to call Josh my son and I know Brina would love to have you as a mother."

Lucy straightened her shoulders. She would not let guilt and a sense of duty sway her again. "I'm sorry, Corby, but it wouldn't work. That night...it wasn't all it might have been."

"Things could change in time."

Lucy backed away. "But they might not. I'm sorry."

Corby nodded and took his hat from the divan. "If you change your mind..."

"I won't," she said with conviction as she walked him to the door.

"I know a bit of Cheyenne from my cow punching days. If you want a lesson or two before you head out I'd be happy to oblige."

Lucy smiled, feeling her spirits rise again. "I'd like that."

## London England

Across the Atlantic, Trevor Lynbrook was also experiencing a rise in spirits after lunching with a few of his old colleagues and spending time at a recently opened charity hospital. Of the half dozen aristocrats who'd attended the opening to receive their due public congratulations for donating to the endeavour, Trevor's smile had been the only sincere one.

For being back there, walking the immaculate halls, seeing the rows of unfilled beds, and breathing in the tart, antiseptic-flavoured air, had been like coming home. He had been rather disappointed there hadn't been any patients to visit. He would have loved to get right in there under the bandages and examine a fresh suture, or even clean out an infected boil. Of course, if he had, he would have heard – for the umpteenth time – *You are no longer simply Trevor Lynbrook, physician. You are the Viscount Ashford, sole heir to the 12th Earl of Greylock . Your forebears have ridden alongside kings and married into the foremost families*

*of Europe. You simply cannot go around putting your hands on, wasting your time on that class of persons. It simply will not do. You have responsibilities. You have duties...*

Still, it had been a great afternoon and with a little strategic manoeuvring on his part, he

might be able to pay frequent visits to insure his grandfather's endowment was being put to proper use. Yes, he just might be able to get a piece of his old life back again.

"Here you go, Perkins," Trevor said in a chipper voice as he tossed his tall hat and silver handled walking stick to his butler. "I've decided to stay in tonight. I believe I'll dine in my room, but leave the brandy out. I rather like this feeling of clear-headedness."

"Yes, sir. But you have a visitor, sir. In the small drawing room."

Trevor took his foot off the bottom step of the curving staircase. He did not like the uneasy look in the older man's eyes. "Who is this visitor?"

"Lady Medford, sir. She said that she won't leave until you speak to her."

Trevor's spirits plummeted like a rock thrown from London Bridge. "I might as well get it over with."

Within five minutes, Trevor's face was hard, the look in his silvery grey eyes unrelenting. His tone was cold, almost vengeful. He fought against the vague stirring he felt at the sight of his former fiancée, so dark and lovely against the light grey of her mourning costume. "It took you two years to ask why I didn't go to Charlie's funeral?"

"He was your best friend," she replied, daubing at the corners of her eyes.

"He stole the woman I loved," Trevor shot back. He saw the truth in Gwynne's dark eyes, the truth he'd tried to deny for three years. It hurt worse than ever and served to strengthen the affirmation he'd been living under since she'd left him – that women were to be used as they used men. "What do you want, Gwynne?"

"I made a dreadful mistake, Trevor. Can you ever find a way to forgive me? I'll make it right. I'll do anything to make it right between us again."

The old Trevor would have listened, but the new Trevor would not allow it any more than his family would allow him to pursue his dreams. "What do you want, Gwynne?" he repeated, getting up to pour himself a large glass of brandy.

Gwynne wiped her cheeks, her eyes suddenly clear. "I'm penniless. Charlie had a mountain of debts. His solicitor graciously allowed me to keep the one insurance policy, but –"

"But you've wasted it on those Parisian clothes, lavish dinners and a dozen servants,"

Trevor said flatly.

"It wasn't wasted. There are certain standards which must be met if one is to be accepted into polite society, you know."

"Oh, I know," Trevor grumbled. "I know all about what 'polite society' demands." He tossed back the contents of his glass then poured another drink.

"Well?" Gwynne asked after a time.

"No."

"Do you want me to beg?"

"I want you to leave," he told her, as he reached for the bell pull.

"You'll live to regret this," Gwynne hissed as the butler opened the door.

Trevor drained the contents of his glass. "I stopped living a long time ago, my dear."

## **Sweet Medicine, Oklahoma Territory**

"Good morning, children!" Lucy said brightly as her students took their seats.

Some were clearly uncomfortable. They were used to learning outdoors, their Cheyenne history taught by their elders in the forms of stories like ancient fables, their main subject that of survival, of providing for and tending to families out on the plains.

But like all children, they were eager for knowledge and Lucy took it upon herself to defy the governmental handbook Christine's husband had given her and teach them in her own way. She'd started by displaying the picture books, paper, slates and chalk and encouraging the Cheyenne children to explore and experiment to their heart's content, although she drew the line at the eating of chalk and the using of pencils as arrows.

Lucy began passing out the slates and letter cards. She overlooked the restlessness of those who could not sit still at the uncomfortable desks, and allowed them to sit on the floor. But one child's restlessness did catch her notice.

"Are you all right, White Dove?"

The girl nodded, but squirmed once again.

Something in the girl's eyes troubled Lucy though she couldn't put her finger on it. She called to Benjy Red Eagle, whose father ran the mercantile in town. "Benjy, I need you to translate for me. I'm not sure about the correct phrasing. Ask White Dove if she has any pain."

"She says her belly is a little sore, but not too bad."

Lucy touched the back of her hand to White Dove's forehead. She didn't feel feverish. "Did she eat anything different than usual?"

White Dove shook her head. "No."

One of the other children chimed in and Benjy translated although Lucy was able to get the gist and smiled. "He says she ate the whole big piece of cake you gave her to take home and she ate his, too!"

Lucy left Benjy in charge while she went across to her house and mixed up a weak bicarbonate solution to help White Dove's indigestion, confident the girl would soon be her usual cheerful self.

She wasn't.

By ten o'clock she began to run a fever, and feel nauseous. By eleven she was crying out from the pain in her lower right side.

"Benjy!" Lucy shouted, scooping up the moaning child in her arms. "Ride into town, get Dr. Slater!"

"Mama?" Joshua asked as he watched his mother try to comfort his sick friend. "Is White Dove gonna die?"

Lucy forced a smile. "Of course not, honey. Dr. Slater will help her get well, just the way Grandpa helped you when you were sick last winter."

"I don't like Dr. Slater. He looks mean and he smells funny. I wish Grandpa Quinn was here."

*So do I, Lucy thought.*

## London, England

Following Gwynne Medford's visit, Trevor cloaked his discontent in the festive colours of gambling chips, painted women and mind-numbing drink until fate intervened in the form of an irate husband with a loaded shotgun.

Trevor winced as much from the searing pain in his buttocks as from the withering stare of his paternal grandfather, the Earl of Greylock.

"I know Fitzhugh is past seventy, but did you have to bed his wife in his very house, with him asleep across the hall?"

"She was quite adamant," Trevor explained. "It took more than a little persuasion to talk her out of wanting to do it on the dining table in front of him."

The Earl shook his head and adjusted his sapphire stickpin. "All things considered, I suppose it's a blessing in disguise. At least it got you sober, away from the gaming tables and out of the whorehouses for two weeks."

Trevor scowled, preparing himself for yet another lecture on the need for him to conduct himself as befitted his station in life. If only he could turn back time and be the youngest male of the line who was free to pursue a true career. He was about to ask his grandfather – again – why it was considered respectable to indulge in idle pleasure but a disgrace to soil one's hands with a pauper's blood in order to save a life.

"You aren't even listening, are you?"

Trevor looked up. "Forgive me. You were saying?"

"I said that I'm sending you to America."

Trevor's light brows arched. "Have I embarrassed you that badly? Am I to be banished until the scandal blows over, or am I to wed some insipid heiress whose dowry will replenish the Lynbrook coffers?" Trevor's silver grey eyes filled with contempt at the prospect of a marriage.

"The coffers are quite full, no thanks to you and your spending of late. I'm sending you to set up a medical clinic for red Indians in a place called Sweet Medicine." The Earl unconsciously

fingered the irregular bald patch behind his right ear.

"I'm going where, to do what?"

"You heard me."

Trevor rolled his eyes and swept his fingers back through his sandy hair. Suddenly, the prospects of becoming a "remittance man" or wooing insipid heiresses were looking much better. "Are there no doctors in America capable of building this clinic?"

"More than a few, I imagine, but this is a personal favour to Pat McNamara."

*You sir, are hooked through the gills*, Trevor told himself. There would be no wriggling out of this horrid task if it was a favour to the man who'd saved his grandfather's life three decades ago.

Trevor combed through his hair again, his eyes narrowing suspiciously. "Why me? I thought medicine wasn't a proper occupation. Besides, I haven't practiced in so long I couldn't find the right end of a stethoscope if my life depended upon it."

"Why then do you go out of your way to harangue poor Dr. Sheffield when he comes to see you?"

"Your 'poor' Dr. Sheffield is a bloody incompetent fool, that's why. That stupid bastard tried to bleed and purge me!" Trevor's well-formed jaw tensed and he forgot that the Earl had never answered his original question. "I was shot in the arse and that cloth-eared git thinks an enema is the cure!"

"I'm booking your passage this afternoon. How soon do you wish to leave?"

Heaving a weary sigh, Trevor laid his head back on the mound of goose down pillows and stared blankly at the pastoral scene painted on the high ceiling. "Make it three weeks from now. I should be sufficiently healed by then."

**Sweet Medicine,  
Oklahoma Territory**

*Dear Christine,*

*I'm making a royal mess of things. The Cheyenne refuse to send their children to school, and who can blame them? Certainly not me. I wouldn't trust Joshua in the hands of a teacher who killed one of her students the first week on the job!*

*I realise I didn't literally kill White Dove, but I feel as though I did by allowing that town quack, Slater to treat her. Daddy said that the appendix would have ruptured anyway, but I can't help but wonder if a trained surgeon could have saved her.*

*I suppose there's no point in second guessing myself, but it's times like these when I wish I possessed my stepsister, Star's bravery. She would have attempted the operation herself, relying on her own steady hand and the knowledge our father tried to instil in us.*

*Daddy wasn't able to recommend anyone who might practice medicine for the reservation, but apparently my Uncle Pat knows a brilliant young doctor in search of a challenge. As long as he knows what he's doing and isn't prejudicial towards the Cheyenne, I'll be pleased. (Have you had any luck with the clinic fund-raising effort? If not, this doctor will just have to travel to his patients or secure his own facility.)*

*I'm afraid that's all there is to report this time. Hopefully, in a few weeks I'll have better news. I won't give up unless you fire me or the Cheyenne physically remove me from Sweet Medicine (which they may very well do as I plan to go out to their encampment after I mail this. I am determined to get an audience with their reclusive leader, Angry Wolf.)*

*Give my love to Vance and the children.*

*Yours affectionately,*

*Lucy*

Lucy's unease turned to fear once the horse drawn buggy neared the Cheyenne encampment, for blocking the narrow road were two mounted warriors.

Shirtless, each wore a breastplate of hair-pipe bones and decorated with brass beads and dangles of horsehair fringe and it was all too easy to imagine their well-sculpted faces painted in the bright colours of war.

With the Cheyenne words Corby Hillhouse had taught her running through her mind like

so much gibberish, Lucy greeted the men in the sign language she'd learned years ago from her Uncle Pat. *Friend*, she signed twice.

The men continued to glower, testing her resolve. When her only response was to give her worried son a reassuring hug, they ordered her down from her wagon, brandishing their lances, barking words in a harsh tone.

Lucy stayed a discreet distance behind the mounted warriors. They spoke among themselves and a few of the words drifted her way. Her grip on Joshua's hand tightened and he responded to the unconscious act.

"Mama, I wanna go home. To our real home."

"We'll be all right, honey," Lucy said in her calmest tone. "They want us to be frightened so that I leave Sweet Medicine like the other teachers did."

Josh stopped walking. "Yeah. I wanna. I won't fight with Nita no more. I miss 'Brina and Uncle Corby."

Lucy stooped and kissed her son's cheek. "Don't worry. I won't let anyone hurt you."

Before she could say anything more, one of the Cheyenne warriors began shouting orders for her to keep up as they veered off the road and took a longer, more rocky course, which Lucy guessed was to further test her mettle. They walked close to thirty minutes before reaching the Cheyenne encampment.

Unlike many of their brethren who'd taken to living in small frame houses, Angry Wolf's band chose to live in traditional conical lodges. These government issue canvas tipis were arranged in a circular pattern, their door flaps facing east to greet the rising sun.

Lucy's eyes were immediately drawn to the largest tipi, the only one constructed of buffalo hide. She estimated that it was comprised of over a dozen full sized skins and she took a moment to study the decoration painted on the outside, various scenes depicting the war exploits of its owner, Angry Wolf.

Expecting to be led directly there, Lucy was a little surprised when her escorts approached the first lodge to her right, and stepped inside. While she waited for them to reappear, she stole a look around the small village, so empty, so devoid of life. Her friend, Ben



Red Eagle had told her that it was usually a bustling little community. Obviously, the inhabitants had been instructed to keep out of sight lest her very presence bring death to them as it had to White Dove.

"Mama," Josh said softly, reaching out.

Lucy picked him up. "It's all right, honey —" She broke off as her escorts exited the tipi followed by White Dove's parents, Pretty Woman and Brave Bull.

Both bore the healing scars of grief mutilation and Pretty Woman had cut her waist length hair to above her shoulders to lament the loss of her only surviving child.

Lucy empathised with the other woman, but unease for her own child's safety turned to cold fear when the bereaved father raked his malevolent black eyes over her. He muttered a few Cheyenne curses then went back inside.

The taller of the two escorts turned to Lucy and addressed her in sign.

*Leave the child.*

Lucy shook her head.

He signed again, this time adding that it was an order from their chief, but again she refused. He and his companion conferred in whispers then the taller warrior said slowly in English. "*Leave the boy, or leave this place and trouble us no more.*"

"I'm scared, Mama," Joshua mumbled, his large dark eyes pooling with tears, his small chubby hands grasping her shoulders. "I'm real scared."

Lucy held him tighter as she studied the hard faces of her escorts. If they wanted her dead, she would be, they wouldn't play this unnerving game.

"Leave the boy," the taller man ordered again in stilted English.

Joshua whimpered. Lucy hugged him and kissed his cheek. "Shhh, honey. It's all right. It's a test, I think. They want you to wait with White Dove's mother while I speak to chief Angry Wolf."

"White Dove told me her mama was nice. She was 'posed to ask her to make me a toy."

"Leave him white woman. Now."

Lucy wavered, searching Pretty Woman's eyes for any sign of vengeance. All she saw was

a profound sadness.

Pretty Woman held out her hand. "Safe," she said.

Lucy put Joshua down. "I'll be back as soon as I can. Be a good boy."

"Yes, Mama," he answered, placing his hand into that of White Dove's mother.

Lucy felt the stares of hidden eyes as her escorts took her on an unnecessary circuitous route to their leader's lodge. This was no doubt part of the test as well and she easily imagined how frightening it must have been for the other teachers who must have fantasized that those who watched from within their odd homes were poised for attack, the lurid images of dime novel massacres and bloodthirsty savages fuelling their terror and driving them back to the safety of eastern civilisation.

*Your trick won't work on me*, Lucy thought triumphantly. Her thoughts broke off when they reached Angry Wolf's tipi. She was shoved through the door flap and nearly lost her balance before her eyes could adjust to the sudden change in the brightness level. One of the first things she saw illuminated by the small fire in the centre of the lodge was the Cheyenne leader himself.

He presented an imposing figure with his rigid back and cruel expression, and Lucy doubted her friend Ben's claim that Angry Wolf was a thoughtful, generous man.

Lucy remained silent, waiting for him to make the first move and as she looked at him she couldn't help but notice that the government issued trousers he wore beneath his buckskin shirt had had the crotch cut out so that they were more like traditional leggings. Instead of a breechclout covering the gap, however, Angry Wolf was naked, his genitals barely concealed by the fringed lower edge of his heavily beaded shirt .

Lucy breathed a quiet sigh. These intimidation tactics were wearing her patience. She wondered if the next part of the repertoire consisted of the chief brandishing a bloodied knife and threatening to add her blonde hair to his collection.

At last he gestured for Lucy to sit opposite him and she did so, her knees bent to the side. She supposed that some of the other teachers naturally emulated their host who sat cross-legged, which she knew to be a social gaffe as far as Cheyenne women were concerned.

Still Angry Wolf said nothing. He simply stared at her, his hawk like eyes cold and

intense. He stood and placed his hands on his lean hips, smirking when the action caused the bottom edge of his shirt to rise exposing more of his genitalia for her benefit. He smirked.

Lucy appraised his member coolly despite its increasing arousal. She stood to look the chief directly in the eye, then spoke in English, having heard that he was quite fluent when he chose to be.

"I am widowed and have a son, so the sight of your organ does not frighten me; although I suspect it had a much different affect on the unmarried women hired to teach before me."

"You should be afraid, white woman. I can keep you captive as we used to do when we were free. I can use your body many times a day in many different ways. I can grab you by the hair and make you pleasure me with your mouth."

*No wonder Christine lost so any teachers so quickly,* Lucy thought. An innocent young woman would be devastated by such words. Lucy smiled indulgently. "As I said, I was married."

Angry Wolf glared as he stepped around the fire. He stood within a hair's breadth of Lucy. "I could be like the Pawnee and let all the men in this camp use you before they tortured you to death."

Lucy did not flinch. "If you wanted to rape or kill me, you would have done it instead of playing this game."

"For a small woman, you have a large mouth."

Lucy silently counted as the Cheyenne turned his back. She was more determined than ever to get through to him. "The life you knew is gone," she said softly. "You have to allow your people to learn new ways just as my husband's people did."

The chief spun and skewered Lucy with a deadly look, pointing a menacing finger at her. "Your husband's people were fools! You will not teach our children to hate us! You will not cut their hair! You will not take their names from them! I will not let you make them ashamed to be Cheyenne! You tell this to the Ames woman and her spineless husband!"

Lucy stood her ground and struggled to keep her own temper in check. She followed when Angry Wolf returned to the other side of the fire. "I am not like the missionaries at the boarding schools. I wouldn't teach your children that being an Indian is a disgrace any more

than I would teach that to my own son. Use your language. Keep your customs. Wear your hair any way you damned well want to, but please, give your young people a chance to adapt to the white world. If you don't, then the Cheyenne are truly doomed."

Angry Wolf turned on her again, his brawny arms folded across his chest. "Adapt to your white world? You would have me be like those in town? They bring disgrace on our people!"

"That's not what I mean—" Lucy was interrupted by the plaintive wail of an infant. The sound came from the far side of the lodge which was deep in shadow. It was a pain filled, hungry cry and instinct pulled Lucy towards it.

Huddled beneath a thin blanket was a girl no more than eighteen. She was holding a baby who nursed fitfully, his cries becoming louder, bringing tears to his mother's eyes. She looked up at Lucy, silently begging for help.

"What's wrong?" Lucy asked quietly.

"He is hungry," Angry Wolf said. He handed the young mother a wooden bowl containing cow's milk. "She does not have enough milk and there are no other babies in camp for anyone to help her."

The baby refused the cow's milk and began to cry harder.

The wail tore at Lucy and she knelt down, opening the concealed slits in her shirtwaist and chemise, glad that she'd decided to bring her old clothing instead of buying new things as her sister suggested. "Please, give him to me." She held out her arms.

The Cheyenne girl looked to Angry Wolf, her eyes pleading for him to agree.

"You would feed him?" he asked skeptically?

"Of course. I helped nurse my sister's infant when she took ill." The baby's shriek made her wince and she felt what milk she had left let down, engorging her nipples. "Please?"

Angry Wolf nodded his consent, then retired to his place by the fire.

The Cheyenne girl was noticeably relieved once Lucy settled the baby at her breast and he began to nurse greedily.

Lucy smiled down at the suckling baby. How much he reminded her of Joshua at that age. She ran her fingertips along the side of his face and cooed to him as she'd done to her own child

and later to Sabrina Hillhouse and her nephew James. "Such a pretty baby you are, and you're so hungry. I know you'll grow up big and strong like your father. You look just like him, yes you do—"

"He is my grandson. His father was my youngest, Soars Like A Hawk. The cholera took him last winter."

Lucy glanced over her shoulder. "I'm sorry, but I'm not surprised, considering Dr. Slater's so-called skill," she said, noting that Angry Wolf had put on his breechclout.

The Cheyenne snorted his contempt. "He is no medicine man. Why did you let him cut White Dove?"

Lucy reared back as if slapped. "I'm sorry. My father is a doctor and I assumed...I'm sorry, so very sorry..."

Angry Wolf came forward after a time, watching the trickle of tears slide down Lucy's cheeks. "You meant White Dove no harm. Tell me, would your father come here, take away the white sickness?"

"He can't, but my uncle is sending a doctor to Sweet Medicine." The baby fell asleep and Lucy set him down in the crook of his dozing mother's arm. She wiped her cheeks, rearranged her clothing then followed Angry Wolf to the other side of the lodge.

"Your daughter-in-law is exhausted. Have you made her your wife?"

"You are jealous that I might lie with her. Do you desire me, white woman?"

Lucy frowned. "I meant to ask if she takes care of you. Does she cook, do chores?"

"Of course."

Lucy looked around the well-tended lodge then at her host. From the condition of both it was obvious that the girl took care of her father-in-law and his home to her own detriment.

"That poor girl needs rest to help her milk replenish itself and she can't get any if she's running herself ragged waiting on you like a slave."

The chief's expression hardened once more. "She is a woman. Do you expect me to cook for her?"

Lucy waved her hands in a show of disgust. "If things go on like this, both mother and

child will suffer. I don't think you want to see that. Can't you ask one of the other women to keep house for you? Better yet, let your daughter-in-law and grandson stay with me a while. I can nurse the baby and give her more time to rest."

"You stay here. Live with us."

"I can't," Lucy said quickly. I have to live near the school. I still have to teach the Red Eagle children as well as my son."

Affronted, Angry Wolf stood and turned his back. "You go now."

"But your grandson —"

"Go!"

He called in the two warriors who'd escorted Lucy to the camp and she knew that the subject was closed. She left without further comment, hoping that he would at least consider all that she'd said, especially about his family.

Lucy was escorted back to Joshua who was sitting outside with Pretty Woman, playing with a mound of polished stones as he munched on a strip of dried beef. "Thank you for looking after him." She paused then with a combination of halting Cheyenne and sign language said, "I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me. I would have done anything to keep White Dove safe."

Pretty Woman nodded, her eyes brimming with tears.

Lucy and Joshua followed their mounted escorts on foot back to her wagon. It surprised her when one of them lifted Joshua then held out his hand to help her climb up. She was even more surprised when the taller man returned to his horse returning moments later with a little strung bow and a few blunt-tipped arrows which he gave to Joshua.

"They are from White Dove's father," he signed. "He forgives."

Lucy's lagging spirits lifted a notch although a part of her remained concerned about Angry Wolf's grandson and daughter-in-law. Perhaps when Uncle Pat's protégé arrived, he could help her get Angry Wolf to listen to reason.

## Chapter Two

Dr. Trevor Lynbrook alighted from the cramped stage coach the following afternoon, his face resembling a piece of marble that had been chiselled into a mask of utter contempt. *So this is it, Sweet Medicine, Oklahoma Territory*, he thought, stretching his stiff back. He massaged his left knee which had gotten a devil of a cramp in it. If he wasn't a gentleman he'd rub his aching arse as well. Would it have been so blasted difficult for the backwoods fools to extend the rail line another thirty miles?

"Here ya go yer lordship!" the stage driver yelled, throwing Trevor's large leather valises to the ground.

"Be careful with that, you oaf," Trevor warned when the man climbed down and reached inside the coach for the small trunk and leather satchel containing his medical instruments.

"Do forgive me, yer graciousness," the driver drawled before setting the trunk down with a thud.

Cursing under his breath, Trevor quickly unlocked the lid and checked to see that nothing had been broken. He closed it then set the satchel on top of the trunk, looking up when the driver whistled and motioned to two scraggly red Indians who were lounging on the wooden sidewalk in front of the saloon.

"Slim Face! Three Fingers! Git yer red asses over here and carry this man's bags to the hotel."

Trevor's mouth dipped into a deeper frown as the Indians staggered towards him, affirming his worst suspicions of this God forsaken hell-hole and its inhabitants. He studied the Indians' dirt smudged faces, stringy hair and tattered hodgepodge of native and white clothing. He shuddered to think what sort of vermin resided upon their person. He decided then and there to treat whatever ailments this pair and their savage kinsmen currently had, wire Pat McNamara that all was well then return to the civilized world post-haste.. His attention drawn

by the sound of voices, Trevor looked towards the men who had exited the saloon to taunt the Indians with slaps and shove in addition to words.

“Three Fingers don’t mean one-handed you dumb ass!”

“Can’t you see this here’s a fine gentleman? Get his gear to the hotel pronto!”

The older looking of the two Indians the one they’d called Slim Face, looked to Trevor, palm outstretched. “You pay?”

Trevor scowled. “How much?”

“Four bits,” he replied with a bleary eyed smile.

“What?”

One of the cowboys laughed. “The price of a drink. Fifty-cent.”

From his pocket Trevor took a few American coins, dropping two quarter dollars into the Indian’s palm, then gave his companion the same, then started towards the hotel, paying no mind to the curious stares and whispers he generated along the way. The Indians stopped and deposited his belongings on the ground.

“Take them inside you blasted fool!”

The Indian with the missing fingers gestured to the crudely lettered sign to the left of the double doors. *No Injuns or Niggers*

Grumbling, Trevor bent to pick up the tow large valises.

“You pay?” Slim Face asked once more, palm outstretched.

“I paid.”

“You pay?”

Trevor swatted the man’s hand away. “I paid, now go,” he said adding a cold blooded stare. The Indians ambled away. He took a crisp linen handkerchief from his breast pocket then wiped his palm, muttering to himself. “Bloody Christ, what am I doing amongst these vile inhuman creatures?”

He was grabbed by the coat sleeve.

His first reaction was to strike out, but once he saw that the responsible party was a woman, an attractive, pert, blonde woman, he held his temper in check.



"For your information those men are as human and you or I," she informed him in no uncertain terms, her blue eyes glittering like shards of ice in the sunlight.

"Is that so?" Trevor asked disdainfully.

"That is so."

To Trevor's surprise, his supercilious look, carefully cultivated through years of practice failed to have its usual cowing effect. Equally surprising was the way the woman continued to upbraid him, adding a few sharp pokes of her index finger for emphasis.

"I'll have you know that those 'vile creatures' were once two of the most celebrated warriors ever to ride the Great Plains. Together, Vipponah and Nahiossi counted more *coup* than six average men combined..."

Trevor failed to hear the rest of her discourse for he was struck by the brilliance of those blue eyes as she spoke, the sheer perfection of her lips as the unfamiliar words spilled so easily from them. She was a delicately boned woman but there was nothing delicate about her spirit, and in those few moments Trevor determined that a stay in this hell-hole might just be tolerable if he could get to know her better, whether she was married or not. He smiled.

"Do forgive me, my dear. I am not usually so-brusque."

"My name sir, is Mrs. Willis and I am not your 'dear' anything." With that, she lifted the hem of her serviceable black skirt and exited Trevor's presence with a regal aplomb that would rival any in the Royal Family.

Stepping forward, Trevor leaned on the nearby hitching rail, elbows resting on the rough dirty surface, all concern for his finely tailored clothing gone. His mouth curved into a thoughtful smile as he continued to watch the unflappable Mrs. Willis stride away, her hips gently swaying in a naturally erotic way. She disappeared into the sprawling mercantile across the road and he wondered if Mr. Willis was the proprietor. He would have to see about that. There were still some things he might need to purchase despite the medical supplies which should be arriving by wagon shortly.

Lucy paced in front of Ben Red Eagle's sales counter, making a rough gesture towards the front window. "If it wasn't for people like him, Nahiossi and Vipponah wouldn't be the way

they are."

Ben shook his head. "I've been telling you since the day you got here to stop worrying about those two."

Lucy stopped pacing, her jaw sagged open for a moment. "How can I not worry? How can *you*? Nahiossi is your uncle."

Ben leaned against the shelf behind him. "When our band was brought to the reservation years ago Three Fingers had a choice to make. He could have done like my father and taken the white man's road. He could have been like Angry Wolf trying to hold on to the old ways or he could take the coward's way out and drown his sorrows in a bottle. He made his choice, now he's stuck with it."

Lucy's hands gripped the edge of the counter. "People can change. If he was just given a chance, a little encouragement and much less condescension it would make a world of difference."

Before Ben could respond his wife Mary entered from the back, children following behind. Joshua rushed to his mother telling him how good Mrs. Red Eagle's oatmeal cookies were.

Lucy ruffled her son's black hair. "I get the hint. Ben, could you add some honey and oats to my order please?"



Trevor stared out the window of what was alleged to be the Imperial Hotel's finest room. It was a room less than half the size of the ladies' parlour in his family's London townhouse. The colours were drab, the furnishings sparse and worn, but it would suffice.

Trevor's somber expression turned to a slow smile when a familiar blonde female came into his line of vision, a bulging canvas sack slung over her right arm, her left hand clutching that of a swarthy-skinned lad. He chuckled softly then thought aloud, "If it isn't the beautifully indignant Mrs. Willis." His gaze was upon her as she stopped walking when two farm wagons stacked with sacks of grain and crates of chickens rolled along the dirt paved street. He

continued to watch her noting that for a small woman she possessed the hourglass shape his mother and sister-in-law spent hours trying to achieve with all manner of corsets and padding. Trevor stroked his chin. There was nothing false or stiff with regards to Mrs. Willis' feminine charms, he'd stake his estate and title on that.

A chicken feather stirred up by the jostling of the wagon floated through the air, landing upon Mrs. Willis' bosom. Laughing down at the boy beside her, she brushed the feather away with a graceful flick of the wrist. He watched her progress to the other side of the road. One of the two scraggly Indians approached her and Trevor tensed. She smiled, spoke to the man then handed over something from her bag. The other Indian appeared, leading a horse and buggy. She gave him a parcel as well before helping her son then climbing into the buggy herself.

She smiled and waved to the Indians then was gone.

An image of her was still hovering in the recesses of Trevor's memory the following morning when his breakfast tray arrived from the nearby restaurant. Tipping the shaggy haired young deliveryman Trevor asked, "Would you be so kind as to tell me where I might find the local schoolteacher?"

The man's eyes narrowed. "Which one?"

Trevor blinked, unable to believe that his backwater place was able to support one school let alone two. Now what was that girl's name? He'd been drunk at the time he'd gotten details of his 'assignment' and now couldn't remember what Pat McNamara had said. "Perhaps if you described them to me. I seem to have forgotten the name of the one I'm looking for."

The old man helped himself to a seat and a slice of toast. "The regular school is over next to the church. My sister runs that. A pretty little thing she is too. Has brown hair and big smile. She does have a touch of baby fat but that'd melt right off her if'n she had a brood of kids to tend to. You looking for an educated woman then, are you?"

Trevor nearly choked on his tea in part because it was horrid, but mainly because he had no desire to give some frontier woman a brood of babies. If that's what the Earl and McNamara had in mind they could jolly well forget it. "Your sister is a widow? I believe her name is something like Lucinda?"

The old man stood, his sun-blotched face darkening. "You must be looking for the Widow Willis then."

"Willis? This school of hers —"

"Is for useless injuns and half-breeds" the man snapped, leaving without further comment.

"My, my, my," Trevor whispered settling back into the lumpy chair. He took a crisp piece of bacon and chewed it slowly. Surely there was only one Mrs. Willis in this town. *Widow Willis*, he reminded himself the corners of his mouth lifting slightly. Perhaps his brief sojourn in this odious place would have its entertaining moments after all.

The encounter with Angry Wolf continued to gnaw at Lucy. She realised that what little bit of wet-nursing she might provide his grandson wouldn't be a cure-all but surely it would help. The child's mother was worn out. She needed rest and the baby needed any and all sustenance. If things continued as they were both of them would surely die. Why couldn't the chief see that? Why couldn't he believe that she'd only come to Sweet Medicine to help, that she wasn't trying to steal the children or turn them against their heritage? Surely the brief time the children were at school showed that. She hadn't forced them into wearing the clothing provided by the government. She hadn't chastised or tried to bully the children into following the prescribed policy.

Taking a sip of her ginger tea, Lucy seriously hoped that Angry Wolf wasn't being swayed by his male ego. That he wasn't exerting his male and chiefly authority just to prove that he was still the dominating warrior he once was.

Suddenly, Joshua's excited cries mingled with the thud of hoof beats to halt Lucy's thoughts. She went out onto the front porch tying the belt of her silk wrapper tighter. A small party of buckskin clad warriors led by Chief Angry Wolf waited. The ranks parted at a glance from the leader and Angry Wolf's daughter-in-law rode through on a spotted mare, her infant son strapped to a beaded cradle board tied to her back.

"Kimimela needs your help white woman," Angry Wolf announced. "I will return later. If they are well, I might let the children return to your school."

Lucy smiled then went to help the young mother down from her horse. She looked to the Chief. "Would you care to share supper with us?"

"Kimimela has her own provisions," he said pointing to the parfleche, the rectangular rawhide parcel tied to back of the mare.

Lucy returned his insulting look. "Kimimela is a guest in my home, a guest who needs complete rest. I will see that is properly fed and cared for."

Lucy smiled when the knock sounded on her front door. It was just as she suspected. Angry Wolf had returned, his earlier show of bravado for the benefit of those who accompanied him, to prove that he could not be dictated to by a mere white woman.

"Come in," Lucy called sweetly, continuing to nurse Kimimela's son while the young mother rested upstairs.

"Good Morning, Mrs. Willis. Allow me to—to..." Trevor Lynbrook's clear voice broke then trailed off as his gaze fell from Lucy's beautiful face to the swell of her breast, which was peeking out from the pale blue silk of her dressing gown. Her breast was full and round, her skin the most glorious shade of ivory he'd ever seen. Convulsed feelings overcame him as he stood there, watching her, watching him. There was a surge of absolute lust, a sense of discovery, a heady craving.

Lucy's mind was spinning like mad with question after question. Who was he? Why was he here? Why was he staring at her that way and why did she feel so—so all-overish? Suddenly, the Englishman's silvery grey eyes grew alarmingly wide. His mouth gaped open. Now what on earth—

The sensation of coolness made Lucy glance down to confirm what she already guessed, that Little Raven had fallen asleep, his head lolling to the side, exposing her bosom completely. Lucy shifted the baby and pulled the edges of her wrapper closed, while the strange warmth which had been filling her turned to indignation. "Joshua, come here!"

Lucy regretted the sharpness of her tone when her son came in looking as though he

expected to be accused of a crime he didn't commit. She gave him an apologetic smile. "Honey, please keep our guest company while I get dressed."

Joshua eyed the stranger warily. "Yes, mama."

Lucy stood. "If you will excuse me, Mr. —"

Trevor's expression went blank for a moment as he struggled to recall his name.

"Lynbrook. Trevor Lynbrook."

"Mr. Lynbrook, this is my son, Joshua Willis." Lucy gritted her teeth when the obnoxious Briton smiled and extended his hand for she fully expected him to wipe the "filthy Indian-ness" from his palm as he had done with the Cheyenne yesterday in town. He didn't. "I won't be long."

Trevor was looking with interest at Joshua's little bow and arrow when he heard the soft creak of the stairs that signalled the young widow's return. He looked up as she descended the last few steps. She'd clad herself in a plain gown that was the most unbecoming shade of olive green he'd ever seen. It was severe in the extreme with no trimming of any kind and yet its plainness accentuated her natural beauty. With the healthy pink blush tinting her porcelain smooth cheeks and the sparkle in her wide blue eyes, she was certainly the most exquisite creature he'd ever set eyes on and in that instant he wanted her beyond all reason.

Lucy sent Joshua on an errand, then came across the room. Trevor remembered his manners at last and rushed to stand, nearly falling when his toe caught on the leg of the divan. She took a seat on the small embroidered chair across from him, and folded her hands daintily in her lap. "Hello, again, Mr. Lynbrook. May I ask why you're paying an unannounced call at this early hour?"

Trevor licked his dry lips. "I don't mean to intrude, madam. I assumed that you'd be in the midst of your teaching duties this time of day."

Lucy shrugged. "I should be, but the only pupil I have today is my son. The Red Eagle children are taking a short trip with their mother and Chief Angry Wolf has had a change of heart about having the children of his band attend."

Without warning, Trevor's mouth blurted out the question that had been eating away at him since she'd sent her son from the room to take a snack to someone. "Who is Kimimela? Another son, a daughter, a – friend?"

They stared at each other for a long time, both surprised by the abruptness of the inquiry.

Lucy was the first to regain her composure and she levelled the viscount with a look that would have made her strong-willed sister proud. "Kimimela is a guest. She's the daughter-in-law of Chief Angry Wolf. She was having difficulty nursing so I offered to help her while she builds up her strength."

Trevor relaxed, feeling a mixture of both relief and awe. "Nursing? Surely your son has outgrown that stage."

"Yes he has, but back in Warburton I began wet-nursing a motherless child around the time Joshua was weaned. Not that any of that is your concern."

"Right you are." Trevor said thoughtfully, stroking his chin. He was most impressed by her compassion for he knew women who could barely bring themselves to nurse their own offspring, and some who couldn't – his own mother included. "Forgive my being forward it was idle curiosity. I meant no offence." "

Lucy nodded. "You never answered my question, Mr. Lynbrook. What brings you here?"

"You, actually. I'm a physician. I've come to tend to your Indians," Trevor replied, watching the pink blush fade from her cheeks as the realisation began to hit her.

"You? Uncle Pat sent you?"

"Yes."

She sprang to her feet and began pacing, wringing her hands, shaking her head in disbelief. Suddenly, she stopped and fixed him with a challenging look. "Uncle Pat couldn't have sent you! Uncle Pat wouldn't send someone like you!"

Trevor's spine stiffened. How dare she carry on as though he were some pox stricken whoreson? He stood and looked down on her, taking advantage of his superior height. "I assure you, madam, that your uncle did send me, although the request bordered on blackmail via my grandfather, the Earl of Greylock."

Lucy rolled her eyes. "I suppose you have a worthless title of your own."

"You are partially correct, madam," Trevor said, raking her with an icy stare. "I have the great misfortune of being the Earl's sole heir – the Viscount Ashford, to be precise." He paused and the corners of his mouth lifted in a smirking smile. "Feel free to address me as 'my Lord'."

"Not even if you hog-tied me, smeared me with honey and staked me to an ant hill," Lucy shot back.

Trevor straightened his starched shirt cuffs, adjusting the diamond studs fastening them. "As charming as that sounds, I believe I shall leave that type of behaviour to your Indian friends."

Lucy's sharp intake of breath broke the heavy silence of the room. Her cheeks mirrored the burning anger coiling through her small frame as she crossed the distance between them. "The Cheyenne may be just dark-skinned savages to you, but they are people the same as you and I. They already suffer terribly from the ravages of white diseases, malnourishment, and a general lack of concern from those responsible for their well-being. They certainly don't need anyone like you adding to their misery, so why don't you go back to your castle and do whatever it is you do. I'll wire Uncle Pat to send a real doctor."

"I *am* a real doctor, my dear, and I can't go back until I repay a debt of honour to your uncle," Trevor informed her, slipping his hands into his trouser pockets. "It might interest you to know that your uncle saved my grandfather's life some thirty years ago after the group he was travelling with was attacked by a Cheyenne war party." He paused. "I'll spare you the details of what those ignoble warriors did to a pregnant woman and her adolescent daughter." He was surprised to see her expression grow sad then harden once again.

"Tell me," Lucy said, a slight catch in her voice. "Is your real purpose here to repay a debt to my uncle or to exact revenge on these Cheyenne for a thirty year old injustice?"

Trevor mulled it over, watching as a band of sunlight fell upon her from behind. It enhanced the shimmering gold of her upswept hair and softened his own anger. "I don't expect you to believe me, madam, but I have no intention of botching the treatment of a sick patient. Any sick patient."



Lucy eyed him suspiciously. He seemed sincere enough, but she wanted an assurance.

"Do I have your word, then, that you'll treat the Indians as you would any white patient?"

Trevor smiled benignly, his attention drifting again to her hair. She should wear it loose more often, he mused, remembering the incredible sight, the way the ends of her hair curled and delicately skimmed the ivory fullness of her breast.

"Well, Mr. Lynbrook?" Lucy asked. "Do I have your word that you'll treat the Cheyenne fairly?"

"Yes, Mrs. Willis," Trevor said, imagining her as she'd been earlier. "I promise to do my very breast – best," he corrected instantly, hoping that she'd missed the slip.

She hadn't.

"Get out."

"It was an innocent slip of the tongue –"

"Get out!" Lucy shouted again, her face flushed, her eyes livid.

Ignoring the viscount's stammered apology, she shoved him towards the front door, slamming it in his face hard enough to rattle the framed photos on her parlour mantle.

Upon his arrival back in town, Trevor's first order of business was-finding a suitable place in which to set up his medical clinic. The next was to get the image of the Widow Willis out of his mind.

Unfortunately, all of Sweet Medicine's property owners loathed the idea of selling or leasing space to provide medical services to "those goddamned redskins".

Trevor swirled the watery whiskey in his glass, making a mental note to import his own stock as soon as possible as the town's leading citizen/mayor droned on ad nauseam. "That Angry Wolf still got some of the prime land in these parts and what does he do with it? Nothing. Hell fire, if it was mine, I'd have a hundred head grazing there..."

Trevor set his glass aside. "As much as I've enjoyed this chat, I really must be going. Should you or any of the other gentlemen change your minds, I shall be in residence at the hotel

until further notice.”

Squinting against the midday sun, Trevor stood outside the saloon for a time debating his next course of action. How in Heaven’s name was he to find a place for the clinic? His mind was a total blank until he caught sight of the town's leading merchant, Benjamin Red Eagle, or as Trevor had heard him referred to for the better part of the afternoon — “that high-priced-son-of-a-bitch-injun”.

Lucy wielded the rug beater like a weapon, striking the braided rug long after the last dust mote was carried away on the spring breeze. “That man!” she grunted, giving the rug three more swats for good measure, not caring that her arms were beginning to ache.

How dare that man come here? How could Uncle Pat let him, encourage him? How could he even think to call that grandiose oaf a splendid physician? Why his claim to medical fame could only be treating aristocratic ladies for the “vapours”. That man was no more fit to run a clinic she so desperately wanted to see established than she was to —

“Mama?”

Lucy stopped beating the rug and looked at her son. “Yes, honey?”

“Can you make lunch now? Me an' Kimimela are hungry.”

Lucy dropped the wicker rug beater and took hold of Joshua's chubby hand, trying to erase the image of that awful, awful man from her mind's eye.



“Have you any suggestions?” Trevor asked after appraising Ben of his unsuccessful attempt to rent a suitable space for his offices.

Ben finished arranging a row of shiny belt buckles on the counter in front of him. “It seems to me that the answer is as plain as the mud splotch on your left shoe.”

Trevor looked down, frowned then took his handkerchief and restored his shoe's shine. “And that plain answer is?” he asked, wiping the other shoe for good measure.

"Build yourself an office out by Lucy's school, and if you want some kind of official go-ahead, I'd recommend sending a wire to Christine Ames over in Guthrie. Her husband is in charge of Indian affairs for this area, but Christine is the one you want to contact to get things done."

"I daresay the Widow Willis would not be at all amused," Trevor said dryly before standing.

"Where are you going?" Ben asked.

"To send a telegraph. When I'm through there, perhaps you'll be so kind as to give me some information on Mrs. Willis. Since we're going to be neighbours it really is my duty to learn a bit more about her, don't you think?"

Tiny murmurs tumbled from Lucy's lips as she dozed on her bed, Little Raven nestled in the crook of her arm. She murmured again, feeling the brush of lips against hers. She inhaled deeply when an unmistakably masculine scent drifted towards her. It was wonderful. The kisses were wonderful. She shifted against the plump pillows, inhaling the scent again, delighting in the feel of those male lips skimming her chin, her throat. She let out a little laugh when the lips then feathers tickled her exposed bosom...

Lucy gasped and bolted upright, clutching the edge of her bodice. She picked up Little Raven when he began to fuss. She stood, glaring at Angry Wolf.

The Chief's dark eyes danced with amusement as he stood beside the bed, his muscular arms folded across his buckskin clad chest. "Do not look at me like a frightened deer, white woman. If I wanted to take you it would not be with my grandson beside you."

Lucy moved away from the bed and stood, her cheeks burning with a mixture of shame and anger. What was wrong with the men today? "You could have knocked on the door to announce yourself, you know."

The Cheyenne laughed. "Are you angry with me or with yourself for liking my kisses? Our women too, make those sounds of pleasure when touched by a man."

Lucy said nothing, unwilling to admit even to herself that she had done any such thing.

She pushed him out of her mind. "If you came to check on Kimimela, come with me."

Angry Wolf stepped in front of Lucy and led the way. He watched stoically as she returned his sleeping grandchild to its mother.

"I'll leave you alone, but please don't stay too long, it may tire her."

The chief did not reply. Lucy went to look in on her son who was in his room, busy with a set of wooden blocks. "I'm going to the kitchen to start supper, honey."

"Okay," Joshua said, intent on the beginnings of his tower.

Lucy was peeling potatoes when a knock sounded on the front door. She regretted opening it when she saw the visitor.

Anticipating her next move, Trevor held up his right hand when she tried to slam the door in his face. "I do believe you and I travelled this road earlier," he announced, taking advantage of her momentary chagrin to step inside her parlour.

"Get out." Lucy ground the words out between clenched teeth.

"Can do, but won't," Trevor said lightly, reaching into the breast pocket of his black jacket. "You may be interested in reading this."

Lucy snatched the telegraph message and read the opening sentence, certain her eyes were deceiving her. She hardly heard the sound of Chief Angry Wolf's voice from above.

"I will go now, white woman, but I will return tomorrow. There is a gift for you on your too soft bed," Angry Wolf proclaimed in from the top of the stairs.

*Too soft bed?*

The phrase ran over and over in Trevor's mind as he watched the Indian come down the flight of stairs as if he were the master of this house – and her.

"Forgive the intrusion, madam," he said in a low, seething voice. "Good day."

Lucy's brain slowly put the last few seconds into perspective and she coloured with humiliation as she realised the implication. "You wait right there –" She broke off when Trevor barged out. "Come back here!" She stopped on the threshold upon hearing a crash overhead and her son's cry of pain. She ran upstairs.

When Trevor stepped into his buggy he glanced back inside in time to see the Indian dash up the stairs behind the Widow Willis.

### Chapter Three

Joshua's forehead sported a bump the size of a bird egg from the tumble he had taken while standing atop his bureau to place a few more blocks on his tower. Once Lucy calmed him she showed Angry Wolf out, but not before giving him a piece of her mind on the importance of educating the children of his village.

She eyed the Cheyenne chief suspiciously as he rode off, certain that she caught a ripple of amusement beneath his stoic surface. If she didn't know better she would swear that he'd made his double-edged comment about the bed on purpose to make her look bad in Trevor Lynbrook's eyes. Not that it mattered, of course. She didn't give a fig what that pompous aristocrat thought of her. Still, a man coming from the vicinity of her bedroom announcing that he'd left a gift for her, was not something she wanted to have happen again. It could too easily be turned into idle gossip and drift back to Christine Ames, thus, putting her teaching position in jeopardy.

Lynbrook knew that Angry Wolf's daughter-in-law was her guest and it should have been obvious that it was her room the chief was leaving. Why only the basest sort of person could think otherwise.

*The sort of person lascivious enough to leer at a woman innocently nursing a hungry infant?* Lucy's damaged pride asked. *Exactly.*

The more Lucy thought about the way Lynbrook had stared at her — ogled her that morning, the more angry she became and she returned to her kitchen, mentally calling him every horrid name she could think of. She chopped the apples for her pie with a heavy hand imagining that she was hacking away at Trevor Lynbrook and his filthy mind. How dare he assume the worst about Angry Wolf's presence, and he had, she was certain of that now.

"My lord, indeed," Lucy muttered, cleaving another apple in half with a heavy swipe of her knife.

*There is a gift for you on your too soft bed.*

The Indian's echoing words brought a grumble from Trevor for he, too, had had numerous occasions to leave behind baubles in appreciation for sexual favours granted. Trevor grumbled again and slammed down his empty whiskey glass before pushing his way through a group of ranch hands coming into the saloon. They pushed back.

The next thing Trevor knew he was coming to consciousness on an uncomfortable bed in an unfamiliar room. He tried to sit up, but the room swam around him and a firm hand held him in place until he leaned back against the mound of pillows.

"Whoa now, doc," Ben Red Eagle said. "Just stay put a while and give your brains a chance to unscramble."

Trevor closed his eyes and groaned as a knife-like pain stabbed through his cranium. Although each word he spoke made the pain cut deeper, he asked, "What in the bloody hell happened?"

Suppressing a grin, Ben pulled a chair up next to the bed. "I can't say as I blame you for forgetting. You took quite a drubbing from those cowpokes. If you don't mind my asking, why on earth did you tangle with three armed men?"

"I have no idea, Mr. Red Eagle," Trevor mumbled, knowing that it was a lie. He did remember. As much as he hated to admit it, he'd brought it on himself and probably could have avoided the incident entirely even after the first man shoved him in response to the way he tried to push past on his way out of the saloon.

He should have let the incident go but for some reason the frustrations of recent times had exploded for no apparent reason.

"It might not be much consolation," Ben said. "But you busted them up pretty good before you went down and the barkeep pulled out his shotgun to break things up."

Trevor's generous mouth pulled into a smirk and he sat up, rubbing the bruised swollen knuckles of his right hand. "Hurrah." Trevor's smirk turned to a grimace upon a closer inspection of his injured hands. His operating hand wasn't broken but he wouldn't be holding a

scalpel for at least a week. Hopefully he wouldn't need to. He sat up, swung his legs off the bed and rubbed his throbbing temples. "I appreciate you scraping me up off of the ground."

"It wasn't me. It was Nahiossi – my uncle, Three Fingers."

"He is your uncle?"

"He is. I find it hard to believe at times myself. Oh and he said to tell you that he won't refuse any monetary thanks you might like to give him."

"Duly noted," Trevor said. He stood and turned towards the door, grimacing again when he caught sight of his face in the bureau mirror. He looked like a prize fighter – a losing prize fighter.

"My missus has some salve she uses for cuts and such. You're welcome to it."

"I'll be fine," Trevor said. He extended his hand to Ben. "Thank you again."

"Any time." Ben paused as he opened the door. "Whatever happened with Lucy? How did she take the news that you're gonna build your clinic next to her place?"

Trevor's back stiffened and his silvery eyes took on a wrathful sheen as he remembered the scene at her home. *I left a gift for you on your too soft bed...* "I have no idea. We never had the chance to discuss the matter. Goodnight. Thank you again for your hospitality."

Back in his hotel room Trevor took out his medical bag and nursed his wounds while telling himself that it made no difference to him if the Widow Willis chose to accept strange men into her bed. Why he knew many widows and dissatisfied married women who did the same thing, often with himself as the welcome recipient of their desires.

Why should Lucy Willis be any different? Why did he even care?"



Lucy stifled a yawn as she went out to greet the children Angry Wolf brought to her the following morning. She smiled and hugged each of them, then reintroduced them to Joshua and the Red Eagle children. She walked them all to the school a short distance from the house and spoke to Angry Wolf while they settled themselves inside.



"Feel free to stay. I think we'll have half days for the rest of the week to get them back in the routine. We should be finished by noon."

Angry Wolf looked down from his vantage point on the back of his horse. "I am no slave to the white man's clock. I will return for them when I think they have had enough of your teaching for the day."

The sound of singing lured Trevor to the schoolhouse door and he stood off to the side, peering in at Lucy Willis, who was pointing to letters on the blackboard as she led the children in a sing-song recitation of the alphabet. She continued the lesson by singing the simple words she had written beneath the letters. She began to make up silly rhymes with the one syllable words and before long the children giggled as did Lucy. Trevor smiled to himself, enchanted both by her creativity and her winsome laugh. His enchantment died a premature death when a threatening voice intruded.

"You will never have her, *Waquini*."

Trevor turned to glare at the Cheyenne. "I suppose you think you will."

Angry Wolf's dark eyes glittered dangerously and he said something in his native tongue which Trevor could not understand. Nonetheless, the tone of voice and the look in the Indian's eyes was enough to arouse the doctor's ire.

"That will be all for today, children. Joshua, please collect the slates," Lucy said, wondering why Trevor Lynbrook had returned and why he and Angry Wolf were at a standoff just outside the door. She went down the aisle between the rows of desks, aware of the quickening of her pulse as she took notice of the way the light played upon the classic angles of the Englishman's profile. Lucy immediately turned her attention to Angry Wolf.

"I've given the children their copy books and a pencil to take home. I wrote their names for them in English and would like them to copy it at least five times. I'm not concerned with perfect handwriting or neatness just yet. I want them to get used to working with pencils and forming their letters."

Angry Wolf crossed his arms over his chest which was bare save for the lightning bolts painted over his pectoral muscles. "You have given them new names, white woman? I forbid this! You know this!"

Lucy did not back away from the Cheyenne and she wondered why Trevor took a step closer to her side. "I did not give them Christian names, if that is what you mean. I told you I would never do that. I simply wrote out the Cheyenne word as best I could and the English translation." Lucy grinned. "I can't say I wasn't tempted to give a simple name like Bob to *Wahanassatta*."

Angry Wolf laughed. The humour was lost on Trevor, who was pleasantly surprised when Lucy offered him an explanation instead of leaving him out of the joke.

"In English *Wahanassatta*'s name translates to He Who Walks With His Toes Turned Outward." She laughed again. "It took quite a few lines to print that."

Her bright smile was infectious, but Trevor's good humour was quickly destroyed by Angry Wolf's next comment.

"You amuse me white woman. I believe I will come here tomorrow and let you teach me to mark your words."

Lucy smiled. "I told you before that all of your people are welcome here."

Angry Wolf answered with a curt nod. "I will think on this and decide if I should learn the white man's writing."

"Wonderful."

Angry Wolf turned to Trevor. "Will you be here tomorrow, *Waquini*?"

"I believe I will," Trevor replied coolly, accepting the veiled challenge.

Angry Wolf's answer was a grunt and he left with a flourish by vaulting onto his horse and racing ahead of his charges, breaking the quiet of the afternoon by whooping at the top of his lungs.

Trevor's expression was dark as he watched the Indians ride off. "What was that he kept calling me – *wapini*?"

"*Waquini*," Lucy corrected. She felt a slight flush of heat beneath the high collar of her

shirtwaist when Trevor turned his head and gazed down at her with entrancing silvery eyes. "I might be mistaken, but I think the word means 'Hook Nose'."

She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from giggling as she watched the colour rise in Trevor's cheeks once the insult hit home. He drew in a deep breath, swelling his already broad chest to the point where she thought his vest buttons would pop.

Trevor collected himself and straightened his shirt cuffs. "Hook Nose, indeed. "

"He was just teasing," Lucy said. She studied his nose, picking up on the slight imperfection now that it had been pointed out. "Actually, it gives you something of a boyish look." Now, for the first time she noticed the bruising around his left eye and the small cuts scattered over his chin and forehead. "You've been hurt. What happened?"

"It's not important," Trevor said softly, not wanting to detract from this perfect moment. His gaze travelled leisurely over Lucy's upturned face, so hauntingly beautiful in the afternoon sun. He simply had to sample those incredible lips of hers or suffer the pangs of starvation.

Lucy's entire body trembled when Trevor leaned in as if to kiss her and her lips tingled in anticipation.

"Hello there!"

Lucy jerked back at the sound of Ben Red Eagle's booming voice, coming to her senses in record time. Without a word she took the small crate of school supplies Ben was delivering and carried them inside, brushing past Trevor who offered to help.

She let the box down on her desk with an angry thud. What on earth had gotten into her? She smoothed down the front of her shirtwaist, patted her hair back into place before going back outside.

"So, doc, where are you building the clinic?" Ben asked as Lucy reached the doorway. "I think your best bet would be to attach it to the house and put a set of rooms on top for yourself."

Lucy's jaw dropped as Ben's words sank in.

"*What?* You can't think you're building a clinic here! You're not living out here!"

Trevor answered her sharply. "I would prefer to live and work in a more civilised place, madam, but since my purpose is to treat the Cheyenne you teach, it is only logical that my office

and apartments be here."

Lucy struggled to find her voice. "You have no right. This is government property!"

Trevor straightened his shirt cuffs. "I have the authorisation, my dear. In fact, I brought it to you yesterday afternoon." He paused waiting for her to reply. "The telegraph," he prompted. "Did you ever read it?"

Lucy dashed into her house, searching the parlour until she found the paper she'd shoved behind her son's photograph on the mantle above the hearth.

*...Wonderful! A splendid idea, Lord Ashford! My husband will certainly support your efforts and I'm sure you will receive an official commendation for donating the funds, materials and labour to supply and operate this much needed facility. Give my love to Lucy and thank her for bringing you here...."*

Lucy swore under her breath. This was abominable. She refused to deal with that lecherous man on a daily basis. She crunched the telegraph message in her fist. "I'll put a stop to this at once."

"Unfortunately, my dear, you can't."

Trevor's smooth, deep voice struck Lucy with a force she felt low in her stomach and she spun to face him.

"Oh, I can stop this. I will stop this. I have known Christine Ames since we were seventeen years old. We went to teacher's college together. I was her maid of honour when she was married and I'm the godmother to her first born," Lucy said confidently. "If I ask her to spare me the inconvenience of your abominable presence, she will."

Trevor said nothing as he remained leaning against the jamb of the door, his arms crossed in front of his chest. He was amused by Lucy's certitude, enchanted by her naiveté. "I do hate to burst your bubble, my dear, but Mrs. Ames will not agree to my leaving, not even to please you."

He watched Lucy's pretty blue eyes turn to ice and he let himself be held spellbound by the swaying of her hips as she strode across the room to face him.

"It is your bubble that will burst," she said, pointing her finger at him. "Christine is not the type of woman to be fooled by your cultured accent and false aristocratic charm. She —"

"She is a woman who likes the social power her husband's position and friends bring her," Trevor interrupted. He stood away from the door frame and slipped his hands into the pockets of his trousers. "I may not know your Christine, but I know many women like her. Her husband's current position is a stepping stone, your success here will allow her to step up to the next level, and any patronage I might offer is yet another crucial element to increase her own social standing, wealth, and power."

Lucy opened her mouth to protest but was unable to. As much as she hated to admit it, Lynbrook spoke the truth. Christine had married Vance Ames in part for his political ambitions and the attention it garnered her.

"You will not build on to my house," she said after a time, her tone lower than normal, her words clipped.

Trevor stepped forward, pleased that he'd called her bluff and won. "But, technically, my dear, it isn't your house, is it? It is government property. And I'm certain that if I pressed my suit, your dear best friend Christine would think it an excellent idea that we work so closely together."

Lucy clenched her fists at her sides and bit back the slew of vile names she wanted to call the pompous Trevor. She was about to bodily eject him, but he turned, speaking over his shoulder. "If you'll excuse me, I believe that I'll walk around and see exactly where I want to build my clinic and apartments."

"May I suggest the Gates of Hell?"

Trevor turned, cocking his head to the side, giving her a quizzical look. "But I thought you were against us being neighbours, my dear."

Each stroke of hammer against nail made Lucy cringe, for the pounding added to the headache she'd awakened with every morning for the past month. She stifled a yawn, then set her tea kettle on to boil. That horrid man had been constructing his blasted building day and night and she'd had just about enough. It was Sunday, for heaven's sake. Did that brute have no morals? Lucy chastised herself for asking such an obvious question, then went to the cupboard

where she kept the tea. If only she were as sound a sleeper as her son.

This incessant banging hadn't had the least effect on him. In fact, he seemed to thrive on it, spending each free moment of his time on the sidelines, watching the workmen build, running to fetch them hammers and extra nails when asked. She guessed that part of the attraction was the small 'wage' Lynbrook paid him for being an 'assistant apprentice carpenter', but there seemed to be more. It was as if Joshua actually enjoyed being in the man's presence and she thought that Star might have been right. Josh needed a man's influence in his life.

Lucy's shoulders sagged as she thought of her late husband and tried to picture him with their son, doing all the things he'd said he wanted to do when they talked of children before their marriage. Seth had had it all planned out, he would teach their sons to hunt and fish and track and shoot the way his own father had done with him. He had promised to educate their children in the old Choctaw customs while she educated and helped them make their way in the modern world that was expanding all around them.

She exhaled a sigh and shook her head. All their hopes and dreams had ended mere months after their wedding when Seth had taken part in a series of political assassinations between the warring Choctaw political parties. He had been a staunch supporter of the Nationals who wanted to retain Indian control of their land at all cost even if it meant executing their own people, the leaders of the Progressives who favoured assimilation and seeking United States citizenship. Seth and his good friend, Silon Lewis, paid the ultimate price for their participation while close to a dozen others, all equally guilty were given a nominal punishment.

The memory of it all broke Lucy's heart even now after all this time and she would give anything to be able to go back, to see things more clearly, to stop Seth before he made the biggest mistake of his life.

"Are you all right, Mrs. Willis?"

Lucy gave a start at the unexpected sound of Trevor Lynbrook's soothing voice and dropped the tea canister she'd been holding. She was surprised when he stepped forward, bringing the broom and dust pan she kept near the back door. She reached out to take them.

"Please, let me," he said.

Trevor swept up the tea and broken crockery, disposing of them while Lucy watched in silence, completely overwhelmed by the simple act of kindness. He put the broom and dust pan back and came towards her again. "You don't look at all well. Would you like me to examine you?"

Lucy tensed and gave him a critical look. "No, I do not want you to *examine* me. I would not want you to examine me if I was dying from a thousand wounds and you were the last doctor on the face of the earth."

The corners of Trevor's mouth turned downward. "I shall remember that in the future."

He stood there, regal, imposing, and far more attractive than Lucy was willing to admit. "What do you want?" she asked tersely, folding her arms in front of her.

Before he could answer the tea kettle whistled.

Lucy removed the kettle to a trivet on the table, then retreated to her place by the cupboard. "Well?"

Trevor slipped his hands into the pockets of his finely tailored charcoal grey trousers. "I simply wanted to ask if you and your son would like to ride in to church with me today."

Lucy's expression went blank. "You're going to church?" she asked slowly, certain that she'd misunderstood.

"Yes. Believe it or not, Mrs. Willis, I actually attended services back home on a fairly regular basis."

"Fairly regular?" Lucy asked. "Except when you were otherwise occupied with a lady friend?"

Trevor's silvery grey eyes were cold as he corrected her. "Except when I was at the hospital, or tending to one of my patients." He removed his hands from his pockets and stepped forward until he was only inches from Lucy. He breathed in her heavenly scent though it did little to quell his irritation. "For your information, my dear, I haven't been near a woman in months."

"Is that so —"

Lucy's words were cut off by the press of Trevor's lips against hers. The kiss was swift, yet

infinitely powerful and it left her quivering deep down inside.

Trevor backed away as Joshua's footfalls sounded on the stairs. "Would you like a ride to town, Mrs. Willis?"

"Yes," Lucy answered quietly.

Trevor left the stylish new buggy he'd purchased at the livery and escorted Lucy towards the church while Joshua ran ahead to catch up to the Red Eagle children. To Lucy's surprise, Trevor placed her arm through his and slowed his pace so that she had no choice but to slow hers as well.

"What are you doing?" she asked, making no move to pull free.

"I'm escorting a very beautiful woman to Sunday services."

Lucy's heartbeat quickened. "I imagine you might like to make friends here, but to be honest this little display will bring you no respect. In case you haven't heard, I'm not highly thought of by many residents of Sweet Medicine."

"Then many residents of Sweet Medicine are bloody fools."

Lucy chuckled. "At least we can agree on that one thing."

Trevor stopped walking and gazed down at her. God, but she was a vision. He stroked her cheek with a feathery touch of his fingers. "I'm sure we could find more to agree on." She pulled away.

"I am a respectable woman, Mr. Lynbrook, and I will never agree to what you have in mind."

Trevor watched Lucy scurry away like a frightened child then followed her until the booming voice of the mayor stopped him.

"Hold up there, yer lordship!" He took hold of Trevor's hand and pumped it furiously. "I'd like you to meet my daughters. Beatrice, Gloria and Alma, this is the Viscount Asham."

"Ashford," Trevor corrected sharply.

The mayor's cheeks coloured. "Yes, yes, of course, how stupid of me. Viscount Ashford, these are my daughters." He paused when his wife cleared her throat. "And this is my wife, Lavinia, Mrs. Burgess."



The mayor's wife grinned from ear to ear and offered Trevor her hand. Reluctantly, he took it and placed a light chivalrous kiss upon her glove, regretting it when her eager daughters presented their hands as well.

"It was a pleasure meeting you all, but I really must be going. Good day."

Trevor entered the church to find that Lucy had situated herself so that he could not get a seat beside her and he had to content himself with sitting in the row behind. He managed to rectify the situation by manoeuvring himself into position directly behind Lucy, despite the muttering of those whose toes he stepped on in the process.

"You could have saved me a seat," he whispered in her ear. Although he wasn't surprised when Lucy ignored his comment, it didn't make the snub any easier to take. Still, being close to her and inhaling the soft clean scent of her each time a breeze blew in the large windows at the front of the church, made it more tolerable. Once the service ended, Trevor managed to brush off all those interested in making his acquaintance and found Lucy and her son walking behind the Red Eagle family.

"If you rush off, how ever will you and Josh get back home?"

"Ben offered us a ride home."

"Nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense at all," Lucy said, keeping her eyes straight ahead, trying to curb the wild fluttering of her heart that had started the instant she felt him come up behind her in the church. It seemed the service had gone on forever, each moment more uncomfortable than the last as he stood there, radiating unseen power. Even when they were seated his breath caressed the back of her neck, swirled around her and made the heat rise within her as his kiss had. "We're having lunch at Ben and Mary's so there's no need for you to take us back. Feel free to be on your way."

Lucy groaned inside when Ben's head whipped around and he stopped walking, causing them to stop as well. Trevor bumped into her and she felt the shock wave vibrate through every nerve she had. If she didn't know better she would swear that the man was made of steel.

"The invitation goes to you, too, doc, unless you have other plans."

Trevor smiled. "I have no plans whatsoever. I'd love to join your family for lunch." He

looked down at Lucy. "You don't mind, do you, my dear?"

"As a matter of fact, I do."

"That's a pity." He stepped around her to walk beside Ben.

Lucy let Joshua run ahead then continued on to the Red Eagles' walking as slowly as she could. She should borrow a horse from Ben and just head home to spare herself from being stuck near that awful man for the remainder of the afternoon. Lucy stopped and debated with herself. She really should go home, but she didn't want to. It was so lonely out at her place with no one to talk to and she looked forward to these Sunday afternoons with her friends.

Lucy picked up her pace, determined to make the best of a bad situation. And she tried not to dwell on how Trevor Lynbrook's presence made her feel.

## Chapter Four

Lucy found it impossible not to dwell on the multitude of sensations Trevor Lynbrook stirred in her once he removed his jacket, vest and shirt to instruct Ben and the children in the basics of British football. He wasn't made of steel as she'd imagined earlier, but of smooth skin and solid, well-formed muscle with a sprinkling of sandy hair over his chest. The hair glistened in the sun as he began to perspire and Lucy let her eyes wander down, taking in the way the hair grew sparser as it thinned into a narrow sprinkling that reached down inside the top of his trousers...*to parts you'd be wise not to think about*, Lucy's practical side reminded her.

Her pulsing body overrode her mind in short order and ordered her eyes to remain right where they were. She squirmed.

"My, my, my, but there's something about a sweaty man that does things to me," Mary Red Eagle said as she brought plates and cutlery from inside her house. She began setting the table, her eyes straying frequently to her bare-chested husband. "Every time I see Ben undressed, or even half undressed, I feel just the way I did on our wedding night." She laughed quietly and handed Lucy the napkins to set on the pine picnic table. "At least now, after ten years of marriage, I know exactly what to do about those feelings."

Lucy's cheeks coloured as much from Mary's comment as from the boyish grin Trevor flashed at her when Joshua tripped him up.

"Speaking of feelings," Mary said. "It seems to me like you and Lord Ashford looked rather chummy."

Lucy whipped her head around. "No, we are not," she said forcefully. "It was simply more practical that Josh and I ride into town with him since he planned on going to church anyway."

Mary sat on the bench on her side of the table. "You don't have to be embarrassed, Lucy. I'm certainly not the judgmental kind. I just assumed that since he gave up his hotel room that you'd been keeping company."

Lucy 's blue eyes flamed with indignation. "If there are filthy rumours spreading about me and that man, please put a stop to them or tell me who's behind them so I can stop it myself."

"Whoa, now," Mary said, lifting her hands in a gesture of surrender. "No one is spreading rumours, and if they are, they haven't drifted past my ears, and if they do, the person saying them will be set straight and you know that." She paused while Lucy nodded. "I just meant that Trevor Lynbrook is a very good looking man, who apparently has more money than Croesus, judging by what he's spent at our store alone."

"I don't care what Trevor Lynbrook looks like or how wealthy he is. I didn't ask him to move next to me and I've hardly had anything to do with him the entire time he's been there beyond a casual hello and goodbye." Lucy took one of the sugar cookies from the small basket to her right and began to crumble it in her lap. "I am not attracted to that man and never will be."

"I think he's attracted to you."

Lucy took a second cookie and began crumbling it. "If he is, he's wasting his time. When I went off to college my mother told me to stay away from a man who can have any woman he wants because he wants every woman he can have."

Mary moved the basket with the cookies out of reach after Lucy took a third. "You can't judge all men by your mother's bad experience."

Lucy glanced over her shoulder when Joshua called to her, happy that he'd scored a goal. Trevor Lynbrook flashed her a seductive smile and she turned away quickly, crushing the second half of her cookie in both hands. "In this case I can. He seems exactly like the man who ruined my mother. He promised her the world, gave her just enough of it to cloud her senses, then left her alone, pregnant and unmarried."

Mary Red Eagle gave Lucy's hand a comforting pat. "Your mother made a mistake, but she didn't let it turn her against all men."

"No," Lucy agreed, glad that her mother had met and married a fine man like her stepfather, Quinn McNamara. "But I have no intention of making the mistake she did. My husband is dead and I don't need to look for another."

"It might be good for Josh, though," Mary said, getting up. Before Lucy could disagree, she said, "Come inside and help me bring out the food."



It was dark when Lucy and Trevor arrived home. Lucy went inside to light a lamp while Trevor took the horse and carriage to the barn. He carried Joshua into the house, laughing softly when Lucy's face registered surprise.

"He was wide awake and talking one minute and by the time I'd unhitched the horse, he was fast asleep."

Lucy smoothed the fallen lock of hair away from her son's eyes and planted a kiss on his forehead. "Would you carry him upstairs for me?"

"Of course."

Trevor watched as Lucy removed her son's shoes and stockings and covered him with his blanket. She tucked the small buffalo toy he often played with under his arm then gave him another gentle kiss on the forehead. The loving gestures caused a pang of longing to strike Trevor. His mother had never done that for him, no one had ever done that for him. He recalled those lonely nights of his childhood, glad that this precious little boy would never know such a feeling of abandonment.

He followed Lucy out of the room. "I think you'll have a devil of a time getting him up in the morning." Lucy smiled and that smile made him feel warm all over.

"Probably, but he certainly had a good time. That's the only drawback to us living out here. He has no one to play with after school. Back home he had my sister's children close by and the little girl I watched, but..."

Trevor reached out and cupped Lucy's soft, ivory cheek in the palm of his hand. "All that could change, Lucy. All he needs are brothers and sisters to play with."

Lucy backed away, her hand tightly gripping the base of the small oil lamp. "That's impossible now, isn't it, considering that Josh's father died before he was born."

The iciness of her tone did not dissuade him. "Tragic business, that." She inhaled sharply and Trevor needed to smooth over her ruffled feathers. "Ben told me. I asked what happened to Mr. Willis." He stepped closer, Lucy stepped back. "It must have been very hard on you to be widowed so soon after your marriage."

Lucy held the lamp in front of her. "Like my brother-in-law often says, 'a lot of things in life are hard'."

Trevor took the lamp from her and set it on the small table outside her bedroom door. "Life doesn't have to be hard, Lucy. I could give you and Joshua a very comfortable, very pleasant life..." His voice drifted off as he lowered his mouth to hers.

Lucy pulled away from the kiss although her body begged her not to. "I don't want anything from you, Mr. Lynbrook, and I would prefer that you remember that. I didn't ask Uncle Pat to send you, I asked him to send a doctor, any competent doctor to help the Cheyenne. The connection we have is purely professional, and you would be wise to remember that." She gestured to the lamp. "You can use that to make your way next door. Goodnight."

After a restless night, Lucy awoke before dawn to the smell of tea brewing. She hurried downstairs in her nightgown to see if she was dreaming or if by some fluke she'd left something on the stove. She certainly never expected to find a dishevelled Trevor Lynbrook seated at her kitchen table, absentmindedly stirring spoon after spoon of sugar into his tea cup.

"Mr. Lynbrook! What in the blue blazes are you doing here—in your robe, no less!"

He took a quick sip of his tea and nearly spit it out. "Forgive me, madam," he grumbled as he took the cup to the back door and tossed the contents outside. "I didn't mean to intrude but my cook stove hasn't arrived and I felt the need for a spot of tea." He poured hot water into his cup and spooned in some of the tea he'd brought from his own kitchen. "Would you like some?"

"No thank you. I have my own."

Trevor dropped the spoon onto the table. "Blast it, woman, why do you have to be so hostile?"

"Why do you even care?" Lucy asked, not liking the way her temperature was rising at the

sight of his bare chest through the opening in his velvet robe. She inhaled sharply when those eyes of his impaled her like a sword.

"I don't know," he said roughly before getting up and leaving.

Lucy sat in the chair Trevor had occupied. She could feel the lingering warmth of his body and a mild pulsing began in her womanly centre. as something Mary said yesterday came back to her.

*Every time I see Ben undressed, or even half undressed, I feel just the way I did on our wedding night.*

Lucy thought of her own wedding night. The sight of Seth naked made her body tremble in places she hadn't been fully aware of until then. Seeing Trevor yesterday had been a lot like that, even more intense, but she was afraid to fully acknowledge it.

It simply could not be. Ever. She didn't know what kind of man Trevor was and she didn't really believe what he said about not being with a woman since they'd kissed. The man oozed sexuality and he knew it. It was highly unlikely that he would deprive himself of bodily pleasures and there were enough harlots at the saloon who would surely suit his needs.

Lucy refused to listen to her inner self as it prodded her to remember when Trevor kissed her. It was a meaningless kiss, one that should never have happened and she would not jeopardize her reputation or sully the memory of her late husband by dallying with a man like Trevor Lynbrook. She owed it to Seth to remain true to their marriage vows.

Trevor's physical frustration coloured his attitude for many days and although he knew the temporary cure was close at hand he couldn't bring himself to go into town and seek out the paid women there. They could certainly ease the ache in his genitals, but they couldn't fill the void in his soul. Lucy Willis had unearthed the void that he'd covered over with the gambling, the liquor, and the women back in England. Now he wanted Lucy to fill that void, but for the life of him he hadn't a single clue on how to arouse her interest.

He hadn't been able to get close to her since that Sunday three weeks ago, literally couldn't get close. Whenever he came near she found some way to put some object between them so he'd

stop approaching her entirely except when it was to speak with her son. A thoughtful smile curved Trevor's mouth. That lad was a joy and he wanted very much for the Earl to meet him. He was funny and bright and a quick learner. He'd come to know quite a bit about carpentry and building simply by watching the workmen during his free time. Joshua was like the son he would love to have had.

Trevor's thoughts were curtailed by the leader of the work crew. "We're ready for you to see it, sir. The inside is all done and clean as a whistle. We put the furniture where you told us. All it needs now is some of them womanly touches like curtains and tablecloths and such."

Trevor walked through his office, surgery and the upper apartment with the foreman.

The foreman laughed when they passed by the doors connecting Trevor's half of the building to Lucy's. "I never thought we'd get these doors put in for you, 'specially after she come at us with her rolling pin. For a bitty little woman, Miss Lucy sure got one hell of a mouth on her. No wonder she done tamed them savages and got them all to reading and writing. If you don't mind me asking, how did you get her to let us put the doors in?"

Trevor grinned. "I owe it all to the Red Eagles. They were kind enough to take Mrs. Willis and her son on an all day outing."

The foreman snickered. "Well, now the doors are in place I guess you'll be planning—"

The man broke off when Trevor seized him by the collar, his silver grey eyes dark and deadly. "Why I put in those doors is none of your bloody business and if you so much as utter one more word like that about Mrs. Willis, I will thrash you to within an inch of your life. Do you understand?"

The man nodded vigorously. When Trevor released him he bolted down the stairs. Trevor followed.

"Wait a minute, you blasted fool. You forgot your last payment!"

The man hopped onto his horse yelling for his workers to do the same. "Just send it to the bank. We got enough left from last week to hold us over!"

Lucy was coming out her front door, a bucket of steaming soapy water in one hand, and a scrub brush in the other. "Did they go and quit on you? Isn't that a shame?" she said in a sing-



song voice.

Trevor smiled to himself, then made certain that his expression became impassive before he turned and spoke. "Actually, my dear, they've finished. We are officially neighbours."

Lucy nearly dropped her bucket. "Oh. Well. You'll have to excuse me then. I have to clean the schoolroom for tomorrow. The children got a bit carried away with their paints this afternoon."

"You're going to scrub the floor?"

"No, I'm going to disrobe and wash my dress just to entice you," Lucy shot back over her shoulder, walking away from him. "Of course I'm going to scrub the schoolroom floor. Who do you think cleans it and my house? I don't have an army of servants to do my bidding like some people I know."

"We don't have any army of servants, Mrs. Willis. It's closer to a small brigade."

Trevor followed her inside the school and sat atop one of the little wooden desks at the rear of the room. He looked at the pictures hanging to dry at various places on the walls. They were cute if quite primitive, but two near Lucy's desk caught his eye. "I take it that the painting to your right is Joshua's."

"Yes," Lucy mumbled, not at all pleased that her son chose to paint himself with Trevor watching the carpenters in response to her request for a picture that showed Josh's most recent happy moment.

"Who painted the one on the opposite side? It seems more — mature some how."

Lucy stopped scrubbing and looked up at the picture in question. That one didn't please her any more than her son's had. It had been painted by chief Angry Wolf. It was done in the simple style of painting that decorated his lodge and war shield.

It showed Angry Wolf coming from his lodge and meeting a yellow haired woman on a road — the white man's road. Together they walked along the road to a place that led off the paper — a place he had yet to reach.

"That one was done by — one of my older students."

"It's quite interesting. Is that woman supposed to be you, leading the boy on the road of

enlightenment with your teaching?"

"Something like that." Lucy glanced back over her shoulder. Trevor was still staring at the picture, stroking his strong chin, obviously trying to decipher what he saw depicted. "Don't you have something better to do?"

Trevor looked away from the painting. He flashed her a brilliant smile. "No. Nothing at all."

Lucy grumbled to herself then began to scrub the floor with a heavy hand.

Trevor soon found something else to do once he caught sight of Lucy's shapely backside wiggling as she scrubbed with all her might. "Actually, I should unpack my equipment and prepare to begin treating your sav – Indian friends. Good day."

Trevor's surprise bordered on complete shock when, a half hour later, Lucy Willis knocked on the door connecting her parlour with the waiting area of his office.

"What a pleasure to see you. I told you those doors would come in handy – in the event of an emergency or what-have-you."

Lucy met Trevor's grin with a harsh stare. "There will be no what-have-you. Ever. I knocked at the outside door, but apparently you didn't hear me."

Trevor had heard, but he'd hoped she would use this inner door. "I'm sorry, my dear. It must have been the clattering of my instruments. Would you care to take a look around since you're here?"

Lucy's curiosity won out over her common sense. "Perhaps a quick look."

Trevor came to her side and placed her arm over his. She trembled but did not pull away. "A long, slow, leisurely look would please me more." He placed his hand over hers when she tried to pull her arm free. "Of course, a quick, innocent look is better than none at all. In fact, I rather wanted to ask your opinion on a matter of interior decoration. Might you help me in selecting some linens, window curtains and the like? Perhaps some paintings or something to brighten up the waiting area, make it a bit more 'homey' for the Cheyenne."

"I suppose I could," Lucy said quietly as she looked around the room, overwhelmed by the sparkling new medical equipment. This little clinic was almost as well equipped as Uncle Pat's

hospital in Boston.

Lucy managed to free herself from the clutches of Trevor Lynbrook and walked around to the opposite side of the treatment table. "If you wouldn't mind, I think the Cheyenne, especially the children would feel more comfortable if you let me hang some of the paintings they did in your waiting room."

"Would you be so kind as to hang Joshua's in my office, above my desk? It's right through here, let me show you."

Lucy stepped behind the huge mahogany desk and sat in the roomy leather arm chair. It was a bit unyielding, but she imagined that one day it would be like the chairs of her stepfather and Uncle Pat, worn soft and moulded to their own particular contours, rendering them useless to anyone but them.

Lucy looked around the room. Across from her was a credenza with microscopes and a large medical bag resting on the top. To either side were floor to ceiling bookshelves lined with medical texts. A plush velvet sofa rested along the wall near the door. It was all very nice and obviously very expensive.

"You seem to approve," Trevor said, grabbing hold of her attention. "Tell me, what type of curtains would you suggest for the windows behind you?"

Lucy looked at the wide windows. "A dark velvet or damask, I think, perhaps in one of the colours in the Persian carpet you selected. You might want to hang some sheer lace panels underneath for when you have the draperies open, to help filter some of the light."

Trevor smiled and sat on the edge of his desk close to her. His pulse quickened at her sharp intake of breath. He brushed a fallen lock of hair away from her forehead, his smile broadening when she shivered.

"I know Joshua is spending the afternoon in town. If you don't mind, I'd like to drive you in to pick him up. Perhaps you can look through some of the things Ben has on hand or one of those catalogues he orders from and pick out some of the things I need. I'll be needing things for my apartment upstairs as well. All I have now is a single set of bed linens. Would you like to look around and get a few ideas?"

Lucy moved back and took a deep calming breath. "I think you have more than enough ideas for the both of us, Mr. Lynbrook. And no, I would not like to see your apartment. Judging from the unnecessary opulence of this room, I'm sure I can find something suitable, if not entirely what you have in mind."

She got up and went around the side of the desk away from Trevor. "I'll meet you out front. I'd like to freshen up a bit before we leave."

Trevor exhaled a quiet sigh as he leaned back against the hitching rail outside Ben Red Eagle's mercantile and peered inside the store watching while Lucy and Ben's wife pored over catalogues behind the front counter. Without a word he accepted the tall glass of cool lemonade Ben handed to him and gulped it, hoping that it would put out the fire in his blood.

When Lucy laughed heartily at something Ben's wife said, the beauty of her smile, the lilting sound of her voice, added a fresh spark to his inner fire while raising his level of physical discomfort. Trevor shifted nervously, then gulped down the rest of his lemonade. He noticed Ben studying him with more than a little amusement and stood straighter, despite the maddening ache.

"And what, pray tell do you find so damned funny?"

"You."

Trevor looked down his nose at the seated man.

Ben coughed to hide his amusement. "Sometimes, love hurts."

Trevor smirked. "Really now? And where did you come by this little gem of sage advice—Red Eagles' Book of Ridiculous Quotations?"

The humour disappeared from Ben's black eyes. "My father told me that right after I had the shit kicked out of me by Mary's three brothers for saying hello to her in public."

Trevor was momentarily speechless. He had come to think of Ben as a man first and an Indian second. "It must have been difficult for you," he said finally.

"You could say that," Ben answered. "I was sorely tempted to give up on Mary, but I didn't. I needed her the way I needed air to breathe. I didn't like having to sneak around like a

thief in the night just to see her for a few minutes, but I understood that she was afraid for herself and for me. She may have been raised in a family of peace loving missionaries but I seemed to bring out the worst in them."

Ben glanced inside the store and shared a loving look with his wife. "I ached like crazy for that woman, but I waited for her to get over the fear and elope with me. I guess I'm trying to tell you to be patient with Lucy."

Trevor felt the sound of Lucy's laughter wash over him again. "I'm afraid that patience has never been one of my virtues as far as women are concerned."

Ben stroked his chin and thought of a solution for his friend. "No offence, doc, but maybe she wouldn't be afraid of you if you came down off that high horse of yours and acted more like a normal person."

"What?"

Ben scratched his head and took a deep breath. "Take a walk with me, doc, and I'll try to explain."



Lucy shielded her face from the early morning sun with her hand and squinted, certain that her eyes were deceiving her.

"Mama, why is Dr. Lynbrook dressed like a cowboy?" Joshua asked, coming out of the house to accompany his mother to the school.

"I have no idea," Lucy said, squinting again, a little afraid that she and her son were hallucinating. She paused while Josh ran ahead to greet Trevor, still certain that her eyes were deceiving her, although a small part of her hoped they weren't.

Trevor Lynbrook was undeniably impressive in his exquisitely tailored suits, but even now, wearing a pair of faded denims, a soft cotton shirt and shiny new western boots, he was down-to-earth handsome.

To extinguish the fire in her belly, she reminded herself that he was still a shallow wolf in

sheep's clothing. "Planning a masquerade party, are you?" she asked, brushing past him and shoosing Joshua inside.

*Patience, man, patience,* Trevor reminded himself. He started to adjust the cuffs of his shirt before remembering that he had no cuff links to adjust. He stepped inside the school and followed her to the front of the room. "Actually, my dear Mrs. Willis, I thought today would be a fine time to 'open for business' as you Americans say. I should like to examine your little b—students once they arrive and ascertain what, if any care they happen to need."

"You were going to call them beggars or blighters or something awful, weren't you?" Lucy asked point blank, stepping behind her desk. She looked down at the sheaf of graded tests in the centre.

Trevor reached across the desk and tilted Lucy's face up so that she had no choice but to look into his eyes. He felt her skin flush and saw the colour rise in her cheeks. She wasn't as immune to him as she liked to think. "I'm sorry. It was a careless slip."

Lucy pulled away and took a step back. "Are other careless moments waiting in the wings? Will you have a 'careless slip' should one of the Cheyenne require surgery of some sort? If so, you'd better just pack your over-stuffed bags and get out."

Trevor stepped around the desk and let Lucy back herself into a corner. "I have never, nor do I ever intend to 'slip' when it comes to performing a surgery. I take my profession as seriously as you do yours."

Trevor spun on his heel and strode out of the school, leaving a speechless Lucy in his wake.

She remained that way for the better part of the day, dispensing with her lesson plan and letting her students fill their time with meaningless "busy work" — practicing their handwriting, drawing and painting, doing simple addition on the blackboard. All that time she could feel chief Angry Wolf's curious gaze upon her, but managed to steer clear of looking at him directly. However, she could not evade his look or questions when she let the class go outside for an early lunch.

"What has the *waquini* done to you? Whatever it is I will kill him for it."

Lucy gasped and grabbed Angry Wolf's wrist when he brandished the large scalping knife he wore at his waist. "Stop this nonsense! He hasn't done a thing to me and if he had, I certainly don't need you to defend my honour."

"Why do your eyes not say the same as your mouth, white woman?" Angry Wolf took her by the arm and led her away. "He has done something to you, something that fills your pretty eyes with fear. For that alone he deserves to die."

Lucy turned away not wanting to acknowledge the truth she'd been hiding from herself since the day Trevor Lynbrook kissed her. Composing herself as best she could, Lucy turned back to face Angry Wolf. "Nothing has or will happen that concerns you. I don't mean to be rude, but that is simply the way it is. I appreciate your concern, but I don't need it. I really don't."

She paused and lowered her voice. "Before you get the wrong idea about our — relationship. I have to tell you that what you painted can never be. If I've helped you to understand the white world any better I'm glad, but I can't be there for you except as a teacher. I'm sorry, if I gave you the wrong impression."

Angry Wolf shoved his knife back into its scabbard. "I have no feelings for you, white woman. You asked us to paint foolish pictures, a child's dream and that is what I did. I will never walk the white man's road with a yellow eyes the way Red Eagle's son does."

He barked an order to his people to finish their lunch so that they could return to their camp.

Lucy grabbed hold of his arm, snatching it away when he turned and glared at her. "Please don't do this. Please don't take away their education because of what I've said."

Angry Wolf's hard expression softened and he offered Lucy a brief smile before resuming his superior posture. "I take away nothing, white woman. Your heart is not in the teaching today, so I will not waste my people's time. They have enough to do back at camp. They will come tomorrow. Be prepared to teach them."

Lucy smiled. "I will be. I promise."

Just as they were leaving, Lucy remembered that Trevor had planned to examine the

Cheyenne. She ran after Angry Wolf, calling to him at the top of her lungs.

The shouts brought Trevor to his front door and although he could not hear what Lucy was saying to the mounted warrior, Angry Wolf's rapt expression told him more than enough. Trevor went inside, slamming the door behind him.

His bad humour had not lightened later that day when the timid knock sounded on the door connecting his waiting room to Lucy's side of the building. He flung open the door. "What do you want?"

Startled, Joshua Willis dropped the framed pictures he was holding. Trevor scooped him up in his arms before he could run away.

"Don't be afraid of me, Josh. I didn't mean to yell or frighten you. I thought you were—I've had something on my mind today. I'm sorry."

"You're not m-mad at me?"

Trevor smiled and ruffled the boy's thick black hair. "I'm not mad." He set Josh down then picked up the pictures. "Did you bring these for me?"

"Uh- huh. Mama said you wanted to hang 'em up, so I framed 'em just like the carpenter showed me how."

Trevor looked at the pictures. "You've done an excellent job, my boy, excellent." He placed Joshua's on top of the pile. "Ah, here's my favourite."

"I did that one."

"Really? I had no idea. Well, that makes it even more special. I was going to put it in my office, but now that I know you painted it I want to hang it upstairs, in my bedroom where I can look at it every day."

Joshua's dark face lit up with a brilliant smile. "Really?"

"Really," Trevor said sincerely, wishing he could please Josh's mother as easily.

Trevor let Joshua decide where to place the other paintings in the waiting room downstairs.

"This is the last one," Joshua said picking up the other painting to catch Trevor's eye the previous day. It was the one with the yellow-haired woman. "This can go in your office."



"Perhaps," Trevor said, not wanting to disappoint the boy. The more he looked at the picture the more he came to dislike it, although he couldn't find a concrete reason for this feeling. "Do you know who did this one."

"Uh-huh. It was Angry Wolf. This is him and this is my mama walking with him."

"Oh," Trevor said setting the picture down on the leather sofa. "Well, then, perhaps your mother would like to hang this in your house or near her own desk. I'm sure it's very special to her."

"I guess so," Joshua said. "Dr. Lynbrook, why do mamas cry when they're happy?"

Trevor sat down so that he could look Lucy's son in the eye. "What do you mean?"

Josh shoved his chubby hands into the pockets of his pants and scuffed his foot on the floor before looking up. "Well, I helped Mama when she hanged them up to dry and when she looked at this one she started to cry. Not like a real cry when you fall an' get hurt, but her eyes got kind of wet. She said that the picture made her happy, but she didn't say why. So, why do mamas cry when they're happy? I only cry when I'm hurt or sad."

Joshua paused and tugged on Trevor's shirt sleeve to regain his attention. "Do you ever cry? My friend, Benjy says only sissies and girls cry, but I don't know. It don't seem bad to cry. Is it?"

Trevor forced his mind to stop dwelling on the sudden gnawing pain that was eating away at his stomach. "Crying isn't a bad thing, Josh, but men usually don't, not in public at any rate."

"Why?"

Trevor could only shrug.

"Oh," Joshua said. "It's like one of them 'grown-up' things, my mama says I'll understand when I'm big."

Trevor smiled. "Exactly."

The second unexpected knock at the connecting door was less of a surprise to Trevor, but that didn't make opening the door any easier.

"I don't mean to interrupt, Mr. Lynbrook, but — Josh, there you are. Come over here

where you belong," Lucy said quickly, pulling her son in front of her to separate her from Trevor. "I'm sorry if he was a nuisance."

"He wasn't a nuisance at all. I rather enjoy his company." Trevor cocked his head to the side. "Does that surprise you?"

"A little," Lucy said, trying to hang on to her son, as he pulled free.

"I'm goin' up to my room to play."

Lucy turned to go, but Trevor grabbed hold of her skirt, dropping his hand once she froze in place. "Wait a moment." He retrieved Angry Wolf's painting from the sofa and gave it to her.

"This is far more important to you than it will ever be to me. Good day, Mrs. Willis," he said before closing the door in her face and locking it from his side.

## Chapter Five

Trevor looked at his gold pocket watch. He tapped it against his palm then held it up to his ear. Damn. The watch was working perfectly, it was time that had stopped. It was only half past Noon. He got up from the chair outside of Red Eagle's Mercantile and sauntered inside, looking around at the same things he'd looked at three times that hour.

"Doc, can I see you for a minute?"

Trevor looked up and smiled, glad for the interruption. "Of course, Ben. Need a spot of medical advice?"

Ben ran his hand through his hair. "Not really. Let's take a walk."

They walked halfway to the edge of town before Ben could get the words out. "You know that Mary and I think the world of you. "

"That makes two of you, three counting Joshua," Trevor added.

Ben laughed nervously. "I know you don't have many friends here and believe me when I say that Mary loves having an extra body at the dinner table, but, um... We understood because your place wasn't finished and the hotel food ain't so good, but..."

Trevor bristled. "Spit it out, man."

Ben stopped walking. "The open invitation isn't open for tonight."

"Say no more. I'm sorry for imposing, but I can't cook. Never really had to, never saw the need to learn." Trevor's brow creased. "I suppose I shall have to advertise for a housekeeper."

"Not until tomorrow at least. Mary cooked up a pot of soup for you and a loaf of bread, some fresh butter, and an apple cobbler."

Lucy took advantage of the morning recess to take down the bed linens she'd washed that morning and hang up the remaining set, the ones she decided on the spur of the moment to take

from Trevor Lynbrook's bed after he left. She sighed inwardly when she thought of that huge, pillow soft bed. Sleeping on it would be like sleeping on a cloud...

"Mama!" Joshua called running around the side of the house. He stopped to catch his breath. "Can I, can I stay with Wahanassatta after school. His pa said I can sleep over."

"We'll see. Please ask everyone to go back inside. I'll be there as soon as I hang this last sheet."

Trevor arrived just as Lucy was about to go back to the school. She eyed the large box in his hands, as the delicious aromas of the food drifted towards her.

"That smells wonderful. What do you have?" She tried to lift a corner of the checked tablecloth covering the box's contents, but Trevor turned away.

"My, but you're the 'Nosey Nellie' today. Just chock full of questions aren't you, Mrs. Willis?"

"I was just trying to be neighbourly, Mr. Lynbrook. I knew I shouldn't have wasted my time and soap washing your blasted bed linens."

Trevor almost dropped his box. He looked to the sheets and pillow slips blowing in the breeze. "So, you had to take a peek at my bedchamber after all. Tell me, did you like what you saw?"

Lucy felt the heat rise to her cheeks and she turned towards the clothes line, not wanting him to see her blush. She cringed when she heard his ribald laugh.

"That blush is worth more than a thousand words, my dear. More's the pity that I couldn't have joined you. Ah, well, another time perhaps."

"In your dreams," Lucy grumbled as he walked past.

Trevor stopped and peeked around the sheet at her. "You occupy centre stage every night my darling."

"Are you sure you wouldn't prefer having me translate for you?" Lucy asked Trevor a while later when he ushered the first patient into his examination room. She lowered her voice.

"Joshua might unintentionally muddle things—"

"Thank you, no, Mrs. Willis." He looked over his shoulder and smiled at Joshua who was showing a nervous little boy the purpose of a stethoscope. "I have the utmost confidence in your son. If you'll excuse me."

Lucy was relieved when she saw children exit the room with smiles on their faces and cherry liquorice whips clutched in their hands. Trevor came out of the room behind Joshua. He was wiping his wet hands on a clean towel.

Angry Wolf stood, whipped out his knife and held it against Trevor's throat. "You clean your hands as if my people are filth. You will die."

"No!" Lucy leapt to her feet and grabbed Angry Wolf's wrist. "No! He meant no disrespect. Cleaning the hands after each patient is very important even though some doctors, like Slater in town, refuse to accept it. It stops the spread of sickness. My father does it; so does my Uncle Pat. All good doctors wash their hands."

"This is the truth?"

"I swear," Lucy said.

Angry Wolf gave Trevor a warning look. "I will let you live because she wishes it, Waquini." He resheathed his knife. "We go now."

Lucy breathed a huge sigh of relief while Trevor blotted the trickle of blood from the scratch at the base of his throat.

"And it angers you that people think of them as savages," Trevor remarked, looking at himself in the mirror near the fireplace. Lucy came up behind him, her expression a mixture of irritation and concern.

"Can you really blame them after the way they've been treated. Did you know that the cholera outbreak last winter was caused by blankets sent by the army? Blankets the Supply Sergeant knew were contaminated."

Trevor grimaced. "That's disgraceful."

"To put it mildly."

Trevor gazed at her reflection and knew that he had to have her soon or go mad, stark

raving mad. "Lucy —"

He broke off when Josh bounded into the room and tugged at Lucy's skirt. "Mama! Mama! Can I go stay with Wahanassatta? Please? You said!"

There was no mistaking the look she'd seen in Trevor's eyes and she was afraid to be all alone out here with him. "I don't know. Angry Wolf might not appro —"

"He said I could. I asked him."

Lucy looked down at her son. Why did he have to be so practical for his age? "All right. Let me pack you a bag."

"Don't need one! Bye!"

Lucy hurried outside to bid her son farewell. She remained there long after the Cheyenne party disappeared out of sight only partially out of concern for Josh.

She sensed that Trevor was watching her from his front door and her body responded with a thousand pleasurable prickles shooting out in every direction, making her shiver despite the warm rays of the afternoon sun shining down upon her.

They were alone.

She shivered again when she heard his boots crunch against bits of dried brush and dirt as he approached with slow, careful strides. What was she to do? Lucy closed her eyes and prayed for guidance. It came in the form of long forgotten memory.

*"I'm scared, Star."*

*"Don't be. Just remember what I said, follow your heart and everything will be fine..."*

Her stepsister's advice echoed in the far reaches of Lucy's mind until the press of Trevor Lynbrook's large, strong hands on her shoulders erased everything but the wonderful feeling of closeness.

"If you have no other plans, I would love to share my dinner with you," he said softly.

"I think I'd like that."

"Wonderful," Trevor said brightly, taking Lucy by the hand, turning her to face him. He couldn't resist the urge to steal a quick kiss then escorted her to his home.

Refusing Lucy's offers to help, he busied himself with putting the soup on the stove and

slicing the loaf of fresh bread Mary Red Eagle had given him.

She sat at the large kitchen table and nervously twisted her hands in her lap, glad that Trevor couldn't see her hands from his angle. She cleared her throat quietly. "I'm rather impressed, Mr. Lynbrook. I never expected you to know your way around a kitchen."

Trevor laughed as he carried the platter of sliced bread to the table and sat opposite Lucy. "To be perfectly honest, my dear, this—" he indicated the bread and soup pot on the stove. "Is about the limit of my culinary skill. And boiling water for tea, of course."

Lucy laughed that enchanting laugh of hers and Trevor felt himself respond in record time. He was thankful that she couldn't see him below the waist at this moment. "Would you be so kind as to keep watch over our soup while I nip upstairs to the dining room and set the table?"

Lucy's heart leapt up into her throat at the mention of the upstairs. "No. I mean, there's no sense in going to all that trouble. We can eat right here." She started to rise from her seat, nearly toppling it backward. "I'll just run next door and get some dishes."

Trevor was suddenly in front of her and although she hated feeling like a terrified schoolgirl, she couldn't help it.

"Don't go," Trevor said in the same calm tone he used with scared patients. He knew that if she left now he would never get her back here. "Believe it or not, I had the foresight to order a second set of dishware and cutlery for down here." He pulled her chair back. "Please sit down."

Lucy did, ordering herself to act her age, reminding her frantically beating heart that she was a grown woman, that nothing could happen here, between Trevor and herself unless she wished it to happen.

*How I wish it would happen...*the lonely part of her sighed.

Trevor checked on their dinner and remained on that side of the kitchen, sensing her need for a safe distance between them. "Would you like some wine with dinner? I have a lovely Bordeaux that would be excellent with this." Lucy's blue eyes widened in alarm. "Of course, if you prefer water or tea..."

"Wine would be fine," Lucy said, giving him a nervous smile. "It caught me a little off

guard is all. Over in our part of the territory, Indian Territory, alcohol is illegal. I haven't had a glass of wine with dinner since Josh and I visited Uncle Pat last summer."

"Excellent." Trevor stepped into the spacious pantry and returned with the bottle of wine and two cut crystal glasses. He set them on the table then brought out bowls, bread and dessert plates, a dish for butter and sterling flatware. He snapped his fingers. "I'll have to go upstairs for the napkins." He gestured to the pot on the stove. "Would you?"

Lucy smiled. All trace of nervousness gone. "Of course."

She checked on the soup, then stepped back towards the table and examined the china, crystal and cutlery. This was first rate and she had no doubt that Mary wasn't exaggerating when she mentioned the cost and the fact that he'd had it shipped all the way from San Francisco. She glanced over her shoulder and gave one of the glasses a tap with her fingernail. Its sound was as clear as a bell and she sighed inwardly.

How nice it would be to live with such finery as she'd seen in this house, to have someone around to help with the mundane chores that left her exhausted after a long day of teaching. She'd never known such luxury although she'd grown up in comfortable enough surroundings. Still, it might be nice to be pampered for once.

"Here we are," Trevor said coming in with two fine damask napkins, a detailed crest embroidered on them.

Lucy took them from him and placed them beside their soup bowls, rubbing the costly fabric between her fingers when Trevor turned to check on their food. A little pampering and luxury would definitely be nice.

Trevor's thinking was quite the opposite as he served Lucy then himself and poured the wine. "I think I rather enjoy this casual dining. It certainly is a change from having a gaggle of servants watching your every move – discreetly of course."

Lucy laughed and coughed, the wine almost catching in her throat. She patted her chest. "Forgive me. It's a bit hard to imagine anyone not wanting to be waited on hand and foot."

Trevor's silvery eyes darkened and he set down his glass. "You don't think much of me at all, do you?"



Lucy broke a piece of crust from her bread and began to crumble it. "It isn't that. I was quite impressed by the way you handled things this afternoon, with the children and Angry Wolf, it's just... You and I are from completely different worlds." She took a sip of wine and stayed the impulse to crumble more bread.

"Yes," Trevor agreed, setting down his sterling spoon. "But my world, as comfortable as it can be, leaves a lot to be desired. People judge you on what your title is and who your parents are. Here, people, like you and Ben and Mary, put more stock in me as a human being, not some title which will be bumped up to the next level once my grandfather dies."

"America has its share of shallow people."

"Yes, but you aren't one of them." He paused, gazed at her, "Give me a chance, Lucy. That's all I ask."

Trevor reached across the table and placed his hand on hers. His heart leapt with unrestrained joy when Lucy smiled that beautiful smile of hers and entwined her fingers with his.

It was a start.

## Chapter Six

They ate their dinner slowly, talking of their upbringing, their careers.

Trevor leaned back and swirled the last of his wine in his glass. "Every time I look at your son I see the free spirited little boy I always wanted to be."

Lucy laughed, feeling just a little giddy from her wine. "If you want to see free spirited, you should see my sister's oldest girl. That child's exuberance puts her parents to shame and that's saying a lot."

Trevor smiled. "Perhaps I'll get the chance to meet more of your family some day. I enjoyed meeting your aunt and uncle in Boston, although I have to admit that I was a bit—I was jolly close to being stinking drunk by the time I left their house." He set his glass aside. "I hope I didn't embarrass myself. I suppose if I had, you would have heard of it by now."

"Rest assured, you would have heard of it at the time." Lucy finished the last bit of her Bordeaux, liking the way it warmed her all over as it slid down her throat. It made her feel almost as warm as Trevor's kisses. "Aunt Emme and Uncle Pat are quite tolerant to a point. If you breached the bounds of what they consider acceptable, you would have heard about it in short order."

Trevor grinned, detecting a deeper meaning to the comment. "You said that you stayed with them during your college years. Did you ever breach their bounds?" Lucy's girlish blush told him he'd guessed correctly

"Sort of. I never told anyone this, not even my sister." She pressed her fingers to her mouth to contain a giggle. "I was spending the night with my friend Christine and we snuck into her father's study while her parents were out. We drank some of his brandy, a lot of his brandy, actually, and then Christine showed me the naughty pictures he kept hidden in his desk."

"Naughty pictures?" Trevor teased, delighted when Lucy's cheeks coloured again.

"I'm sure you know exactly what I mean."

"I believe I get the idea."

"I think you do," Lucy said staring at the opening at the collar of his shirt where wisps of sandy hair were visible. "Anyway, the women in the pictures were done up in all manner of costumes and the positions the men had them in were shocking at first, but the more brandy we drank the more ridiculous they became and we laughed ourselves to tears. Unfortunately, we laughed so long and so hard that we lost all track of time—"

"Mrs. Ames' father caught you naughty girls with his playthings, didn't he?"

"Yes!" Lucy laughed harder than she had in ages as she remembered the scene. When she regained a modicum of composure, she finished the tale. "We were terrified at first, but then Christine and I looked at each other and we were both struck by the same thought."

"That her parents acted out the scenes on the cards?" Trevor offered.

"Yes! Christine's parents are fine people, but they're both rather portly and..."

She and Trevor both dissolved into peals of laughter, laughing until their eyes teared and their jaws ached.

Trevor reached across the table and took hold of Lucy's hand. He rubbed his thumb back and forth, savouring the satiny, smooth feel of her skin. "You are a treasure, Lucy."

There was no mistaking the seductiveness of his voice or the desire in his eyes, and Suddenly, Lucy felt afraid. She pulled her hand free and began to clear the table.

"You don't need to do that. Just leave it," Trevor said.

"I want to. It's the least I can do to repay you for dinner."

"You don't need to repay me. I don't expect anything in return."

Lucy could not make herself turn to face Trevor, so she began to draw hot water from the tank attached to the wall near the stove. "I don't mind, really. I want to. Why don't you sit outside and relax? I'll be done in a minute."

"As you wish," he said, going out to the small porch he had built at the rear of his half of the building.

*Patience, man, patience,* he reminded himself, more determined than ever to get through to

Lucy, to make her feel about him the way he felt about her. He had to. He simply, positively had to before he burst.

Lucy took a leftover bit of bread and stood in the corner near the trash can, methodically breaking it into smaller and smaller pieces as confusion tormented her. She enjoyed Trevor Lynbrook's company and she knew that he enjoyed her company as well, which was the real problem.

He wanted her. She'd known that for a long time. It was just that, if she gave herself to him, would he want a deeper relationship or would he chalk up the conquest and move on? *You'll never find out hiding in here, will you?*

Lucy smiled to herself. She cleaned the dishes and put away the leftovers in the icebox, took a quick sip of wine from the half empty bottle on the table, then went outside.

Trevor leaned his chair back against the wall of his house, propping his long legs on the railing of the small porch. He stared out at the open prairie replaying the pleasing dinner conversation he and Lucy had shared.

As if summoned by his thoughts, she came outside carrying a large wicker clothes basket. She began taking down the bed linens that she'd washed for him earlier then turned to look at him. "What's wrong? Did the soup give you indigestion?"

"Hardly. I was just thinking that I'll never get used to it being so flat here."

Lucy suppressed a smile as she folded a pillowslip. "You miss the rugged mountainous terrain of London, do you?"

Trevor chuckled and smiled at her. "I was referring to our country place — Ashford Hall. It's up near the Scottish border. It's beautiful in summer when the heather's in bloom and the rolling hills are a vibrant green. The air is so sweet and clean there that you can taste it."

Lucy smiled to herself. She could stand here forever and just stare into those silver grey eyes of his listen to that smooth accented voice. She took down another pillowslip and folded it as she stepped closer to the porch.

"It sounds lovely and reminds me of where I'm from — Warburton. There are lots of hills, crystal clear streams, and some of the most glorious sunsets I've ever seen."

Trevor pointed over her shoulder. "That sunset isn't too shabby." Lucy turned to look at the horizon and he left the porch needing to be close to her. She was a flawless angel in the golden glow of the sun's fading rays. God, she smelled exquisite with the delicate, flowery scent of her perfume mingling with the sunshine freshness of the linens she was holding. It was the most potent aphrodisiac imaginable.

*Remember, old man, patience.*

Trevor paid no heed to the inner voice. He slid his arms around Lucy's small waist, stopping when she tensed, pulling her close once she relaxed.

"It's a very pretty sunset, don't you think?" He murmured, dipping his head to nuzzle her soft neck, falling prey to the sweet temptation of her.

Lucy shivered and melted back against Trevor, pressing her hands to his, allowing the Pillow-slip to fall to the ground. *Oh my, Oh my, Oh my!* her mind cried as a thousand bolts of invisible lightning shot through her at once. She let Trevor coax her around and willingly surrendered herself to his lips.

She ran her fingers up through his sandy hair and let him press her close, so close that she could feel his growing arousal. She never thought to protest when he slid his hands down and cupped her bottom, cradling her lower body against his. She moaned quietly when he kneaded her rear, and she arched forward, shivering again as his shaft grew rock hard.

His tongue was demanding as he explored her mouth. His hands were hot and swift as he caressed her body through her layers of dress petticoat and drawers. Lucy's senses spun out of control. This was wanton; this was frightening; this was the kind of wild passion she'd been dreaming of for so long.

It crushed her when Trevor put an abrupt end to the kisses, the touches. But then he cupped her face in the palms of his warm hands and looked at her with those spellbinding eyes. He looked at her in a way that made her throb deep inside.

Trevor's breathing was quick, his voice husky. "Lucy, don't deny it. I can't. I must have you." He took hold of her hand and pressed it to the front of his denims. "See what you do to me? He pressed his own hand into her skirts, and pressed against her mound. She squirmed, a

whimper catching in her throat. "You feel the same. I know it." He kissed her again with that same bestial intensity then flicked his hot tongue over the lobe of her ear. "Come inside with me, Lucy. I want you. I need you."

Lucy stammered, unnerved by the way he made her feel. Inside? She wanted him now. Out here. Right in the open. The wetness of arousal collected between her thighs. She wanted to touch him, to taste him, to do everything imaginable. "Y – yes," she said at last.

He scooped her up as though she were weightless and kissed her hard. It seemed to take a millennium for him to cross the short distance to the house and in that time, and Lucy's fear of the newfound passion began to take hold. Was this right? Did it even matter? She didn't know, and right now she didn't care.

Trevor carried her upstairs and began undressing her the instant her feet touched the plush patterned carpet. He tore loose two buttons in his haste and ripped her dress further when he pulled it down past her hips.

"I'll buy you a new dress," he whispered, continuing to disrobe her. "I'll buy you a hundred. A thousand."

His hands made quick work of her petticoat, camisole and stockings. Lucy trembled when he cupped her breasts. She moaned when he suckled them slowly, playfully nipping at the engorged tips. He kissed her mouth, his hands running up and down her back, his nimble fingers sliding beneath the waist of her drawers. Trevor tickled her bottom, gliding his finger between the soft globes, teasing her until she arched forward. Lucy kissed him with a hunger that surprised even her. She had never felt like this.

*Can you trust him? Do you really know him?*

Lucy banished the fearful little voice as best she could when Trevor smiled a seductive smile that made her stomach flutter. She sucked in her breath when he trailed scorching kisses down her neck, his hands inching her drawers lower and lower. She felt the wetness form and pool between her legs when he stroked her thighs and calves then tickled them again in reverse order once he'd tossed her drawers aside. He grinned a wicked grin when she opened, inviting his touch.

"You little vixen," he whispered, kissing the curls between her thighs. She whimpered when he ran his tongue along her wet slit then flicked it over the throbbing bud nestled above. He backed away when she arched her hips forward. "I know what you want, Lucy. I know exactly what you want."

Fear prodded Lucy again as she watched Trevor undress, swiftly and surely. He had done this many times. Many, many, many times. She swallowed hard when he gave her a rakish smile.

"I won't hurt you my, love, I promise," he said when her wide blue eyes latched onto his shaft, harder and thicker than it had ever been. He felt a drop of fluid ooze from the tip. He wouldn't be able to hold back for long. He swept her into an embrace his cock hard and prodding her soft flesh. She trembled when he lifted her and eased her to the bed. He wanted to please her. He wanted her years of waiting to culminate in a climax like none she'd ever known. He kissed and caressed her as he moved his body over hers. She continued to tremble. "Easy, Lucy, not too fast."

Lucy trembled harder, but not for the reason Trevor assumed. She was afraid and ashamed. She shouldn't be here. This was wrong, so terribly wrong. She clamped her eyes shut as a hellish battle waged within her. Her body craved the sex. Her heart wanted a commitment.

*You're both consenting adults.*

*Seth loved you. He gave you his name. What will this man give you – respect or worthless baubles?*

"Relax my, darling," Trevor whispered, positioning himself at her entrance. He stroked her thighs, trying to ease them apart just a little more. "Relax, love, take it slowly."

Lucy pushed his shoulders. "No. I can't. Let me up!"

Trevor stopped and looked into her frightened eyes. He kissed her tenderly, and was troubled when she did not respond, did not even part her lips. "It's all right. It's just been a long time for you. I'll go slowly, I promise." He tried to stretch her tight opening with his fingers.

"No!" She slapped his face. She sat up when Trevor rolled onto the opposite side of the bed. She looked at him, staring at her in disbelief. She wanted to explain, she tried, but it all ran

together like so much gibberish.

"I don't want a thousand dresses. I never felt like this. I want — I'm sorry. Not yet. Seth and I..."

Trevor sucked in his breath. He got up and went around the mahogany bed. He pulled on his denims and shirt then gathered Lucy's things and tossed them at her feet. "I never forced a woman in my life and I'm not going to start now, even if she did lead me on." He picked up his boots and strode to the door.

He turned and gave her a long, critical look. "One more thing, Lucy. The next time you plan to seduce a man, have the decency to leave your husband's ghost outside the bedroom."

Bitter tears filled Lucy's eyes as she heard the sound of hoof beats galloping off towards town. She returned to her own room and put on a fresh dress, then sat out on the front porch. She fell asleep there and was still there when Angry Wolf brought his band to school the following morning. She awakened when Joshua jumped on her lap.

"Time to wake up!"

Lucy winced. Her head pounded terribly, and she was sick to her stomach. She lifted Joshua from her lap. "Be a good boy and get Mummy a glass of water." She stood and made her way down to where Angry Wolf was waiting. "I don't feel well. I can't teach. Perhaps tomorrow."

The chief caressed her too pale cheek. "The white medicine man does not cure you? Where is he?" Tears filled Lucy's eyes, and Angry Wolf's eyes took on a vicious sheen. "He has done this to you."

Lucy gasped when Angry Wolf vaulted onto his horse and tore off in the direction of town. She prayed that he wouldn't do anything foolish. She took the water Joshua brought to her and asked him to explain to the others that school was cancelled.

Feeling a little less queasy, she squared her shoulders and went to meet Ben Red Eagle who was arriving with his children.

"You look like hell, Lucy, and here I thought the doc looked bad," Ben said, gesturing for his children to stay in the buckboard. He placed his arm around Lucy's shoulders and walked



out of his children's earshot. "What happened between you two?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing," she muttered, her eyes brimming with tears.

Trevor paid no attention to the commotion out in the street below his hotel window. The entire bloody town could be burned to the ground and he wouldn't care less. He kept his eyes closed as an uneasy sleep crept over him.

He was shocked awake when a cold knife blade pressed against his throat. "Now you die. Now you die, *Waquini*."

"You should have listened, medicine man. You should have left her alone."

Trevor met Angry Wolf's contemptuous gaze with one of his own, never even flinching when the tip of the blade nicked him and he felt blood drip down his neck. "I didn't do anything. She pushed me away. She wants her dead husband!"

"You lie."

"Ask her."

Footsteps pounded up the stairs. Voices echoed toward the room.

"The injun's in there, around that bend!"

"Shoot the bastard!"

Angry Wolf pulled back his knife and broke for the window. He was gone before the sheriff and deputy arrived.

Trevor was out of bed, examining his throat. It was a minor wound but stung like the devil.

"Where's that red bastard? He do that to you?"

"We'll string him up if he did!"

"I see no red bastards here, gentlemen," Trevor replied coolly. "And if you are referring to my injury, it happened when I was shaving."

The sheriff eyed Trevor skeptically. "One hell of a dull razor you got seeing as how you got a full day's growth of beard."

Trevor turned from the bureau mirror, a false smile plastered on his face. "Yes, it is one hell of a dull razor, hence the cut. Now if you gentlemen will excuse me."

Lucy was lying on the divan in her parlour, a cool compress pressed against her forehead when she heard the approaching hoof beats. Thinking it was Ben bringing back Joshua, she went outside. Her breath caught in her throat when she saw Trevor, for he was even more handsome rumpled and unshaven, than when he was impeccably groomed and dressed.

He paid her no mind, taking his horse around back to the barn. Lucy dashed through her house arriving out back as he was dismounting. She brushed a few strands of hair away from her eyes and approached him, hurting inside when he continued to ignore her. "Trevor, please listen. Let me explain." She touched his arm and he jerked it away.

"I think not, Mrs. Willis. I may have been duped once, but I shan't fall for it again."

"I didn't dupe you."

"Dupe, tease, beguile, call it what you will."

Lucy threw up her hands in disgust. She had tried to confide her fears, but it was quite obvious that he didn't care about her or her feelings. "When will you leave for England?"

Trevor looked up from unfastening his horse's saddle. He was genuinely surprised, but that surprise turned to indignation. "So that was your ploy, was it? Lead me to the brink, rebuff me and see if I run away home? You're even more naive than I imagined. I'm staying, my dear, until I complete what I set out to do. But not to worry, I've already wired your uncle to look for a replacement."

Lucy stood silently while he finished unsaddling and rubbing down his horse. She didn't want to remain, but her body refused to move. Her eyes wanted to see him, her nose wanted to smell the musky scent of him. He moved with a natural grace she'd never seen in a man. Her pulse quickened when he finished and came towards her on his way out of the barn.

He stopped scant inches from her, and his smell engulfed her, drew her, made her tingle with wanting as she had last night....

Trevor saw the look in her eyes and although he still wanted her, he wouldn't give in, not until she could tell him that her husband was indeed dead and buried. "It would have been good, Lucy. I would have given you pleasure like you've never known. I would have given you

the world."

*But would you ever give me your love?* she wondered.

Trevor bathed, changed, then packed up a valise. He was on his way out as Ben Red Eagle was bringing Joshua back home.

"I thought you weren't leaving," Lucy said quietly, coming down off of her porch.

"I do not answer to you, madam, but in the event you care, I'm going to consort with people who appreciate what I have to offer."

"You have to pay for my time if you do anything with it or not," the prostitute informed Trevor as she buttoned herself back into her low cut striped dress.

Trevor mumbled something unintelligible as he studied the blue stripes. Lucy's dressing gown was just a shade lighter than those stripes. He poured himself another brandy and reached into the bedside table to retrieve his billfold. He pulled out the bills and tossed them across the bed.

"I don't give change," she said, tucking the money into her bodice.

"And I don't give a bloody damn."

Trevor set aside his half empty glass when the woman left and put on his wool pants. Why did Lucy have to freeze up on him? Why did she let the memory of her dead husband intrude?

*Because she loved him you cloth-eared fool.*

Trevor got up and paced the small room. So what if she did. He'd loved Gwynne, but he'd gotten over it. It never stopped him from rejoining the living world. Why, that blasted woman must be trying for sainthood, piously worshiping at the shrine of the late, sainted Seth Willis, a man so in love with her that he destroyed her hopes and dreams, took the executioner's bullet instead of booking passage or appealing for a lesser sentence as his cohorts did.

Trevor passed by the splotched bureau mirror and stopped long enough to stare at his reflection, knowing that he could curse Lucy's dead husband from now until doomsday, but

that it wouldn't put the blame where it truly belonged, on his own shoulders. He was jealous and that was the simple truth. He was jealous of a ghost, a simple farmer who'd won Lucy's heart and devotion.

She was right. They were from vastly different worlds. He didn't really want to fit into hers and he doubted that she would be readily accepted into his. It was useless, futile, a flight of pure and utter fancy to think they could find a common ground.

Ah, but if they could...

There was only one thing left to do. He wandered over to Ben Red Eagle's store. Ben was out front.

"I'll be going back to England soon."

"You won't be heading out today," Ben said glancing up at the darkening sky. "Help me get these feed sacks inside, doc."

Trevor helped, amazed at how quickly the weather was turning ugly. He was also surprised when Ben started closing the outside shutters and bolting them closed. A few other shop keepers were doing the same. Gusting wind came out of nowhere and blew debris around the street. People were running and shouting.

Rain began to pelt down. Hail soon fell like a shower of bullets.

Ben was cursing a blue streak as he ran inside and called to his wife. Trevor looked at the sky. It was almost black and the wind was getting stronger, so strong that he had to hold on to the porch post for support. He'd never seen anything like this.

"C'mon, doc. We gotta get to the cellar. A twister's coming." He tugged on the confused Trevor. "A cyclone. A tornado." He pointed to the looming funnel shaped cloud in the distance..

"Lucy! Joshua!"

Ben's dark eyes were alive with fear. "No time. She knows what to do."

He held on to Trevor who tried to run.

"Let go of me! I have to get out there!"

Glass shattered at the far end of the street shouts and screams followed. Ben used all this strength to hold on to Trevor and not be blown by the gusting wind. His cry of "Sorry, doc."

was drowned out and Trevor's world went black.

Pain exploded through Trevor's jaw and he felt himself being pulled by a multitude of hands. He dreamed that he was a prisoner, being thrust into the bowels of the Tower of London as the world's mightiest steam locomotive roared above him, shaking the very earth to its core.

Lucy recited every prayer she knew as she rocked her terrified son on her lap in the dark confines of the damp storm cellar. The doors above them rattled and shook and seemed ready to pop free of their hinges and she worried that the wind would do just that and that the deadly funnel cloud would suck them up into its spinning jaws.

## Chapter Seven

"Wait a minute, doc!"

"Sweet Christ, man! I will not wait! Lucy may be injured or worse!"

Ben shook off Trevor's attempt to move him. "I mean wait until I get the damned door open. Something's on top of it."

Trevor lunged forward and shoved at the cellar door upending the mirrored bureau blocking it. The spotted glass shattered at last and Trevor stared for a moment. It was from his hotel room. He ran over the debris barely noticing the destruction around him. He found a frightened horse, its bridle caught on a broken piece of fence.

"Easy now, old man. I need you." The horse calmed a fraction and Trevor freed it then swung up onto the animal's back, kicking it in the sides. He beseeched all the citizens of Heaven to grant his wish and let him find Lucy and her son safe or at the very least alive.

His vision blurred as tears stung his eyes when he saw what could only be a lifeless body perched at an unnatural angle over a fallen tree. They had to be all right they simply had to be. If anything happened to them he would be lost forever.

"Shhh, honey. Don't cry."

Joshua cried harder and clung tighter to his mother as the sound of destruction roared overhead. Wood splintered, glass shattered, metal banged.

Lucy and Joshua both screamed when something seemed to explode overhead.

Trevor's heart fairly leapt from his chest when he saw the bloodied blonde woman half rise then collapse fifty yards ahead of him until he came close enough to see that it wasn't Lucy.

He wanted to press on to make certain that those he loved were safe, but he couldn't, the doctor in him wouldn't allow it.

"My husband. My baby. My baby."

"Be still, madam," Trevor said softly to the woman he recognised as the wife of one of his carpenters. "Lie still while I see about your family."

Trevor ran the distance to the roofless house and scrambled through the rubble calling to the missing man. He found him pinned beneath broken roof supports. He was alive but had broken his arm.

"Janie. Little Mandy."

"Your wife is uninjured. I don't know where your daughter is."

"Asleep. Upstairs."

Trevor pulled the carpenter free then clambered up the staircase, tossing bits of broken furniture out of his way. He knew the moment he reached the top step that the child would be dead. She was. Her tiny cradle, lovingly fashioned of tiger oak by her father, had been crushed by one of the fallen ceiling beams.

Trevor wiped the tears from his eyes with a swipe of his sleeve then wrapped the child in a crisp white curtain that looked as if it had just been brought home from the mercantile. He carried her downstairs. The carpenter's wife had recovered sufficiently and was with her husband, staring numbly as their devastated home.

She let out an anguished scream and hurried forward when she saw the limp bundle in Trevor's arms. Trevor handed the dead infant to her mother then fashioned a splint out of some pieces of a broken chair.

"Will you be all right if I leave? I need to see about Mrs. Willis and her son."

"Go 'head," the carpenter said, tears streaming down his cheeks as he reached out a trembling hand to his dead child.

Suddenly it was gone.

It was quiet, too quiet and Lucy feared the worst—that she and Joshua had indeed been

killed and were now stuck in an eternal oblivion.

But then, the darkness began to lift and a tiny ray of light poked through a gap in the door overhead.

"Mama?" Josh asked, sniffing back his tears, trying to wriggle from her deathlike grip.

Lucy loosened her hold then hugged him and kissed his forehead. "It's all right, honey. I think it's over. I think the storm passed." She gently nudged him from her lap and tried the door. It wouldn't budge. She tried to calm her fear. "Perhaps we should wait just a few minutes more to be certain the storm is gone, all right?"

"Okay," Joshua mumbled, his dark eyes focused on the band of light three feet away.

Lucy sat back down on the dirt floor and pulled him onto her lap. "Let's do one of our finger plays."

"Dear God In Heaven, No," Trevor groaned as Lucy's beloved school, or rather, the pile of rubble that used to be Lucy's school came into view. Miraculously, a small apple tree not two feet outside the front door was standing as was their combined house. The barn, however, just past their back doors, was levelled. Yet, his buggy was intact about one hundred yards away, as if picked out of the barn and gently deposited in the new spot. Lucy's spotted grey gelding.

"Lucy! Lucy! Joshua! Can you hear me?" Trevor called approaching the demolished school. "Is anyone here?" He moved some of the debris but found no sign of anyone.

He ran into his house then crossed over into hers but found nothing but shattered dishware and bric-a-brac. He dashed towards the barn. "Lucy! Joshua!" Where were they? Perhaps they'd gone to the Cheyenne camp, though he hoped not. God only knew what this storm did to their inadequate shelters.

"Mama, I hear something."

Lucy stopped her reciting the rhyme she'd started and listened. She heard nothing and she still wasn't able to budge the cellar door. There was no telling how long it would take for someone to come out here.

"Joshua! Lucy! Please answer!"



Lucy began banging on the cellar door. "Trevor! Trevor! Help us!"

Trevor thought he was hallucinating. The sound seemed so distant, so unreal.

"Someone help us!"

It was real. It was Lucy. He looked around. Of course, she had one of those cellars that Ben had around the far side of the house. Trevor began throwing the boards and books and large metal pans that had been deposited from the storm. There was a soggy mattress and a few women's corsets as well as a garden spade and twisted horseshoe wedged near the cellar door handles.

Trevor thanked the Almighty the instant the light shone down upon the dirt streaked faces of Lucy and her son. He lifted Joshua with one arm and wrapped the other around Lucy shoulders and held them close. "Thank God, you're safe. I was terrified."

Lucy hugged Trevor's waist. "I was so afraid. It was so loud... It didn't seem so scary the last time..." Once her heart settled back into a more normal rhythm, she looked up at Trevor. She was afraid to ask, but knew that she must. "How are Ben and Mary?"

"They're fine. I was with them when it started. I tried to get back here —"

"You would have been killed."

Trevor was struck by her deep concern and the angry frustration he felt with her. Earlier was gone.

"Mama, do you think Wahannatta is okay?"

Lucy gasped. "The village couldn't have withstood this! We have to go!"

Trevor put Joshua down. "I'll get my bag and some supplies."

"I'll get my —" Lucy broke off when she saw that the barn was destroyed.

"My buggy is over there," Trevor told her. He took Joshua by the hand. "Help me, son."

"Mama," Joshua called in a broken voice when they arrived at the Cheyenne village.

Everything was gone, everything, but all the Cheyenne were alive, except for Angry Wolf who hadn't been seen since he sought out Trevor earlier that morning. Lucy helped Trevor tend to the cuts, bruises and few broken bones, then helped her friends gather what they could from

their scattered broken possessions.

She managed a half smile when Trevor took some cherry liquorice whips from his medical bag and passed them out to the uninjured children he'd just examined. They hurried off with Joshua. "I envy children their resilience."

Trevor put away his stethoscope and bottle of antiseptic. "And I admire your dauntlessness. If this had happened back in London, the women of my acquaintance would have taken to their beds for the remainder of the century, not rushed out to help others before their own nerves had a chance to settle.

Lucy picked up the case containing his suturing needles. "Then it's a good thing I will never be an aristocratic lady of leisure."

Trevor's expression turned dismal as Lucy picked up his bag and took it to the buggy. It brightened slightly when some of the Cheyenne came over and thanked him in their faltering English. "That's what I'm here for after all."

Lucy overheard the remark, or rather the patronizing tone and frowned. He seemed genuinely concerned when helping them and his efforts to cheer the children as he treated them had warmed her heart, but of course, it had all been an act. He was very good at acting just like the man who'd ruined her mother. He was charming and polite as necessary, but eventually, his true colours showed through.

Her thoughts were sidetracked when Angry Wolf returned. She rushed to his side for he appeared ready to topple off his horse. He was bleeding from a scalp wound and numerous other cuts beneath his torn buckskin shirt. He was missing one moccasin and his other ankle was swollen to twice its normal size.

Trevor retrieved his medical bag, watching as Lucy helped the injured Indian down and carefully checking his wounds, allowing him to lean his considerable weight on her small shoulders as they came forward.

"No," Lucy told the chief. "I won't hear another word about it. You're all going to come back to my house tonight. It will be crowded, but we salvaged enough to set up a few lodges."

Angry wolf brushed a trickle of blood away from his eyes with the back of his hand and

gave Trevor a scathing look. "The *waquini* does not want us there."

"I've said nothing. Do not put words into my mouth. Now kindly remove your shirt so that I may examine you."

Trevor was heavy-handed with the stinging antiseptic solution as he dressed the Cheyenne's cuts, but he dismissed Angry Wolf's fierce looks with a mild shrug. "Can't be helped, cleans the wound, you know."

"I know, *waquini*. I know that you do not belong here."

"I will be here until my replacement arrives. You'll simply have to put up with me until then." Trevor glanced up at Lucy. She averted her eyes.



"You can't be serious!" Lucy exclaimed when she read the telegraph from her friend Christine Ames a few days later.

Trevor was entering to see if any mail had arrived from home. "What is it? Has Mrs. Ames finally gotten back to you?"

Lucy crumpled the message in her fist and looked at him. Her pretty blue eyes glittered like ice. "It takes her three days to answer me and now she says that her husband cannot authorise the additional expense of rebuilding the school and Cheyenne camp because his orders from Washington are to curtail all unnecessary expenses."

Lucy began to pace in front of the high wooden counter, her hands on her hips, her chin set at a defiant angle. "She has the nerve to say that I spend too much on supplies. That first batch she sent was all the government ever paid for and that was her idea!" Lucy stopped.

"What is wrong with that woman? These people have lost everything and she can't see that new lodging be given to them because it will go over her husband's allotted budget! It turns my stomach."

"Unfortunately, my dear, compassion is not an attribute that will garner a political promotion."

Lucy's shoulders sagged. "Well, at least Ben has given them enough to get through the end of next week, but his own resources are stretching to the limit what with the damage to their house."

Trevor wanted to sweep her into his arms and hold her close if only to keep her from the watchful gaze of Angry Wolf who seemed to be like a shadow to her these days. As it was, he simply shoved his hands into his trouser pockets. "Don't worry, my dear, things like this have a way of working out in the end."

Lucy eyed Trevor suspiciously the following week as he helped Ben unload the wagon laden with building materials for a new school. Three similar wagons had arrived the previous day with supplies for the Cheyenne camp.

Trevor wiped the sweat from his brow with a graceful motion. "Why are you staring at me, madam? The provisions arrived with a note handwritten by your dear friend, Mrs. Ames, did they not? Why do you find it hard to believe that others have heard of the disaster and graciously offered assistance to those less fortunate?"

Lucy said nothing, tearing her eyes away from that muscular, sweaty chest. She wanted very much to dip her hands into the bucket of cool water on the porch and rub it over his hot skin. "I'll start unpacking the boxes of books."

Trevor's eyes were glued to Lucy's swaying hips as she strode past the half finished foundation of the new, larger school until he felt Ben Red Eagle's unstinting gaze boring into his back. "What?"

Ben held up his hands. "Didn't say a word, doc. I was just thinking that whoever's been so 'graciously assisting' Sweet Medicine these days is one hell of a decent caring man."

Trevor smirked. "At least two of us think so."

Trevor kept to himself, so much so that Lucy was rather worried. She tried to check on him but he wouldn't allow her inside his part of the building all he would do was speak through

the closed door that he was. "Fine. Bloody fine." She was truly troubled the day Angry Wolf brought the injured members of his band to the clinic to have their wounds checked as Trevor had instructed after the tornado.

When Trevor admitted them into his clinic he looked like death warmed over, his clothing rumpled, his face unshaven, his hair uncombed and hanging down into his eyes. Eyes which were vacant and rimmed with dark circles. His melodious voice was flat. He glanced over his shoulder to the calendar hanging on the waiting room wall. "I hadn't realised that three weeks had passed. My, but time does fly when one is having fun."

Lucy's pity was supplanted by irritation. "You don't need to waste your precious time, Mr. Lynbrook. They seem to be recovering nicely, if you'll give me some more antiseptic and a supply of dressings, I'll check them over myself."

"They are *my* patients, madam. I don't recall seeing any medical certificates bearing your name." Trevor closed his eyes and massaged his throbbing temples.

"You're drunk."

"No, Mrs. Willis, I am not, I did, however, spill a rather large quantity of brandy upon myself the other night. I can't get drunk, you see, I can't eat. I can't sleep. I simply can't— anything." He massaged his head again. The cure to his ailment was so close, so fresh, so clean. If only he could reach out and take it, drown himself in her yielding body, wrap himself in the silken cloak of her affection. "Give me a few minutes, to freshen up," he asked, hoping that his longing for her didn't show.

Trevor's battered psyche received yet another crushing blow when he escorted his first patient out of the examination room. Lucy and Chief Angry Wolf were seated on the sofa, the chief's infant grandson on Lucy's lap. They made a disgustingly handsome little family portrait and Trevor felt positively ill wondering if this man who had nothing to offer other than the stubborn pride of a born leader could succeed where he had failed.

Lucy took Trevor by surprise after the Cheyenne left when she knocked quietly on the treatment room door as he was sterilizing and putting away his instruments, but it was a most pleasant surprise.

"You don't need to hover in the doorway, Mrs. Willis. I am not Jack the Ripper, contrary to your opinion."

"I never said any such thing about you," Lucy answered, folding her arms in front of her.

Trevor closed his instrument cabinet. "You don't need to say the words, my dear. I have eyes. The way you've been looking at me speaks volumes."

Lucy lowered her eyes unable to believe that he'd seen any malice in her eyes. If anything, she would have thought that the wanting shined through crystal clear. There was certainly no point in asking him if he wanted to join her and Joshua for supper, not if he was going to be so hostile because his paid woman turned on him. "I didn't mean to bother you." She turned to leave but stopped and turned back when Trevor called to her.

"I don't mean to impose, but would you have any spare provisions? I have nothing to eat here and I really don't feel like going all the way into town."

Lucy was tempted to say no, but he had a dejected little boy look about him that she couldn't resist. "Actually, I came over to ask you if you wanted to have dinner with Josh and me."

"But you were going to leave without asking."

"It seemed to me that you didn't want to be bothered."

"You were mistaken."

"I suppose we're even, then."

The uncomfortable silence seemed to stretch on for hours and Lucy felt was held captive by Trevor's pale eyes, so cold, so unreadable. "I can bring you something over."

Trevor threw up his hands and crossed the room in a few quick strides. "Stop looking at me like some frightened virgin! Do you want me to apologise for that night? Fine. I'm sorry that I was attracted to you. I'm sorry that the very sight of you makes me ache in every cell of my body. But most of all, I'm sorry that I can't fill the enormous shoes of your dear, sainted husband, Seth."

"I never said you had to," Lucy said, stepping forward. She averted her eyes for a moment, ashamed that she'd been acting like a frightened child. "I know that Seth was no saint."

He was just a man who made a stupid, deadly mistake, but deep down he was a good man and I loved him."

She saw jealousy flash in Trevor's eyes. She wanted to forget about him, forget that he ever came into her life, but ultimately she knew that she couldn't and more importantly, wouldn't. "If I act like a terrified virgin around you, it's because you make me feel like one."

Trevor stepped closer, so close that she could smell his sandalwood cologne. "I would never hurt you, Lucy. I've never been rough with my lovers."

Lucy's breath caught in her throat. It took every ounce of willpower she could muster to speak. "But that's what frightens me the most. "You've had many lovers. Indulging in that aspect of life is a regular occurrence for you, a game. "I can't be a diversion for you, Trevor no matter how wonderful your kisses and touches made me feel."

Trevor let her walk away, remaining where he was while she nervously paced the room. He was stunned when she whirled around, her blue eyes cold like bits of ice.

"I won't be your bedroom entertainment while you're here and be left alone with my reputation in tatters when you go back to England and your luxurious life."

A heaviness settled in the pit of Trevor's stomach. "I admit that is precisely what I wanted the first time I set eyes on you." He held up his hand for her silence. "But it didn't take long for me to realise that such an arrangement would not be suitable for either of us. I want more than meaningless encounters. I want a real relationship with a promise of the future." He paused again.

"May I fix us dinner in your kitchen and serve in your dining room?"

Her question brought a brilliant smile to Trevor's face. "I would like that very much."

Trevor felt vitality seep back into his weary bones as he instructed Joshua in the proper way to set the formal dining table while Lucy prepared their meal down in the kitchen.

"My mama is gonna be mad at us for dirtying up all these dishes."

"Not if we wash them for her. What do you say, old man? Shall we let your mother rest with her feet up after we eat our dinner?"

Joshua's bronzed face lit up. "Yeah. She works real hard all the time."

"Yes she does," Trevor agreed. "She works far too hard. " He pulled out one of the carved cherry wood chairs and sat, lifting the boy onto his lap. "Do you think she would like to live in a very big house and have lots of people do all of the hard work for her? "

"I guess. I sure would like to have somebody do my chores."

Trevor ruffled Joshua's black hair. "I thought you might."

A bell jangled merrily, signalling that Lucy was ready to place the serving platters on the dumbwaiter connecting the dining room to the downstairs kitchen.

Trevor grinned at Joshua. "Let me see your muscles, old man." He gave Josh's arm a squeeze and nodded his approval. "Right. Let's haul our dinner up and prepare to pamper your lovely mother."

"I'm a little worried that my simple meal won't do justice to this fine table ware," Lucy said as Trevor held out her chair for her.

Trevor smiled as he inhaled the tempting aroma of the food spread before them. "It is the other way round, my dear. These dishes can't possibly compare to that magnificent beef roast." He helped Joshua be seated then took his own chair at the head of the table. He began to carve the roast, placing thick slices on their plates. He picked up his fork, his mouth watering in anticipation until Lucy cleared her throat rather louder than necessary. He set down the carving knife and fork. "Of course. Joshua, would you say grace for us, please?"

When dessert was done, thanks to Trevor's four helpings of cake and Joshua's two, Lucy began to stack the dishes.

"No, no, no, my dear. Sit," Trevor told her, taking a dish from her hand. He rubbed this thumb across the back of her hand, grinning when she shivered. "Come into the parlour, relax, put your feet up, and have a glass of sherry. Master Joshua and I will take care of things from here on."

"But –"

"Sit down, mama," Josh said eagerly. "We're gonna primp – pomp –"



"Pamper you," Trevor offered.

"Yeah."

Lucy smiled, her unease about Trevor's lofty connections fading. "Can I take the lovely bouquet you brought to decorate the table with me? It matches your decor, perfectly."

Trevor's rich burst of laughter echoed through the dining room and he handed Lucy the porcelain vase containing the "bouquet" in question – a half dozen white roses fashioned from bits of bandage and held up on silver stems made from his surgical retractors.

"Here you are. Enjoy." He escorted her to the parlour, poured her a glass of sherry and presented it to her with a bow. He took one of the "roses" and tucked it behind her ear, delighting in the way she murmured when he tickled her ear with his tongue. He gave her a swift kiss. "Mustn't keep young Master Joshua waiting."

He paused at the door and gave Lucy a boyish grin. "I adore your simple taste in flowers, my dear. At least I know I won't have to spend a small fortune bringing you orchids in the dead of winter."

"Did you spend a small fortune bringing someone orchids in the dead of winter?"

"Yes, but it doesn't matter now. Nothing matters now that I have you to pamper."

*But it does matter – to me,* Lucy thought, made uneasy again by the fear that their backgrounds were simply too different.

Two hours had passed by the time Trevor and Josh returned. "Did everything go all right?"

Trevor chuckled and ruffled Joshua's hair. "It went once I realised that this washing up was trickier than it appears on the surface. It made perfect sense that one start with the largest thing and work down to the smallest."

Lucy laughed. "Not as much sense as starting with the cleanest item and working your way up to the dirtiest."

"I realised that while waiting more clean water to heat," Trevor said lightly, pouring himself a drink before sitting on the floor next to Joshua and helping him construct a building block castle. "It looks rather like Windsor, I think."

"When are you gonna take us to England?" Joshua asked. "I wanna see a real castle, not just the school book kind."

Trevor smiled at Lucy. "Any time your lovely mother would like, old man."

Joshua got up and jumped onto Lucy's lap. "Can we see the castle, mama? I wanna go now!"

"It takes a long time to get to England, honey."

"But we're gonna go, right?"

"Of course, you will..." Trevor got up and came to the sofa. He hoisted Joshua up onto his broad shoulders. "I'll help you get ready for bed and tuck you in while your mother rests a bit more."

Lucy bit her tongue, halting the sharp rebuke that threatened to tumble from her lips. Why was he filling her son's head with a lot of nonsense about castles and trips to England like this?

Lucy looked at the mantle clock again when she heard Trevor come through the door connecting their homes. "Don't tell me you got Josh to sleep already."

"I take it you're surprised."

"It's usually 'just one sip of water, mama.' or 'please, another story.'"

Trevor grinned then sat next to her. "The secret of my magic touch is a promise of a jaunt into Guthrie this weekend to purchase an atlas and a map of England." Trevor was stunned when Lucy shot him an angry look and got up. "What's the matter?"

"Please don't do this. Joshua is intelligent and articulate for his age, but he's still a very little boy. He doesn't understand idle chatter. He takes everything literally."

Lucy felt Trevor's eyes upon her as she strode to the window and peered out between the lacy curtain panels. She jumped when he came up behind her and placed his large hands on her shoulders for his touch flipped an invisible switch which threw her pulse into high gear.

"You know I wasn't speaking idly, Lucy. I want you and Josh to come to England with me as soon as possible."

The feel of Trevor nuzzling her neck was almost too much to bear and although Lucy's

deprived body cried out for more she resisted and pulled away, turning to face Trevor. "I can't just pick up and leave. I have a responsibility to do the job I was hired for. I need this job to support myself and my son."

Trevor squared his shoulders but held back a sharp rejoinder. "Marry me, Lucy. I will support you and give Joshua every advantage that I had growing up. You shall want for nothing."

Lucy slipped past Trevor. "I need to go out for some air."

Her mind was swirling with a thousand thoughts and questions as she hurried down the stairs and out the front door. Why did she feel so panicky? Trevor just asked her to marry him, she should be dancing on air, but she wasn't and she didn't know why. She could have a wonderful, comfortable life with the most incredible man she'd ever met, but she wasn't sure she wanted it. In fact, a part of her wanted nothing more at this moment than a physical relationship, with no ties, no commitments —

*No taking the chance that once you're ensconced in his castle, he'll tire of you and your simple, undoubtedly embarrassing American ways and leave you.*

"That's it in a nutshell," Lucy whispered.

"What's what in a nutshell?" asked Trevor, who'd been standing in the shadows watching her stare up at the moon like someone waiting for divine guidance. He came forward and sat next to her on the uppermost porch step, close but not as close as he'd like.

She shrugged, glad that the darkness would hide her blush. "It was nothing." She felt her pulse quicken when Trevor reached over and took hold of her hand. His touch was incredible. It was so strong and yet his hands felt so soft for a man. She couldn't help but remember how they felt caressing her.

"Please tell me, Lucy. I want to know."

Lucy sighed inside when Trevor rubbed his thumb back and forth across her hand. "It's just... We can't just rush off and get married."

"Why not?"

She had no answer to give.

He moved closer, so close that she could smell his spicy cologne and the sherry on his breath. "I want you more than ever, Lucy."

"I—I'm not sure..."

Lucy was silenced when Trevor's mouth covered hers and the doubts and fears plaguing her drifted away like rose petals strewn along the waters of a rippling stream. It was ecstasy pure and simple and she felt it deep inside, the throbbing heat that urged her on, told her to surrender to the passion she'd been dreaming of for so very long.

Trevor pulled back just enough to gaze into her eyes. She saw his desire breaking through his calm surface. She felt it vibrating between them like a rising storm. Her heart raced and the wetness formed between her thighs in anticipation. "Lucy, I need you. You need me, too. I can see it, I can feel it." He brushed his fingers across her breast and she arched forward as her nipple puckered in response. "I love you, Lucy. Let me show you. Let me make you mine."

This second kiss was stronger, more urgent and Lucy murmured when Trevor's finger undid the buttons of her bodice and snaked inside her camisole to tease her nipple directly. She couldn't have imagined the tiny nub becoming more swollen with desire, but it pricked against the rolling caress of his thumb, hard and aching. She tangled her fingers in his thick sandy hair when he bent his head to suckle her through the thin material of her chemise. Her body quaked under the sensation as his lips closed around her, the erotic motions of his tongue swirling over her nipple enough to catch her breath in her throat.

"Oh, Trevor," she managed to gasp. "That feels incredible..." She whimpered when he pulled her onto his lap, his lips devouring hers again, his tongue slipping inside with the same sexual expertise he used on her breast. He explored her mouth with slow, probing motions, urging her to do the same. She did, feeling wicked and aroused and more alive than she ever imagined.

Lucy felt herself drifting off to the stars, propelled by the intensity of Trevor's kiss and the feel of his hands, so strong, so soft, gliding higher and higher under her skirts. His hand slid up her calf, over her knee along the inside of her thigh. Her legs parted of their own volition, silently responding to the command of her body that longed to feel his touch at the core of her arousal. She all but came at the mere thought of his fingers slipping into the heat of her hungry

sex.

Thundering hoof beats plunged Lucy back to earth.

"Doc! Doc! Is that you!"

Lucy leapt from Trevor's lap and dashed into her house to get a small lantern. She ran out to meet Ben Red Eagle's wagon. Trevor was already there, in the back, tending to the unseen patient. "Is it Mary or one of the children?"

"No. It's Three Fingers. He got in a fight with some ranch hands. He took a knife near the heart."

"His heart isn't punctured," Trevor said. "But it came close." They pulled up to the house. "Set the light down. When Ben and I take hold of Three Fingers, I'll need you to press this cloth to the wound while we carry him inside."

"Just hold the cloth, fast, Lucy while I wash my hands," Trevor called over his shoulder.

Do you need me to assist you? I've helped Daddy and Uncle Pat and I did a bit of nursing in my college days."

Trevor smiled again as he came to the table and cut away the rest of Three Fingers' shirt before cleaning his chest with an antiseptic solution. "I think our friend Ben needs you more. Why don't you go into the waiting room? I'll be out presently."



"Look at me," Ben said glumly after swallowing the small amount of brandy Lucy poured him to calm his nerves. "All my life I've been talking down to my uncle about swilling this stuff and now it's my turn."

"You're a strong man, Benjamin Red Eagle, you won't be drowning your sorrows any time soon. You love Mary and the children too much."

Ben gave her a weak smile. "Did you know that Nahiossi's daughter was married to Angry Wolf's son?"

"I had no idea. Kimimela never mentioned that he was her father when she stayed with

me."

"Can you blame her?" Ben shook his head. "Nahiossi was a great man once, but he gave it all up; for what? To get knifed over a bottle of booze."

Lucy took hold of Ben's hand. "You heard Trevor, he'll be all right."

Fear danced in Ben's black eyes. "No. An owl followed us all the way from town right up until I stopped the wagon out front. It's an omen, Lucy. He's gonna die."

Lucy said nothing at first, knowing all too well that an owl's sudden appearance was very often followed by death. For a brief moment she again wished that she recognised the significance when one unexpectedly took up residence beneath the eaves of her house near Warburton scarcely a week before her husband took part in the political killing spree that led to his own execution.

"Well, doc? How is he?" Ben asked when Trevor opened the door to the treatment room..

"There doesn't appear to be any severe damage. The cut is about an inch long just to the left of his breastbone and the bleeding has all but stopped. I should think that absolute rest, cold compresses and some opium to keep him still and dull the pain should do the trick."

"I'd appreciate you holding off on that opium, doc, unless it's necessary."

Trevor nodded. "I gave him a bit to keep him still tonight. I should have spoken to you first, but I automatically went ahead with the routine treatment."

Ben managed a weak smile. "It's okay, doc. I just don't want him to get into that habit too. Is it all right if I stay here tonight?"

"Of course," Trevor said without hesitation. "There are extra beds in the patient area where I was about to move your uncle if you'll help me. In fact, you can go up and use my room. I was planning to stay near Nahiossi myself."

"Down here will be fine."

"Would you like me to make some tea or coffee?" Lucy asked. Trevor's easy smile warmed her all over.

"That would be lovely, my dear."

Lucy had just filled the enamelled metal coffee pot at the sink pump when she dropped it.

She didn't notice that it splashed up out of the sink and drenched the front of her skirt because her wide eyes were locked onto the owl perched on a piece of broken fence just outside her kitchen window.

## Chapter Eight

Lucy asked Trevor to help her with the coffee cups so that they could talk without Ben overhearing. "You're sure about Nahiossi, that he's going to pull through?"

"As sure as I can be, why do you ask?"

Lucy took a deep breath, knowing that this would sound ridiculous to him. "There's an owl outside. It followed Ben from town and it means that death is near." As she expected, Trevor gave her a dubious look.

"You take the 'word' of a predatory bird over mine?"

Lucy clasped her hands in front of her. "I'm serious and I know it's hard for you to believe, but to Indians the appearance of an owl at a time like this can only mean bad news. I've seen it, even back in Warburton."

Trevor wanted to laugh in her face, but the conviction in her eyes prevented him from doing so. "I've examined him as closely as I possibly can and I've seen nothing that would indicate damage to the heart muscle. It's a relatively small cut and wouldn't have stopped bleeding if it were that deep."

"All right, just watch over him, please."

Trevor was annoyed that she could doubt his abilities, but he said nothing other than.

"Of course, my dear."

Nahiossi took a turn for the worse during the night. He'd developed a cough accompanied by increasing pain. His pulse had become weak. He showed signs of shock and internal bleeding.

"Do something, doc!"

Lucy took hold of Ben's hand. "It's not that simple, Ben."

Trevor ran his hands through his dishevelled hair. "There isn't anything simple about it,"



he said.

Ben looked through the door of the patient room watching in horror as his uncle writhed in pain despite the cloth restraints meant to keep him still. "You have to do something."

Trevor said nothing, but looked at Lucy. She bit her lower lip and he knew that she understood his problem. Opening the chest cavity was an invitation to death.

No doctor in his right mind would attempt such a thing and none would blame him for not trying. No one could possibly blame him. No one but Ben. And Lucy. And himself.

"It has been done," Lucy said quietly. "Once that I know of. A few years ago."

"Daniel Hale Williams," Trevor said. "I read his official report. An old colleague brought it to me."

"Then you can do something. An operation?" Ben asked in a voice so unlike his own that even Trevor was struck by it.

"It's too risky. I haven't actually operated in close to five years. And a heart operation..." Ben Red Eagle gave him a look of utter contempt and a similar one to Lucy. "Then why are you here? Why did your uncle send him? Because we're just no good redskins?"

"Ben, no!" Lucy tried to reach out to her distraught friend. He shook her hand off, skewering both her and Trevor with another look that bespoke of the fierce warriors he was descended from.

"Then I'm taking him out to the village. If he's going to die, he's going to die among his people."

"No."

Lucy, Trevor and Ben turned their attention to the door where Chief Angry Wolf stood.

"Nahiossi and I were like brothers in battle. He would not want to die this way." Angry Wolf directed his piercing gaze at Trevor. "Work your white magic on him."

"It's risky. I can't guarantee that he'll survive."

"Do it, *Waquini*."

Trevor debated with himself as the three pairs of eyes remained locked on to him. It was too damn risky and yet, he had to try or forever condemn his own cowardly action.

"Can you assist, Lucy?"

"I'll try, but Joshua –"

"I will look after the boy, white woman."

Beads of cold sweat slid down Trevor's back as he administered the anaesthetic to his patient. Lucy blotted away the drops of clammy perspiration, which sprung up on his forehead when he picked up his silver scalpel.

"You don't need to do this if you're not sure."

Trevor looked at her but said nothing.

He did need to do this operation. He needed to save his patient's life and indirectly his own. He needed to prove that he was still the capable surgeon he once was. "I'm all right."

In his mind's eye, Trevor pictured the friend and colleague he'd watched recreate Dr. Williams' monumental operation on one of the teaching cadavers from the medical college.

With a steady hand and swift precision, he opened his patient's chest cavity. He worked as quickly as he could but still it took quite some time until the heart was visible.

It was just as he suspected. As with Dr. Williams' patient, the pericardium – the thin, protective sac surrounding the heart muscle had been pierced by the point of the assailant's knife and would need to be stitched closed.

The underlying heart had been nicked by the blade as well, but it was only a superficial wound and would be left unstitched.

"We'll need to flood the heart area with that salt solution as protection against infection," he told Lucy. "Now give me the forceps and the suture needle."

With the forceps Trevor gently lifted the tissue of the pericardium sac and stitched the wound then told Lucy to use the salt solution once more before he began closing the chest opening with silkworm gut thread. He did not breath a sigh of relief until he placed a clean, dry dressing over the external incision, and then it was only a partial sigh, for the real test was yet to come.

All was quiet by seven that evening. Mary had come to take Ben home to rest for a while. He went only after Nahiossi's daughter, Kimimela, promised to stay the night at Lucy's to be near her father.

"I'm going to take a dinner tray next door," Lucy told Kimimela and Joshua. "I'll be back as soon as I can, and I'm sure Trevor will let you sit with your father."

Lucy knocked lightly on the door to the patient room and entered, setting down the dinner tray on a small table near the door. She stood and watched Trevor, dozing by Three Fingers' bedside, exhausted no doubt from the surgery that took most of the morning. He'd been here ever since, leaving only long enough to relieve his bladder twice.

A wistful smile lifted the corners of Lucy's mouth for Trevor looked like a sweet young boy now with his blond hair falling into his eyes, his mouth slightly open, his arms folded across his chest, but earlier, he had been the consummate surgeon, performing the dangerous operation with a graceful skill that she hadn't thought possible. Why, his expertise surpassed anything she'd ever seen from her stepfather and uncle, the finest doctors she knew. And she knew many, having done volunteer nursing in Boston while attending teacher's college.

Trevor Lynbrook had certainly surprised her today and she wondered what else there was to discover about him. She stepped across the room and gently shook his shoulder. "Trevor. Trevor. Doctor Lynbrook."

Trevor's silvery eyes snapped open. He looked first to his patient and then to Lucy.

"What is it?" he asked, stifling a yawn. "Is there a problem, another emergency?"

Lucy smiled. "No. I just wanted to tell you that I brought you something to eat. There's a bowl of stew, a cold sandwich, a piece of peach pie and some tea."

Trevor's smile was warm and appreciative. "Thank you, Lucy."

He stood and stretched from side to side to ease the kink in his back then checked his patient's vital signs before crossing the room, his eyes glued to the lovely back of Lucy Willis. Her calm demeanour and nursing acumen had certainly impressed him today. He'd been impressed with her after the tornado, but today he realised that she was even more incredible

than he first thought. What a team they could make, in and out of the operating theatre.

He pulled up a chair for Lucy before taking one for himself. She poured the tea for both of them as he took a large spoonful of the vegetable stew, savouring the rich taste.

"This is excellent. Imagine, a trained nurse, teacher, and master chef all rolled into one. I am impressed." Lucy blushed. He smiled and touched her hand before taking a bite of his cold roast beef sandwich and long sip of his favourite tea. "Thank you for assisting me today. I couldn't have done it without you."

"It was my pleasure, doctor."

Trevor's brow arched and he swallowed another helping of stew. "So, you finally believe that I'm a 'real' doctor, then?"

Lucy felt herself blush. "Yes, and I'm sorry that I ever doubted you." She toyed with the edge of her apron, feeling both unnerved and excited by his steady gaze. "It was just that I thought the only thing you were used to was tending to rich ladies' fainting spells."

He finished his sandwich. "Actually, I did do that at my mother's insistence, but my foray into private practice lasted all of twenty minutes." He sipped his tea. "Actually, I think it was closer to seventeen minutes and ten seconds."

Lucy laughed with him and he felt as if he were sharing a joke with an old friend, one who understood the annoyance of dealing with hypochondriacs.

"Actually, I became fed-up with the high-handedness and lack of concern East London's supervising surgeon had towards the patients." Trevor paused again as the memories and resentments flooded back. "A lot of things drove me to open my own clinic – the necessary amputation of limbs to save time and bed space, the lack of clean linens and blankets to curtail laundering costs and assorted other foolishness."

Lucy breathed a quiet sigh and nodded. "I saw that same type of thing in the hospital I worked at in Boston. Luckily, as soon as Uncle Pat was appointed the chief administrator he made certain to put the patients first."

Trevor nodded and held up his cup when Lucy gestured to the teapot. "The medical profession could certainly use more like him, especially where women patients are concerned.

That was the thing that truly turned me away from East London – a totally unnecessary hysterectomy performed on a seventeen year old girl after her husband brought her in and complained that she refused to perform her 'wifely duties' .”

Lucy gasped. “Please tell me you're not serious.”

“Unfortunately, I am,” Trevor said quietly.

Lucy's heart went out to him even before the pain settled in his eyes. “You don't need to tell me.”

He reached out and took hold of her hand. “I'd like to, if I may.” She nodded and placed her free hand atop his. He smiled and kissed her hands to his lips.

“The head surgeon elected to remove her reproductive organs certain that it would calm her 'female hysteria'. It never occurred to the bloody fool to just look at the situation objectively. The girl was just that, a girl in size, while her husband was a brute of a blacksmith, a foot taller and a good seven stone heavier. It's no wonder she experienced pain when they coupled.”

“You couldn't stop them,” Lucy said simply.

Trevor shook his head, his eyes darkening with remorse. “I tried, but had no real authority. The operation only made matters worse and when she still refused to 'cooperate', her husband brought her back and her vagina was mutilated to better accommodate him. The poor girl died of sepsis a week later.”

Lucy's stomach churned. “That's disgusting. How she must have suffered. How you must have suffered.”

Trevor drew in a sharp breath. “You're the first person to understand. The very first. Everyone else said that I was overreacting, but they didn't understand.”

“I don't know how they could have missed it. The devastation is written all over your face.” Lucy reached out, trailing her index finger lightly across his creased brow.

The simple unaffected gesture meant more to Trevor than all the material wealth his family possessed and he wrapped his fingers around hers, pressing her hand to his lips. “I treated her after the first surgery and grew to like her. She was witty and more intelligent than anyone had ever given her credit for. I didn't find out about the second operation until after it

was over and the infection had set in." He breathed a gentle sigh. "I was with her at the end. You'll never guess what her last words were."

"Tell me."

Trevor took a deep breath and when he spoke his voice was thick with emotion. "She said, 'I don't blame you, Doctor Trev, 'cause you're the only friend I ever had. Ever.'"

"I'm sorry, for both of you," Lucy said after a time.

"You have no idea how much that means to me, Lucy," Trevor said in a silky tone as he rose from his chair, Lucy's hand still clasped in his.

Lucy's lips prickled in anticipation as his lips descended towards hers. She became aware only of the heat of his body as their mouths joined. The touch of his lips was soft, but commanding as they seized her senses with their subtle, alluring movements. To feel that touch anywhere else... Lucy would have moaned with yearning had he not stolen her breath as soon as their lips met. Closing her eyes, she was prepared to surrender to that delicious kiss and lose herself to all the pleasures that would follow. But Trevor's sleeping patient stirred, breaking the spell of passion before it could completely blossom.

Reluctantly, Trevor pulled away.

Lucy was surprised with her own resigned longing as the days passed and Trevor remained slightly aloof his focus totally on his patient's progress and his own hunger to read and learn even more of the late breakthroughs in surgical technique. He wired friends in England and her uncle in Boston to send him the latest journals and articles, even first hand accounts of treatments they'd witnessed .

She certainly wasn't jealous of his dedication to medicine or his concern for Nahiossi, but a part of her definitely longed to be the object of Trevor's focus.

**Three weeks later**

The rhythmic pounding of the Cheyenne drums reminded Trevor of hearts beating in unison as he stood in the shadows and watched Nahiossi's daughter and some of the other women try to teach Lucy one of their celebratory dances. She was dressed in a deerskin shift decorated with coloured quills, her blonde hair loose and flowing down her back. Her gentle laugh travelled on the breeze, mingling with the beat of the drums and the low chanting which accompanied the dancers.

"You have returned a great man to us, for that I thank you."

Trevor turned to face Angry Wolf. "You're welcome, but what I did was only a part of it. Your God and Nahiossi's own will to live played bigger parts."

Angry Wolf nodded, but said nothing, as his dark eyes drifted past Trevor to the dancing women. He glanced back, smiling at the doctor's jealous expression. "You have nothing to fear from me. You have won her heart with your white medicine, be sure to cherish it."

"I do," Trevor said as he felt the maddening wanting of her fill him and make his body ache as it had these many nights. His quiet sigh brought a chuckle from Angry Wolf. "What?"

"You have not taken her to your bed, have you?"

Trevor straightened with indignation. "I don't see as that is any of your concern."

Angry Wolf smiled knowingly. "You fear the power she has over you even though she does not see this power for herself."

Trevor tugged on the cuffs of his striped cotton shirt. "As I said it is none of your concern, but to satisfy your curiosity, fear has nothing to do with it." He turned back to the campfire around which the women danced, hoping to avoid Angry Wolf's piercing gaze. It reminded him of his grandfather who could always tell when he was evading the truth.

"No more excuses... Tonight Joshua is sleeping here and with Nahiossi here to stay you will have all the privacy you need." Angry Wolf's eyes glittered in the yellow glow of the fire.

"Are you man enough to accept the challenge?"

"I'm all the man Lucy needs."

"We will see," Angry Wolf answered, stepping away as Lucy approached, breathing heavily from the exertion of dancing.

"You two weren't having words, again, I hope."

"Heaven's no, my dear. He was merely thanking me for performing the operation."

Lucy smiled and fanned her face with her hand. "The dance doesn't look that hard, but it certainly is tiring. Why don't you give it a go?"

Trevor laughed and waved off Ben Red Eagle who was calling for him to join the men assembling. "I'm afraid that waltzing is my forte. Besides, I'm not dressed for the part," he said lightly, his eyes travelling over Lucy's trim body encased in the glove soft buckskin. It was loose fitting, but clung to all the right places and the memory of those places set the blood to pounding in his temples with the same intense rhythm as the Cheyenne drums. "Let's go home, Lucy."

"It's still early, and..." Her voice drifted off as her momentary fear was replaced by the constant craving that had been lurking beneath her calm surface for days on end. "Let me tell Joshua and give him a kiss goodnight."



Lucy stared at herself in the cheval mirror that rested in the corner of Trevor's bedroom. Her hands were shaking like brittle leaves in a stiff autumn wind and she clasped them together as tightly as she could. Trevor had gone to get them each a glass of brandy and it seemed as if he'd been gone a lifetime. She wished that he would hurry back and yet she didn't because a part of her was still frightened.

Not of him, but of the way he made her feel, the way every nerve in her body seemed to jerk to life the instant he set eyes on her. And when he touched her, even a simple, quick touch like the one he'd used to help her out of his buggy was almost too much to bear. It made her ache and quiver deep down inside in a way that she never imagined possible.

If such simple, innocent contact had this effect, what would happen to her when they



coupled? She'd die, literally die.

"Of pleasure," Lucy thought aloud, studying the reflection of the wide canopied bed in the mirror, as a slightly wicked smile spread across her face.

"So sorry pet, I seem to be all thumbs this evening I—" The brandy snifters in Trevor's hands shook, sloshing their contents perilously close to the glass' rims as he realised that this was no mirage, but the fulfilment of every lurid fantasy he'd had since first being attracted to Lucy Willis.

Here she was, lying naked and trembling in the centre of his huge bed. Waiting for him, her glorious breasts rising and falling with each quick breath she took, her deep pink nipples pointing skyward. Her slender hips were turned slightly, her bent leg barely hiding the soft cluster of rich golden curls at the juncture of her thighs.

The look in Trevor's heavy-lidded eyes as he approached after setting the glasses down was like an aphrodisiac to Lucy and she felt a rush of heat deep within her. She squirmed and held out her hand. "Trevor."

Trevor stayed where he was, his cotton trousers stretched to the limit by his rapidly expanding erection. He peeled off his shirt, tossing it to the floor then pulled a tapestry covered side chair to the foot of the bed. "I want you to do something for me, Lucy," he said, his voice husky.

"Anything, if you'll come here," she pleaded.

Trevor sat and pulled off his riding boots, tossing them in the corner, using all of his self control to keep from mounting Lucy and riding her like the wild beautiful creature that she was. His cock was rigid and his balls beneath the shaft swelled and ached at the sight of her as she parted those creamy thighs ever so slightly. He moaned deep in his throat as the flickering lamp light reflected off the sheen of wetness on her thatch of golden feminine curls. He wanted to drink in her juice and slide into her soft wetness.

"Trevor, please," she said her voice thick with need, her blue eyes slitted.

"In time, my love, but first you much touch yourself." As he expected, she sat up, her blue

eyes wide with disbelief.

"No. You touch me."

Trevor licked his suddenly parched lips. Touch her? He wanted to possess her body and soul, devour her, lap at her until she ran dry. "I will, my love, but first, you must touch yourself. Show me what you like so that I might please you."

Lucy held out her hand. "Come here. I think you know exactly what to do."

Trevor's eyes sparkled. "Are you afraid?" he teased. He chuckled when the deep blush crept over her cheeks. "Do it for me, Lucy. I want to watch you play with that sweet pussy."

Lucy's pulse raced like mad. This was wicked. It was sinful. It was exciting beyond belief! She closed her thighs and felt a faint twinge begin to take form. This was it, this was what she wanted. This was the same kind of grand, all-consuming passion that she'd dreamed of her entire life and she wanted to experience it with Trevor.

"If I do this," she asked in a husky whisper. "Then what? What will you do?"

"If you do this," he said carefully, shifting his weight in the chair. "I will ravish you the way no other man could. I'll fuck you until you beg me to stop."

Without another word, Lucy settled back on the pile of feather pillows, closed her eyes and began.

She imagined that it was Trevor's hands cupping and lifting her breasts, squeezing them with increasing pressure until they throbbed. Her nipples tingled and swelled as her palms brushed over them in a lazy circular rhythm. She squeezed and tugged on her nipples, aching to have Trevor's mouth surround and suckle them. Just the thought of that made her grow wetter and she squirmed.

"Are you enjoying this?" she asked with a slight catch in her voice.

"Yes, but not as much as you."

Lucy opened her eyes and turned her head to see him sprawled on the small chair, every inch of his large frame taut and uncomfortable. "Then come here," she said, reaching out with one hand, the other still cupped around her breast.

Trevor grinned as the fingers of Lucy's left hand unconsciously toyed with her dusky

nipple. "In time, my love, when you've finished." He paused. "You know you want to."

"Damn you," she said softly, knowing that he was right. She drifted her hands across her ribcage, liking this wicked little game, knowing that he was feeling the same type of stirring deep inside. This was like those pornographic postcards she'd seen as a girl. It seemed so wrong, to do this, but she couldn't help it because the excitement was like a drug pushing her further to the limit of her moral boundaries.

Trevor's sharp intake of breath broke through the stillness of the room when Lucy slid her hands up and down along her thighs. She smiled to herself. If he wanted a show, he'd get one, she decided. She bent her knees, inched her legs further apart to give him a better view of her sex.

Trevor groaned quietly, his silvery grey eyes growing wide. He reached for the table behind him and felt for the brandy glass, nearly knocking it over, unable to tear his gaze from between Lucy's legs. He gulped the dark liquid when she brushed her fingertips through her pubic hair. "Do it," he commanded, letting the empty brandy glass slip to the thick carpet. "Finger yourself."

"What if I refuse?" she teased, not looking at him, her long slender index finger lazily stroking her wet slit.

"You can't refuse," he told her with absolute certainty. "You want me to fuck you but you know I won't until you've show me how you fuck yourself."

"Damn you," she sighed, increasing the pressure of her fingers, dipping them inside to coat them with her essence.

Trevor felt his erection throb and release a drop of fluid when Lucy exhaled a soft moan as she began rubbing her slick fingers in a voluptuous tempo, her slim hips gently rising and falling, giving her the desired amount of friction. He undid the buttons of his fly, needing to free himself before he strangled. This was remarkable and far more erotic than he imagined. He wondered if she indulged her passions this way alone in the night. What a shame it was for her to have denied herself for so long.

His cock jerked at the sight of Lucy's fingers even more wet, her quickening as she sought

out the swollen bud enshrined within her moist folds. She was gasping now, little sultry gasps, as her desire peaked and the movement of her hips and fingers quickened. He rubbed the swollen head of his cock, spreading the slick drop of precome that oozed out in response to the glorious sight before him. "Slide your fingers in, Lucy. I want to watch you fuck yourself."

"I want you to fuck me," she said, her lovely eyes flashing in the dim light.

"I will when I'm ready, once you do as I've asked," he teased, back, noting how her gaze shifted to the way he casually rubbed his balls sac.

"Damn you," she whispered, the amusement in her eyes clearly overriding the tone she couldn't make harsh.

Yet she did not hesitate in sliding her finger into her pussy, her other hand poised higher to rub over her clit.

"Do it, Lucy," Trevor said forcing his own hands away from his cock and balls lest he come far too soon for them both. Still, he knew that this woman above others would make him hard again in no time even if he did.

His body wouldn't be satisfied until he was buried deep inside hers and felt those hot wet folds close around him the way they must be doing to Lucy's own fingers that quickened their movements. She bucked her hips and slid her wet fingers out and up to rub over her clit, in quick little circles that made Trevor ache.

A quiet cry escaped Lucy when she stiffened and shook from the climax.

She moved her head to look at him as she caught her breath, her trembling hand resting lightly over her sex, her own juice thick and glistening on her fingertips. "Is that...what you wanted?"

"Partly," Trevor replied, rising from the chair, peeling off his trousers. His cock twitched as her wide blue eyes latched on to his rigid length. She reached out to grab him, but he seized her wrist and licked her fingers, her taste so rich, so salty sweet.

Lucy sucked in her breath as she ran his hot tongue over her fingers, sucking them into his mouth once at a time with excruciating slowness. "Oh, Trevor. I need you."

Trevor planted a sweet kiss in her palm then gently laid her hand on the bed. "Look at

what you do to me, Lucy," he said indicating his erection, as another drop of clear fluid oozed from the tip. "I've never wanted a woman this badly. I never needed a woman as badly as I need you."

She sat up and knelt, her knees spread wide. She ran her hands up his thick, hairy thighs.

"You shouldn't do this," he said in a raspy tone. "You have no idea what you're doing to me."

Her reply was a wicked little laugh.

"Oh, God!" he exclaimed, pulling his hips back when she touched the tip of her tongue to the head of his cock and lapped up the sheen of precome. He felt the sweat bead on his forehead and wiped it away with a swipe of his hand. "You're an evil temptress, Lucy."

She smiled a self satisfied smile then settled back on the pillows. "Make good on your promise, then."

"Promise?" he asked weakly. He could barely remember his own name the way the blood pounded in his temples, clouding his brain to everything but this glorious need. Her eyes locked on to his and Trevor knew that his heart was lost for all time.

"Fuck me, until I beg you to stop."

Trevor moved over her swiftly, using all the will he possessed to hold back long enough to kiss Lucy, to caress her flushed cheeks, sample the silky soft skin of her neck and shoulders, indulge his craving on the rosy tips of her breasts.

Lucy's senses spun out of control and she returned Trevor's kisses with a greedy hunger she'd never experienced. She wanted to possess him to brand him as hers alone. She wanted to explore every lean hard inch of his big body with her hands, her mouth.

"Sweet Christ," Trevor groaned as Lucy began gliding her hot tongue along his shoulder. He buried his face in her tousled hair when she began gently sucking on his neck. He pulled away and peered down into her half closed eyes. "I can't wait another second."

"Then don't," she whispered, sliding her hands down his back, gripping him low at the base of the spine, lacing her fingers together as she lifted her hips. She shivered as Trevor drove forward, the thick circumference of his cock stretching her tight opening, her body opening up

to receive the rock hard erection.

His cock filled her beyond belief. A tendril of pleasure travelled through her at the feel of his cock stroking her from within. She moaned, eager to feel him drive deeper still. But he stayed perfectly still for one long, agonizing moment that drove her to the edge of desperation. She feared that he'd changed his mind, that she'd disappointed him in some way.

"Trevor."

He showered tiny kisses across her face. "Easy, my love. It's been a long time for you. We should go slowly."

"No," Lucy said with a sigh. Her body pulsed in need, flaming her desire with each passing moment. "Hurry. Take me. Fuck me," she begged.

The note of pleading in her voice was all Trevor needed to hear and he began driving into her like a frantic adolescent, astounded by this ferocious lust she brought out in him. Her body gripped him, so taut but wet and delicious against his sensitive flesh. He wanted his entire length to be sheathed in the warm depths forever, and he pumped his hips with an urgent need to sate his ravenous desire. With each powerful thrust, she rose up to meet him, contracted her inner walls around him, sounds of pleasure vibrating within her chest. It became an exercise in exquisite torture, as was the feel of her nails digging into his lower back while she clung to him for traction.

He reached beneath to cup her rear and shifted his weight, pulling her as close as he could. He began to chant her name as the sensation built and he felt the climactic summit approach.

"Come with me, Lucy."

"Yes, Trevor, oh yes," she mumbled against his skin as she rose to meet each hard downward stroke, her face buried against his shoulder. He felt her hand snaked between them as she rubbed her clit. She tightened around him, those hot folds gripping him like a dainty, strong hand until he came in hard, sudden spurts.

She hit her peak mere seconds after he did, but Trevor was the one to cry out for she'd bitten his shoulder hard enough to draw blood. He didn't mind.

"I'm sorry," Lucy said quietly, wiping the droplets of blood from Trevor's skin with

feathery touches of her fingertips. "I don't know what came over me. I've never done anything like that. I never felt the way you made me feel."

Trevor smiled down and rolled to the side, pulling her with him. "It was the same for me, my love. Incredible. Simply incredible." He brushed the wayward strands of golden hair back from her forehead admiring the sheen of it and the warm glow of her skin in the soft lamplight. He stifled a yawn, totally sated and half exhausted from their fierce lovemaking. Lucy laughed, a spicy, suggestive laugh. "What?"

"You can't go to sleep," she said, running her finger through the sweat dampened curls of hair on his chest...

"I don't want to, my love, but." He yawned amazed that she'd done this to him. "You've worn me out."

"I don't care," Lucy teased, pushing Trevor onto his back. "You promised to fuck me until I begged you to stop and I'm not even close to stopping."

Trevor moaned as she slid over him, her hot wet pussy drawing him in like invisible fingers as she straddled him and stroked her abdomen. "Heaven help me, then," he said, reaching up to cup her full breasts. Touching them was not enough and he soon had to still her gently rocking hips so that he could sit up against the lacquered headboard of the bed to suckle her. He loved the feel of those erect sliding across his tongue, the skin around them puckering even more with each gentle lap across them.

Lucy moaned softly and began to slide along his still hard cock. Trevor pulled back, drew her into a swift kiss then settled back on the pillows and watch as she rode him, those heavy breasts swaying gently, her skin flushing as her desire built anew.

Suddenly she stopped and gave him a very wicked grin then slid free and shifted to kneel over him. He groaned when she took him into her mouth, her own groan soon muffled when he began to lap at her sweet pussy.

Her wetness coated him and he licked it from his lips when he pulled away to slide his thumb into her his fingers finding and softly stroking her clit as his body succumbed to the pleasures of her mouth.

He didn't think he'd be able to but he was going to come again. "You might want to use your hand, my love," he cautioned.

"Why ever would I?" she asked, lifting her head just long enough to speak.

Trevor squirmed beneath her then she massaged his balls with her small soft hands as her lips and tongue did indescribable things to his cock. He fingered her harder and she rocked back and forth, her pace quickening as they each came again.

Lucy knelt beside Trevor, her pink tongue snaking out to catch the glistening drop of come that slid from the corner of her mouth. "I've never felt like this," she said softly, reaching down to touch her dripping pussy.

"Neither have I," he assured her, pulling her hand to him to lick her fingers clean. He coaxed her down into a leisurely kiss and soon they fell asleep in one another's arms.

Trevor got his much needed rest but he was up shortly after daybreak, his body more familiar with late-working nights and early risings. Trevor smiled to himself as he eased out of the bed, gently shifting Lucy's head from the curve of his shoulder to one of the plump pillows. Last night's "work" had been a true labour of love and this picture, Lucy curled up on his side of the bed, a sweet satisfied smile on her pink lips was something he would remember and treasure always.

He slipped on his robe and crossed the room. He glanced over his shoulder to make certain that Lucy was still comfortably settled in his bed. Luckily, the most important element of his dream was a reality and it was only a matter of time until the other elements fell into their proper place.

It puzzled him sometime later after he awakened Lucy to his simple breakfast of buttered toast and tea when she gave him a look of total disbelief in response to the question, "When would you like to marry and return to England with me? If we leave soon, we'll be there for the height of the Season and I would relish the chance to show you off."

"We can't just pack up and leave. We each have a job to do."



Trevor said nothing. He simply sipped his tea.

Lucy waited for a reply. The wait seemed longer than it actually was.

Trevor put down his fine china cup and rested his elbows on the small side table he'd pulled close to the bed. He stared at his fingers steeped in front of him. "The timeframe isn't that important. As long as the Earl is in good health he doesn't need to have me close by." He smiled, not wanting any vague uncertainties to detract from the wondrous night they'd shared.

He got up and came to sit on the bed, pulling Lucy into the curve of his arm, inhaling her musky scent. With his left hand he caressed her side, slipping between her thighs when she opened for him. She was still wet with his seed, her delicate tissues swollen from their lovemaking.

Trevor's hungry kiss made her head swim, but Lucy was the first to draw back. "I should get up. You're all clean and I'm—"

"Exquisite." Trevor kissed her neck, her shoulder, her flat belly. He trailed his tongue across her salty skin until she squirmed beneath him. He got up and pulled off his trousers, liking the way her gaze was riveted to his cock. He inhaled sharply when she ran her fingers over his erection, her touch the perfect blend of soft yet firm.

He moved her hands away. "I'm going to fuck you again, my love, and then I'll help you bathe."

Lucy's eyes sparkled playfully in the early morning sunlight streaming through the wide window. "What makes you think I want you to?"

Trevor grinned. Sliding two fingers inside her, he stroked her most sensitive spot and grinned again when she responded quickly, arching up against him. He pulled his hand free. "I suppose you aren't interested."

"But I am."

He feigned a sigh and looked to the window. "Oh I don't know..."

"Trevor?"

"Yes?" He turned back surprised to find her on her hands and knees. She looked over her shoulder at him, a coquettish grin upon her lips.

"With such an invitation how can I resist?"

He climbed onto the bed behind her, his cock gliding across her wet slit. She shivered when he pumped his hips lightly then bent to glide his tongue along the base of her spine. It was his turn to shiver when Lucy reached beneath herself to hold his cock still before rocking back and forth letting his swollen head rub over her clit.

Trevor kissed her back again, his blood pounding in his veins. He drew back and slid into her hot body in one swift stroke. He gripped her slim hips, and drove into her, Lucy pushing back, meeting each swift thrust. When she reached to touch herself he slid his hand beneath hers and rubbed her clit in those same swift circles as she'd done to herself last night. Soon she was quaking beneath him her pussy walls contracting around his cock and making him come in record time.

They collapsed to the bed and Trevor rolled to the side, pulling Lucy against him. He cradled her face, and gazed down into her eyes seeing his own heart mirrored in the cornflower coloured depths. "I love you, Lucy. Totally, completely –"

"Forever," Lucy whispered, drawing Trevor's head down for another kiss.



## **London, England**

### **The following week**

"I should think that my own son would have the courtesy to wire me personally with news of his engagement," The Dowager Viscountess Ashford grumbled over afternoon tea. She lifted her cup for her daughter-in-law to pour.

"Really, Charlotte," Trevor's grandmother said, stirring a touch of cream into her tea. "I don't see that it matters. We are all under the same roof. What matters is the identity of this woman." She sipped her tea then set her cup down on the ornately carved table with the regal air of one born to wealth. "I have met her uncle, of course, and all things considered, he is a

rather pleasant, well mannered fellow, but..."

"But she is no one," Trevor's mother announced, voicing the other women's unspoken concerns. "The woman has an occupation. She teaches savages." She set down her cup and picked up her ivory handled fan. "We shall be disgraced."

Trevor's widowed sister-in-law poured a cup of tea for herself and studied the older women. "This may be just another passing fancy of his. There have been so many, one tends to lose track."

Trevor's grandmother, the Countess of Greylock chose to ignore the bitterness and veiled meaning of the comment. "But he never proposed to any of the unmarried ones." She raised her eyebrows but did not acknowledge her grand-daughter-in-law's mumbled comment. She sipped her tea then took a dainty bite of a jam-covered scone. "At any rate, William seems to feel that this infatuation of Trevor's is quite serious, and he is more than pleased."

Trevor's mother grumbled into her teacup. "If you ask me, he planned the thing from start to finish."

"I doubt that," the countess said icily. "His main concern was saving your son from himself and keeping the title in the immediate family, since Ellis had no heirs, male or otherwise."

The eyes of the countess and viscountess turned to the widow of Trevor's brother who mumbled to herself again. "I did my duty often enough. It isn't my fault."

"No matter," the Countess of Greylock interrupted, picking up another jam covered scone. "What we have to do is consider all the options and help Trevor make the best choice possible, for himself and us."

## **Sweet Medicine, Oklahoma Territory**

"I'm with the doc," Ben Red Eagle said after polishing off his second generous helping of the apple pie Lucy brought for their Fourth of July celebration. "I say tie the knot and then

worry about meeting the in-laws."

"Oh, hush and stuff this into that big mouth of yours," his wife Mary said, pushing a piece of blackberry pie towards him. "Weddings are a woman's territory and if Lucy wants to wait, then I'm on her side."

Lucy and Trevor exchanged a smile. "It appears as though we are right back where we started, my love."

"Apparently."

"More negotiating is order, I think," Trevor teased, sliding his hand beneath the table to squeeze her thigh.

"I suppose," Lucy answered quietly, shivering when Trevor's touch shot straight through her.

Mary cleared her throat. "I think it's time we cleaned this mess up and got ready to go watch the fireworks."

"I'll help," Lucy said, playfully ruffling Trevor's hair when he gave an affronted look, quite put out that he had to curtail his love play.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Mary asked as they divided up the left over desserts.

"About what?" Lucy asked innocently as though the pie server never wobbled in her hand.

Mary took the slice of blackberry pie and wrapped it in a clean napkin. "About why you're afraid to marry Trevor and meet his family."

"Is it that obvious?" Lucy asked setting down the knife. She sank into one of the oak chairs and plucked at her skirt.

"It is to me considering that pile of crumbs under the table outside that wasn't there until Trevor started telling us about England and his plans to build you a big fancy house in London."

Lucy chewed her bottom lip. "He is related to and is a close friend of the future King of England. Trevor's grandmother was an attendant at Queen Victoria's wedding. I'm a peon.

People like me wait on people like them. My mother was a parlour maid to an aristocratic family, or heaven's sake."

"And the man who fathered you was as blue blooded as they come, but he was a liar and a seducer and I'm sure he's not alone in that department. Trevor's people aren't your betters. I'll bet they have a few skeletons rattling around their closets."

Lucy let out a sigh and plucked a piece of broken pie crust from the tin pan on the table. "But what if they don't? I love Trevor more than I thought possible and I know that he loves me, but I can't embarrass him. If they hate me as a fiancée that's one thing, but if I'm his wife that's something else."

Mary sat down. "Once you're his wife, what they think doesn't matter."

Lucy smiled weakly and brushed the pie crust crumbs into her palm. "But it does. I can't explain it, but Trevor is the last link in his family's chain to their title and it's very important to him because it's important to them. "

"He wouldn't divorce you because they didn't like you."

"No, but they might disinherit him. Knowing that he brought such disgrace on his family might very well kill the love he feels for me now."

Mary gave Lucy's hand a comforting pat. "You don't believe that. They wouldn't."

"Did you ever think that your family would actually try to kill the man you fell in love with, or disown you when you defied them and married him?"

"No," Mary said simply.

"Joshua, we are studying the geography of the United States of America, not the British Empire, now put that book away and take out the one I gave you."

"Yes, mama."

Lucy set down the ruler she'd just slapped against her desk to get her son's attention then massaged her temples. She went to Joshua's desk and bent down. "I'm sorry, honey."

"It's okay," he muttered, not looking up.

"It isn't all right, and I'm sorry for this and the other times."

Joshua looked up and nodded.

Lucy went back to her desk and picked up her ruler to point at the map hanging over the blackboard, but before she could resume her lesson, Chief Angry Wolf stood and told his people that it was time to go.

"We have the entire afternoon," Lucy protested.

"No, white woman. Our lessons are over. You will teach us no more. We have learned all we need. We know to read and write enough of your language to keep the white chiefs in Washington from cheating us."

"You can't do this. This is just the beginning! There is a whole world ahead of you all. We haven't even begun to talk of poetry or—"

Angry Wolf turned his back and strode from the school his band following behind. Without another word they mounted their ponies and rode off, some of the children carrying their copy books and pencils.

Three nights later after Lucy cried herself to sleep, her efforts to change Angry Wolf's mind falling on deaf ears, Trevor sat alone beneath the small apple tree behind the house, systematically picking apart a long slender twig.

"I have done as you asked, *Waquini*. I have spurned her teaching and forbid her to set foot in my camp. I have crushed a part of her spirit for you and now you must make good on your word."

"I have. I set aside the funds in Ben Red Eagle's name. He'll see that your people are provided with five hundred horses and two thousand head of the finest cattle available. Ben will be contacting those buyers my grandfather told me about. That should get you started in the ranching business."

Angry Wolf nodded. "If my people did not need this to secure their future, I would never have done it."

Trevor stood, his expression glum despite the knowledge that he had gotten his way as he usually did. "I wouldn't have asked you to if there had been another way. I want to go home

and I want Lucy and Joshua with me, but she refused because she was needed here. There was simply no other way."

"So you say," Angry Wolf answered. He left as quickly and silently as he came.

Trevor stared into the darkness telling himself that he had done the right thing. Lucy and her son deserved better than this crude life and if Lucy wasn't ready to realise it then it was his duty as her fiancé to hasten the process. He had done nothing wrong, nothing at all.

## Chapter Nine

Mary Red Eagle hugged Lucy for the fifth time in a row. "Don't you dare forget to write. I want to know everything."

"I promise not to leave anything out." Lucy smiled brightly at Trevor seated out in the back yard, deep in conversation with Ben. "I feel a little strange that he wants to give me such an extravagant pre-wedding, wedding gift, though. It's exciting, but I have the nagging urge to be insulted."

Mary laughed. "You tell Trevor that if he wants to insult me with a new wardrobe, I have a high tolerance as far as being insulted goes."

Lucy laughed and twisted the large aquamarine and diamond ring Trevor had made for her in Oklahoma City. Her smile soon faded. "I'm scared, Mary. I know he won't say it, but he's really buying me the new clothes so that I don't embarrass him in front of his friends and family."

She did not feel better when Mary took her time in answering. "He's crazy in love with you, Lucy that's plain to anyone with eyes and I know that you could never be an embarrassment to him, so stop thinking that."

Lucy twisted the ring again, glancing out the door of the kitchen towards Trevor. "Maybe embarrassment isn't the right choice of words. He wants me to look nice, to fit in with the other women in his life."

"You are the most important woman in his life, Lucy Willis and don't you forget it," Mary said, handing her friend a glass of lemonade. "You dress yourself and Josh in your best clothes to go to church on Sunday, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. It's the same thing only to them, everyday is a dress up kind of day."

"I suppose," Lucy said quietly, still uncomfortable that Trevor was going to "make a new



woman out of her” as he jokingly put it the first time she voiced her concern over his extravagant gesture.

“Come, my love,” Trevor said, holding out his hand to help Lucy into the buggy at the end of the week.

“All right, I just want to be sure that I haven't forgotten anything.”

“You haven't,” Trevor said, his impatience evident in both his voice and stance.

“Everything is in order and locked tighter than a drum. The doctor your uncle secured is arriving tomorrow and Mrs. Ames assured you that a new teacher will be here within a fortnight should the Cheyenne have a change of heart.”

Lucy sighed and took one last look at her house. She hadn't been here long, but it had been like home since the day she arrived and she missed it already. She looked at Trevor and at Joshua who was excitedly leafing through a book on Paris where they were going after stopping to visit Lucy's family in Warburton and her Uncle Pat in Boston. She smiled and gave Trevor a quick kiss. “I'm ready.”

Trevor helped her in then climbed up beside her and hurried the horses off towards town.

*Good Lord*, Trevor thought as Lucy and Joshua pointed out the windows of the train, excitedly giving him a ‘guided tour’ of their former home. This place was every bit as rural as Sweet Medicine, without even a saloon to drown one's misery in. True, the frame buildings were in fine condition and the Indian population seemed quite tidy, but Trevor did not want to remain here longer than necessary.

Once they exited the train, Trevor made arrangements for the bulk of their luggage to be kept at the depot and hired a man to carry their three smaller bags to the hotel where'd he'd secured adjoining rooms despite Lucy's assurance that her parents had room to put them up for the next two nights.

“I'm certain they do, my love,” Trevor replied, bending down to brush a playful kiss across her ear. “But I wouldn't feel quite right should I have the urge to bed you under their

roof."

"Surely, you can wait until we get to Boston or on the boat to England."

Trevor grinned, seeing the desire sparkle in the depths of her lovely blue eyes. "I can wait, but can you?"



"I really can't understand what's keeping Star and Jason," Lucy's mother commented as she refilled her husband's glass of lemonade. "Do you think anything happened?"

Quinn McNamara suppressed a knowing smile. "I'm sure they'll be along any minute, Julie."

A short time later Quinn laughed as his daughter's husky voice drifted through the opened parlour windows and footsteps pounded up the front porch steps. "Nita, stop pulling Martha Jane's braids; James, get that thumb out of your mouth; Matthew, darling, you nursed fifteen minutes ago, you can wait."

Trevor smiled at Lucy as her mother went to open the door. He wanted their home to ring with the same exuberance. He stood to greet Lucy's sister and brother-in-law, his broad smile wavering as they entered the parlour with their children. Indians. He hadn't realised. He shoved aside his immediate shock and stepped forward to greet them as Lucy began the introductions. "It is indeed a pleasure to meet you both. My, what a lively brood you have," he commented lightly as the three older Hillhouse children swept Joshua up in their frenzy and dashed outside to play. He reached out to stroke the plump cheek of Lucy's youngest nephew when she took the baby from her stepsister. "I hope the good Lord sees fit to bless us with such delightful children."

"Uh-huh," was Star Hillhouse's only reply and the only words she spoke to Trevor for the next four hours.

"I don't like him," Star told her husband for the twelfth time since they'd tucked their

children in for the night. She began to pace the length of their spacious bedroom. "In fact, I despise Mr. High and Mighty Viscount Ashford."

Jason leaned back against the elaborately carved headboard of their bed. "C'mon. He wasn't that bad, just a little on the stuffy side."

Star stopped her pacing and shot her husband a cold look. "C'mon yourself. You saw it, I know you did. The instant he set eyes on us, there it was – that look."

Jason's grin faded. "You're right, but he was civil to us and the kids. More than civil."

"*Exactly*. He was trying to cover up his prejudice." She began to pace again. "I've been on the wrong side of that look the same as you. You can't tell me that it didn't bother you."

"Okay, it bothered me – but only a little."

Star scoffed. "The man is prejudiced. If he was that way to us how will he treat Josh? I will not have that child denigrated. Not my nephew, not Seth Willis' son."

Jason sat up straight. "No one was denigrated. He was probably caught off guard. I don't imagine Lucy makes it a point to go around saying 'by the way my sister is half Indian.' I think Trevor really cares for Josh. And it's clear that Josh adores him. You heard the way he called him Papa."

Star stood at the foot of the bed and grumbled. "I should gut him."

"But you won't," Jason said matter-of-factly before patting the empty side of the bed.

Trevor Lynbrook disappeared from Star's mind. For the time being.

The following morning as she sat in her kitchen, with Jason and the children scheduled to be gone for the next few hours, the look she'd glimpsed in Trevor Lynbrook's eyes came back to plague her. No, she would not allow that man to assume the role of Joshua's father, especially if her sister was too blind to see the truth.

"Are you trying to frighten me, madam?" Trevor asked shortly after being shown into Star's office located at the rear of her home. He straightened his shirt cuffs watching as Lucy's stepsister removed her large bone-handled knife from the target mounted to the wall behind her desk.

"Frighten you? Heaven's no," Star said as she sat behind her rosewood desk, the specially designed Bowie in front of her in a position to be thrown. "I like to keep in practice, don't you know. It's the savage red blood in me." Her last sentence was heavy with venom. She gestured to the chair in front of her desk.

Trevor sat, immediately regretting it. She'd undoubtedly chosen the most uncomfortable chair she owned to place here. "I believe I know what prompted this invitation and I apologise for any untoward feelings I may have caused you or your husband."

"I will not accept your sham apology," Star informed him, balancing her knife, point up on the tip of her right index finger. She skewered him with her eyes. "What are your intentions towards my sister?"

Trevor sat quite still despite the twinge forming in his back. He set his elbows on the arms of the chair and steeped his fingers, wondering how this woman's husband put up with her. "That, madam, is none of your business."

Star let the knife drop, catching it by the tip just before it hit her desk. "My sister and nephew are very much my business, Lynbrook, whether you like it or not."

"I believe my opinion of that matter speaks for itself," Trevor said coolly as she came around the front of her desk. Again, he asked himself what her husband saw in her as she folded her arms across her ample bosom and stared down her nose at him as though he were no better than a common guttersnipe. Why, she'd probably show more courtesy to a guttersnipe.

"I'm waiting," she announced.

"For what?" Trevor asked to irritate her.

"I'm waiting for you to get out of Lucy's life."

What Trevor wanted was to get out of this damned chair. "Whether I am in Lucy's life or not is up to Lucy, and Lucy alone. Now if you'll excuse me."

Star leaned forward, making escape from the torturous chair impossible. "You may charm the pants off my family with your wealth and titles, but to me you are just another white bigot and if I even think that you are mistreating my nephew because of his Choctaw heritage, I will make you pay in ways you never even imagined."

He met her wrathful gaze with one of his own. "I love Lucy and Joshua and I don't give a tinker's damn if you believe it. And as far as yesterday is concerned I apologised. Lucy speaks so highly of you that I'd forgotten you weren't blood sisters."

"Would your remembering it have changed your surprise when you saw us, saw that we're Indians?"

"I don't know," he said truthfully. "But as one who lives in a glass house I should think you'd be leery of casting stones."

Star straightened. "What are you talking about?"

Trevor stood and took advantage of his height to look down at her. "Come now, madam. We're both too old to play games." He straightened his cuffs, taking his time in responding. "Is it really my lapse of decorum that has you troubled, or is it the fact that I can give Lucy and Joshua things your sainted Seth couldn't even fathom?"

Star sucked in her breath and Trevor knew that his hunch was correct. "I'm willing to admit that I was jealous of the late Mr. Willis, but he is dead and buried and his memory will be relegated to the past once we reach England."

"I'll tell Lucy."

"Tell her anything you like, madam."

With that, Trevor left.

Later that evening at the dinner party Lucy's parents gave, Trevor noticed a distance between the sisters that hadn't been there the first day and he felt a brief regret at the friction. However, Lucy's words when they were alone in his hotel room confirmed his opinion that he was in the right.

"Sometimes I just don't understand, Star. She's always been on the difficult side, but..."

"But she told you about our 'discussion'?"

Lucy looked up while toying with the curling hair on his bare chest. "Yes and I'm sorry for the way she behaved. She has some crazy notion that you're going to hold me and Josh captive in England and never let us see our family again."

"That's ridiculous."

"I know." Lucy snuggled closer, resting her head on Trevor's chest. "I hope she's there to see us off tomorrow, though. I don't want to leave with this between us."

"I'm sure she'll be there, my love."



Trevor stood to the side as Lucy and Joshua said their goodbyes. To his consternation, Lucy's sister was not there although her husband and children were.

"Wait! Don't leave!"

All eyes turned towards the door of the depot as Lucy's sister rushed in, her hair falling out of its braid, her men's denims dusty, one knee torn. She paused long enough to give her husband a menacing look. "You were supposed to check my horse's shoe!"

He winced. "I guess I forgot."

She muttered something and rushed forward towards Lucy and Joshua.

Trevor walked over to her husband and shook his hand. "Goodbye, old man. It was a pleasure meeting you."

Jason grinned. "I know you can't say the same for my wife, but I don't take offence."

Trevor laughed and slipped his hands into his trouser pockets. "Thank you."

Trevor waited in their compartment while Lucy and Joshua stood out on the small platform at the rear of the train and waved to their relatives until the depot could no longer be seen. He wasn't used to such drawn out farewells, and although it seemed a bit much, he didn't begrudge Lucy for she was accustomed to a different lifestyle. She was used to being open with her opinions and expressing her feelings and he wondered how best to broach the subject with regards to her tempering such impulses once they reached England.

He loved her openness, but knew that others of his set might not find it as charming or easy to bear and it would be in Lucy's best interest to show a trifle more restraint.

"A penny for your thoughts," Lucy said, coming into the compartment.

Trevor flashed her a gleaming smile and pulled Joshua onto his lap. "I was merely thinking how much I love the both of you."

Trevor found the short stay in Boston to be much more agreeable than his sojourn in the Indian Territory. At least in Boston there was indoor plumbing, electricity, and telephones as well first class hotels and fine restaurants at his disposable. He sent Lucy and her aunt on a shopping spree while he accompanied her uncle to his hospital.

"You will turn heads at the play this evening," Lucy's Aunt, Emmeline, said as Lucy turned around in the apricot chiffon gown. "That gown is exquisite."

"And expensive." Lucy sighed and sat on one of the small settees in the large dressing room. "I can borrow something from you or Moira for tonight. Don't you think it's wrong for Trevor to be doing this? He wants to take me to a place that is even more exclusive than Worth's in Paris."

Lucy's aunt smiled. "Pat bought me a gown from Worth for our twenty-fifth anniversary after he gave that speech in Scotland. You'll feel like a princess, or should I say, viscountess."

Lucy plucked at a piece of lace trimming on her gown, heedless of the look the saleswoman gave her. She stood. "I don't think I'll take any of these. I'm sorry for wasting your time."

She avoided her aunt's questions as she changed back into her simple grey suit, her mind awash with conflicting thoughts. It felt wonderful to be pampered and treated to the best of everything, but it still made her feel so — all-overish. And she couldn't help but wonder if her sister might be right about some things. Star was a good judge of character, and while Lucy knew that he wasn't the bluebeard she insinuated he was, something Star said rang true.

*"I'm not saying he doesn't have feelings for you, but please, please be careful. Don't let him make you something you're not."*

Lucy felt her temperature rise when Trevor's eyes swept over her as she descended the curving staircase at their hotel. "Did Aunt Emme and Uncle Pat arrive yet?"

Trevor tucked Lucy's arm in his after placing a gentle kiss in the palm of her gloved hand. "They're waiting outside in their carriage. It's a beautiful night and you're the most beautiful thing about it."

Lucy blushed. "Thank you. I borrowed this dress from my cousin, in case you're wondering."

"Oh. Did you find nothing at the store that suited you?"

"There were a lot of pretty things, but it seemed too extravagant for one night."

Trevor started across the spacious lobby. "You could wear it when we dine at the Captain's table aboard the ship."

"I regret that my clothes aren't good enough."

Trevor stopped in his tracks. Where had that come from? He stroked Lucy's cheek, troubled by the pain he saw reflected in her eyes. "What's the matter, my love?"

Tears brimmed in the corner of Lucy's eyes. "I don't know," she said, unable to put her convoluted feelings into words. She pulled her arm away from Trevor's. "I can't go to the play. I'm sorry. You go. Give my apologies to Aunt Emme and Uncle Pat."

"Lucy —" Trevor stared as she hurried towards the elevator. When she disappeared into it he went outside and gave his regrets to her family. A simple combination of headache and fatigue, he said, no doubt brought on by the hectic pace of the past week and the even quicker pace that was certain to follow. He believed this himself until he found the door connecting his room to Lucy's locked

Lucy pretended that she did not hear Trevor's calls or knocks as she lay face down across her bed until she heard the loud bang followed by the splintering of wood behind her.

"What is wrong with you? You can't go breaking down doors in other people's buildings!"

"I'll pay for it."

"That's your answer for everything, isn't it?"

Trevor said nothing, still standing just inside the doorway in her room. She looked as she



had back before they'd made love, like a frightened doe about to be devoured by the big bad wolf. "Lucy, what—" He broke off as the concierge knocked on the outer door to his room.

When he returned, Lucy was standing at the foot of her bed, a small decorative pillow clutched in her arms like a protective shield. "Well, did you pay them off, exert your noble influence, get your way as always?"

Trevor's shoulders slumped. For every wondrous step they'd taken forward, they'd taken four times as many back in the space of minutes.

"Well?" she asked again, her tone high pitched and so unlike her normal speaking voice. "Did you turn the situation to your advantage as you always do?"

"Lucy, love, what is all this about?" he asked quietly.

Lucy tossed the pillow onto the bed. "Don't play stupid, Trevor. You know exactly what this is about. This is about you treating me like a mistress, trying to dress me up to suit your own personal taste." She sank down onto the bench at the foot of the bed, her head lowered, her voice barely audible. "Star is probably right. You are just using me until you find a new toy."

Trevor couldn't make it all out, but the word Star told him more than enough. He came forward and knelt before Lucy, taking her cool hands into his. He stroked the backs of her hands with his thumbs and her skin warmed within seconds. Thank Heaven.

"Look at me, my love." She didn't. "Please?" Lucy looked up for just a moment. Trevor began to speak, lifting her chin up with a soft prod of his fingertips. "I would never use you. I merely want to give you the things you've never had, the things you deserve, the things I am perfectly capable of buying you without it draining anyone's finances including my own." He paused.

"You really can't accuse me of treating you like a mistress now, can you?" he asked, rubbing the pad of his thumb over the engagement ring he'd purchased for her. "You know that I want you to be my wife, now, tomorrow, the next day—it's entirely up to you. I wanted us to marry in Sweet Medicine." He paused again. "You know that."

"It's just...I don't know." Lucy pulled away and stood, stepping around Trevor. She went to look through the gap where the fine Irish lace curtains came together. She sighed when

Trevor came up behind her and slid his arms around her middle. She didn't pull away, but sank back into his strong embrace, her hands resting lightly over his. "I'm ashamed of myself, acting like some silly little girl."

"You aren't a silly girl," he assured her. "You're the woman I'm in love with." He teased the back of her neck with his lips and tongue, pulling back slightly when she shivered and rubbed her bottom against him. "Let me spoil you, let me show the world how special you are to me."

"You don't need to show the world," she whispered, turning to face him. "Just show me."

"With pleasure," Trevor murmured, pulling her into a tight embrace.

*Can this kind of passion really last?* Lucy wondered as Trevor's possessive kiss made her blood race through her veins and her body crave his. Her nipples hardened and rubbed against the fabric of her clothing, dying to feel the teasing scrape of his teeth and the earnest sucking of his mouth. She felt her drawers grow damp and her body pulse deep inside wanting to feel his cock buried far inside her.

The question running through her mind drifted away when Trevor unbuttoned her bodice and undid her skirt. She gave herself over to the masterful way he undressed her, the possessive way he moved his hands over her hot skin.

She trembled with a wicked delight when he took the Dutch cap he'd gotten for her and slid it into place. She grasped his wrist when he slid his fingers free from her pussy and she brought his hand to her lips and sucked his first two fingers clean.

"Oh Lucy," he groaned, taking hold of her free hand to rub it across the front of his trousers.

She cupped his balls, slid her hand up the hardening length of his cock through the fabric.

"Undress me," he said.

She grinned at the commanding tone and eagerly complied, teasing him with fleeting touches and hungry licks as she exposed more and more of his skin until he pulled away and walked to the end of the bed. He shifted the padded bench and sat on the edge, his hungry gaze raking over her naked body.

"Come here."

She went to him, her gaze never leaving his. She didn't need to be told what he wanted and when she reached the bench she straddled his lap and slid down upon his stiff cock, loving the feel of it stretching her pussy, and burying itself to the hilt.

Giving in to the passion, she rode him slowly, her pace quickening once he began to toy with her clit .

"God, I love to feel you come," he whispered before pulling her into a kiss, his touch quickening and taking her over the edge.

She went limp against him and he was still hard and wanting within her.

"Quitting so soon?" he asked playfully, stroking her back with light feathery touches that made her shiver.

"Never," Lucy teased back, playfully tweaking the end of his nose. She slid from his lap and dropped to her knees before him, taking his cock in hand and stroking him until he writhed on the bench. She slid her lips over the spongy head of his shaft and continued to stroke the length, revelling in the possessive way he tangled his fingers in her hair as she stroked him faster, her lips creating a gentle but firm suction.

She eagerly swallowed his cum when he exploded into her mouth and rose up to sit on his lap when he pulled her up to him and captured her lips in a kiss, his tongue sliding across hers tasting his own essence as she she'd done before.

Lucy was restless that night and was up long before dawn. She stared up at the ornamental plaster medallion in the centre of the ceiling watching as the ceiling brightened with the rising of the morning sun. Trevor stirred beside her and she turned onto her side to look at him, a loving smile lifting the corners of her mouth, the boyishness of his countenance a startling contrast to the powerful virility of his nude body. She trailed her fingertips lightly along the prominent muscles of his shoulder and upper arm, glancing down to observe the effect her touch had on him. His cock swelled and began to harden almost at once.

Trevor murmured her name and reached out for her, his silvery eyes opening by fractions, his mouth curving into a smile. "Good morning, love."

"Good morning." Lucy shivered when Trevor caressed the side of her face, his hand gliding down to cup her breast. She shifted her position, brushing up against his arousal.

"Hold that thought, love. A bit too much champagne don't you know."

Lucy admired Trevor's backside as he walked across the patterned carpet towards the bathroom. Her happy expression faded away as her eyes fell on the small brass cased clock on the bedside table. In two hours they were due to pick up Joshua at her cousin's then travel to New York to catch their ship to Europe.

It was exciting, the prospect of travelling across the ocean for the first time, visiting places she'd only read about, but still, the uncertainty remained, refusing to leave even after Trevor's physical expression of love and his gentle reassurances before they fell asleep that he would love her always, that she was the only woman to make him feel this way – content and more satisfied than he ever thought possible.

Lucy tore herself away from these thoughts when Trevor called to her. He looked like a harem master standing in the doorway, appraising her with a long leisurely look. Without a word he stretched out his hand to her and she went, gladly doing his bidding, certain that she was forever safe with him, that he would never harm her or betray her trust.

## Chapter Ten

The golden rays of sun bathing the port were only slightly more brilliant than the smile which lit up Trevor's face as he swept his arm in a broad gesture as the ship landed in France.

"I told you, my love, the very heavens smile down upon us." He tightened his grip on Lucy's waist. "Not a single delay on the crossing and a glorious rainbow to welcome you to Europe." Trevor looked down as Joshua tugged on his coat tail. "I can't see it."

Laughing, Trevor hoisted the boy onto his shoulders much to Lucy's dismay. "There you go old man. Is that better?"

"Yeah!"

Lucy grimaced. "Don't squirm, Josh," she cautioned, holding her breath, afraid that her only child would plummet to a watery grave before her very eyes.

"I won't let him fall, darling," Trevor said, trying to slip one arm around Lucy again.

"Two hands," she said, placing Trevor's hand around her son's ankle again. "This is not Willow Creek."

"Trevor laughed. "No, my dear, it is the Atlantic Ocean as you have so graciously reminded me each and every time Joshua has set foot outside the compartment." He paused, grinning at Lucy's annoyed expression. "As adorable as those tiny lines on your brow are, I do wish you'd stop worrying." He grinned again when Lucy's brow furrowed and she took a small silver cased mirror from her handbag.

"I don't have wrinkles."

Trevor laughed. "But you will if you worry needlessly."

Lucy put her mirror away and reached up to place a steadying hand on her son's leg.

"Mothers worry."

"I'm simply teasing, my dear." Trevor dipped his head down to give her a quick kiss.

Trevor's brief sightseeing tour of Paris when they arrived later that day was a blur to Lucy

because she was overwhelmed by how many people Trevor knew. The few cables he'd sent from America seemed to have put all of France at his disposal. They'd been met at the dock in Cherbourg, escorted directly to the first available train and had been met at the station in Paris by yet another driver who took a longish route to the fashionable apartments Trevor's family kept near the banks of the Seine.

"Apartment?" Lucy asked incredulously when confronted with the eighteenth century building that occupied the better part of the block, the rest taken up by a walled garden. "I thought you said this was just a small place where your mother and grandmother stayed when they come to buy new clothes."

"I suppose that technically it isn't small, but we keep many of the rooms closed off."

Before Lucy could comment, Joshua ran forward and she grabbed him by the back of his jacket before he could get too close to the river. "This is not Willow Creek either, Joshua Jason Willis. You be careful."

Trevor lifted Joshua and placed his free arm around Lucy's waist. "I'll take you sailing tomorrow, all right, old man?"

"Yeah!"

Lucy grimaced. "Don't tell me you have a yacht, here, too."

"No. It's just a small thing. The yacht is in Cowes. We're favoured to win at this year's race. The Earl had the *Osprey* overhauled this past winter and he thinks that we might even give Bertie a run for his money."

Lucy could only offer a weak smile.

"Would you like something else?" Trevor asked, noting Lucy's untouched dinner plate. "I'll send for the chef. He'll prepare anything you like."

Lucy shook her head. "I'm not very hungry. Would you like to finish mine, honey?" she asked her son who had eagerly eaten two of the delicately grilled trout and was eyeing hers.

Lucy slid the gold trimmed dish across to him and did the same to her raspberry sorbet when the liveried footman appeared silently to serve it from an enormous sterling tray. She

gestured to Trevor's half eaten meal, like Josh, he'd been having second helpings of everything. "Please finish, I'll just sit on the balcony for a while, all right?"

"As you wish."

The grey marble balcony adjacent to the mirrored dining room overlooked the immaculate garden and offered a glimpse of Notre Dame's famed rose window over the lush tops of the towering fruit trees. It was all so big, so showy, so unlike anything she'd ever experienced and Trevor took it all in stride as though this palace on the river was just another little house, the retinue of efficient velvet clad servants were just part of the furnishings. She looked through the glass doors to Trevor and her son eagerly devouring yet another course of the rich dinner, laughing and talking like any father and son might.

This was good for Josh. This close male contact was exactly what he needed, and yet a part of Lucy was reluctant to let him to get too used to this life of luxury. He needed to remember that there was another world, a real world where the majority lived and toiled for what they had, where a man's actions and not his family's connections and money opened doors both literally and figuratively.

Lucy exhaled a soft sigh. Who'd ever have thought that raising her son in luxury would be as challenging, if not more challenging, than the humble existence she was used to?

Lucy smiled at Trevor's reclining reflection as she sat in front of the gilded vanity table that once graced the boudoir of Madame de Pompadour and brushed her hair. She tried not to notice how hopelessly plain her best nightdress looked in comparison to the hangings of the canopied bed which were trimmed with the finest lace she'd ever seen.

"Please don't braid it," Trevor said. He patted the bed. "Let me brush it for you."

Lucy sat cross-legged on the wide bed, her back to Trevor. The gentle tug of the stiff bristled brush going through her hair felt wonderful as did the heat of Trevor's breath on her neck. "Do you brush the hair of all your lovers, my lord?"

"Past tense, love. And to answer your question, no I never brushed their hair, or took

them for moonlit walks, or cradled them in my arms to watch the sun rise. "

"I'm glad."

"So am I," Trevor answered simply, wrapping his arms around Lucy. "Are you going to tell me what's been on your mind this evening, or am I going to have to torture it out of you?"

Lucy turned her head. "Torture?"

"Of the worst kind," Trevor said, sliding his hands up beneath the raised hem of her nightdress. He ran his fingers up and down her thighs letting his hands roam upwards with excruciating slowness until Lucy tried to arch into his touch. He held her with just enough firmness to keep her in place and continued to stroke her heated flesh everywhere but where she wanted it the most. "I told you it was torture."

"The worst."

"So, tell me. What has you troubled?" he asked softly, continuing his love play.

Trevor's sweet torture was more bearable now that some of her thoughts were shifting away from her womanly centre. "You'll think it's silly, but I don't want Joshua to grow up thinking that he can have anything he wants simply because his mother was lucky enough to fall in love with an aristocrat. I want him to remember who he is and where he came from. "

Trevor stopped stroking Lucy and nuzzled her neck. "It isn't silly at all, my love, and please don't think that I want to deprive Josh of his heritage."

Lucy looked back over her shoulder. "It isn't just that. It's this whole business of palatial houses and yachts and all the other material things you take for granted. I don't want him to take such things for granted."

"He won't. Don't worry, love. I won't spoil him rotten. My grandfather may be living royally now, but years ago, when he met your uncle he worked for everything he got. He toiled in the mines right along with his men, ate the same modest meals, wore the same workman's clothes." He wrapped his arms around Lucy. "I took a different path, but I know what it is to work long hours. I know how your back aches when you've stood the entire day. I know what it feels like to fall into an exhausted sleep and wake feeling refreshed, knowing that you've actually done something with your time, something to benefit others as well as yourself."



Lucy's heart swelled with love. "Yes. That's what I want for Josh." Tears of pure joy glistened in the corners of her eyes when she turned to face Trevor. She threw her arms around his neck. "I love you so much."

Trevor hugged her close. "And I love you, more than words can say."

*Then tell her, his conscience prodded. Tell her that you had a hand in getting her to give up her job. Don't run the risk of her ever hearing it from someone else.*

She wouldn't hear it from someone else. Ever. Of that Trevor was absolutely certain. There was no need to tell her. It wasn't important.

"You don't have to do this," Lucy said as she dug into her berries and cream during breakfast the following morning. "I'm sure I can take myself shopping and buy some ready made things."

"And deprive me of giving you a pre-wedding wedding gift and seeing you disrobe in a mirrored fitting salon?"

Lucy slapped Trevor's hand and looked to her son who was just outside the glass dining room doors playing with a wooden wagon on the balcony. "You're not going to be in the fitting room."

"I most certainly will." He laughed when Lucy's cheeks blushed as red as the berries in the Sèvres bowl in front of her.

Lucy blushed. Whatever will they think?

"When they see you they will understand why I can't bear to be apart from you even for a moment."

"Disappointed, my dear?" Trevor teased when he saw the puzzled look on Lucy's face as his carriage turned onto a tree lined street of what appeared a wealthy residential area then stopped in front of a large but nondescript building that might have been a private school. Another brass plate near the double front doors said simply *Maison Fourchet*

"It isn't quite what I imagined an exclusive dress salon to be."

Trevor helped Lucy out of the carriage then escorted her up the broad stone stairs where they were greeted by a nattily dressed old man. Trevor clapped him on the shoulder. "Hello old man." He turned to Lucy. "Allow me to introduce the esteemed Monsieur Fourchet otherwise known as Freddy Newcastle."

Freddy escorted Trevor and Lucy into the entrance hall and Trevor smiled at Lucy's quick intake of breath as the austere building front was replaced by a lavish interior that might have been copied from the Palace of Versailles itself. The twisting blue carpeted staircase that was the centrepiece of the entrance hall and the wealth sumptuous flowers in crystal vases, was a far cry from the bland section of Cassidy's General Store back in Warburton where she'd been buying dresses and the material to make them since childhood. Why, one of the gold framed paintings hanging on these walls probably cost more than half of Mr. Cassidy's stock.

"Ready to go up to the salon, my dear?" Trevor asked, placing her arm through his and following Freddy up to the first floor. His smile grew wider as did that of their escort when Lucy let out the first of many little sighs as they passed through the rooms containing displays of fabrics. Silks in every colour imaginable, brocades in the next room, velvets in the next.

"Good Lord," Lucy said once they entered the large brightly lit salon where finished gowns were displayed on dressmaker's forms. She pulled away from Trevor and Freddy who were laughing at some reminiscence and wandered around the spacious room studying the display arranged apparently by a day's suggested wardrobe. There was a breakfast frock, a simple at home gown, walking suit, dinner dress, a ball gown.

Lucy wandered out into the hall at the rear of the salon after catching sight of something sparkling through an opened doorway. How odd for a dress form to be in the midst of what appeared to be a businessman's office. She pushed open the door a little more and sighed when the whole of garment was revealed to her.

If she could only have one expensive gown in her life this was the one she wanted. It was made from an unusual blue satin that seemed to take in the light and project it back out so that the gown shimmered from within. The bodice had a low squared neckline and short puffed sleeves of dotted mousseline de soie which peeked out from beneath a beaded satin ruffle.

Glass beads do not sparkle like that, a tiny inner voice informed Lucy making her lean in closer to study the gown. Those weren't beads, they were gems, and as her wide eyes travelled over the gown she realised that the beaded irises embroidered upon the bodice and sides of the trained skirt were also made with gemstones.

She jumped when Trevor called her name then hurried back into the viewing salon where he and his friend waited.

"I'm sorry, I wandered into the hall."

Trevor took her hand. "It's quite alright. It seems that Freddy has been called away. He's entrusted us to the care of his lovely assistant designer," he explained, indicating the woman who led them to a private fitting room.

Lucy's head spun when the models began to appear in every conceivable costume imaginable, from lingerie to day dresses, to riding habits, to walking dresses and evening gowns. There were tailored suits, white ones for boating, loose fitting gowns for tea, and a selection of skirted bathing costumes.

Caught up in the moment and the excitement reminiscent of playing 'dress up' as a child, Lucy told the designer which ones she'd like to try on, giving Trevor a sideways look when he suggested that she don the lingerie first.

"I think not Lord Ashford."

Lucy made her selections and Trevor added his own.

"This is positively sinful, you know," Lucy said over her shoulder as she tried on one of the evening gowns she'd selected. It was a cream coloured silk decorated with sprays of hand painted violets and trimmed with yards of delicate lace. "No one needs to change one's clothing four times a day."

"Tell that to my mother," Trevor replied caustically, crossing one long leg over the other. "This is a mere drop in the bucket compared to her closet. Closets," he corrected. He looked towards the door when a sharp knock sounded and Freddy Newcastle entered.

He offered profuse apologies for having been called away, bringing forth a smirk from Trevor. "You should apologise, considering the size of the purchase I'm about to make."

Freddy laughed and looked over Lucy's selections. "Madame has a good eye for colour and style. These suit you. Is there anything else I can help you with, anything you'd like that you haven't seen?"

"I don't think so," she said, her thoughts trailing back to that jewelled blue gown.

Trevor turned her face back towards his with a wispy touch. "Don't be shy, my darling. Have you seen something else you'd like?"

Lucy hesitated. "I did see something. It was a blue gown, decorated with an iris design. I imagine it was something special. I saw it in an office downstairs when I was looking around."

Trevor stood, pulling her up with him. "Show me, love."

Freddy gave them both an apologetic look. "I am sorry, but that gown isn't for sale."

Lucy nodded. "I thought as much... These things will be fine. Will you send them once the alterations are done, or should I come for them?"

"They will be sent to Lord Ashford's residence in a day or so."

Lucy's disappointment cut Trevor to the core. "I want to see the blue gown Freddy."

"I can't Trevor. That gown is going to be entered into an international competition next month. It rivals anything Worth has ever done. I promised it to the Comtesse de Laurent afterward."

"Could Lucy at least try it on?" Trevor asked, placing his arm around Lucy's shoulder, the simple soothing gesture making it clear just how important she was to him.

Freddy thought a long time then signalled to his assistant. Lucy won a little piece of his heart when she asked, "Are you sure you don't mind? I'd love to try it on, but just looking at it once more is enough."

"Please try it, Madame. There's no need to rush."

Trevor sat down again and watched as Freddy pinned the excess material so that the gown fitted closely to Lucy's slim figure. She took his breath away and he knew that Freddy could be persuaded.

Lucy turned from the mirror and faced the men, her fingers skimming over the jewelled decoration, her face glowing with happiness, complimenting the luminescence of the gown

perfectly.

"We'll take it," Trevor said.

"I can't sell it to you, Trev. I've been working on this for months. Le Comtesse is coming to approve of it before I take it to the competition. She financed this. The fabric was loomed specially, the gems came from her own collection"

Trevor stood and gestured to Lucy. "Look at how she compliments your creation, old man."

"Trevor, don't push."

Trevor interrupted her. "Freddy, you may very well win this competition but we both know what's going to happen when the Countess sits down to enjoy her birthday feast. If memory serves me, she usually indulges in roast game with tomato aspic and beet soup." As Trevor knew he would, the designer winced, for le Comtesse de Laurent's atrocious table manners were legendary, albeit overlooked owing to her vast wealth and family connections.

"I can't sell it to you," Freddy said without much conviction.

Trevor took Lucy by the hand and led her down off the small fitting platform. "Look at Lucy, old man. She will do your beautiful creation justice in a way that no other woman ever could." He paused. "You know that I'm right. Look her golden curls, those blue eyes, that ivory skin tone, that *small* waist."

"Madame would look lovely." He tore his eyes away from Lucy. "But I can't."

"Trevor, it isn't important," Lucy said, tugging on his sleeve.

"Trust me, my love. Genevive de Laurent is built like a cow. She is sixty years old and insists upon dressing like a woman half her age. She looks ridiculous half the time but no one has the bloody guts to tell her, especially those who profit from her ego." Trevor turned his gaze to Freddy Newcastle, who winced again.

Trevor continued. "A catastrophe in your pressing room would be most unfortunate and I would offer le Comtesse de Laurent my sympathies on the loss of her gown, but as soon as Lucy's things are ready we're going to England and I don't think we'll be returning to France anytime soon."

"That gown cost nearly one million francs," Freddy said.

"Trevor, no. That's too much. This is all too much." Trevor silenced Lucy with a kiss.

"Nonsense, my love. You want this gown, don't you, and the others as well?"

Lucy chewed her bottom lip as she struggled with the guilt this indulgence was bringing.

"I would like them. All of them," she said at last.

Trevor brushed his lips across hers and let his eyes rake over her in the shimmering jewelled gown. She would be the centre of attention at the Royal Yacht Club ball. "I'll settle the account while you change, my love, then we'll take Joshua for that outing on the boat."

## **London, England**

"What are you two cackling about?" Trevor's grandmother asked as her son's and grandson's widows came into the ladies' drawing-room for tea.

"We have to do something about this woman of Trevor's. We shouldn't even let her set foot on English soil!"

"Quite," Trevor's sister-in-law added, seating herself regally on a dainty side chair. "Her very presence will ruin us all. She's already made poor Trevor the talk of the Continent."

Trevor's grandmother took her customary seat on the thickly padded divan. "Trevor has been the talk of the town for years. What has he gotten himself into now?"

"A step closer to the poor house, from what I hear," Trevor's mother said. "Apparently – and this is from a very reliable source – his woman strode into Fourchet's as haughty as you please and bought everything she set her eyes on. She even badgered my son into stealing a gown for her."

Trevor's grandmother nearly choked on her scone. "Stealing? Be serious, Charlotte."

"It was like stealing," Trevor's sister-in-law chimed in. "That little trollop saw a dress that Monsieur Fourchet made especially for the Princess Louise and she demanded that Trevor buy it for her. And he did!"

Trevor's grandfather gave his wife a questioning look when she told him the story. "Does it really matter? You've spent your share of the Lynbrook fortune on clothing."

"But this is different. I never asked for the dress off another woman's back. It's the principle of the thing, William. I do not wish to see some common little American leading our grandson around like an obedient puppy. They aren't even married. That alone is enough scandal."

"Perhaps they were married in America and are waiting to tell us. Trevor is no one's lap dog, Alvinia and you know it," the Earl said, not looking up from his evening paper. "The girl comes from a decent honest family. Give her a chance."

"One."

## London

### The following week

"Mama! Mama! Where's the Bloody Tower? Can we go? Can we? I wanna see somebody get their head chopped off!"

Lucy grimaced and lowered her eyes as the gentleman exiting the station ahead of them turned and laughed at her son's morbid enthusiasm. She picked Joshua up. "Honey, no one gets beheaded anymore and you have to stop looking at that book Trevor gave you before bedtime."

"But I like it, 'specially the picture with Anne Boleyn's head rolling —"

Lucy placed her hand over her son's mouth. "Enough of that. Look, there's Trevor by the door."

Trevor laughed loudly as Joshua began to badger him about seeing a public execution as he lifted him up into the hired carriage. "Your mother's right, old man, no royal wives are getting the axe anytime soon. Of course, they may do a hanging at Newgate."

"Trevor!"

Trevor laughed and kissed Lucy's flushed cheek. "I was only teasing, my love." He lifted Joshua onto his lap. "You know that Queen Anne died a long, long time ago and you wouldn't

really want to see anyone suffer, would you."

"No. Can we go to Hyde park like you said or sail on your yacht?"

"In good time, old man. All in good time. There's no rush. None at all. We're home. For good."

Lucy was as entranced by London as Joshua and like him, she kept her eyes glued to the windows of the carriage, taking in all the hustle and bustle of the great sprawling city. It was just like the drawings in her textbooks, better even. There was the statue of Lord Nelson, and a short time later they passed the Crystal Palace. Off in the distance was the dome of St. Paul's.

They passed flower peddlers and chimney sweeps going from one job to the next. A few streets away a woman was selling Cornish pasties and another stand featured sweet honey glazed buns.

It bothered Lucy to see so many children either running unsupervised or busy working alongside their elders, but she knew that she couldn't change the world, though she planned to make the best of her corner of it.

"When are we gonna eat?" Josh asked. "I'm hungry again."

Trevor ruffled the boy's hair. "I'm sure that Cook has a banquet waiting. I wired them this morning as soon as we landed."

To Trevor's dismay there were no servants lined up outside to greet them upon arrival. Trevor was not pleased by the oversight and checked his gold pocket watch. Perhaps the clocks in the house were running behind for some reason. Trevor helped Lucy and Joshua out of the carriage and signalled to the butler who opened the door of the four story Georgian house, which sat on a choice corner lot of Grosvenor Square.

"Fleming, send the footmen out to get our bags. More will be arriving shortly."

Trevor's dismay began to take on an ireful colour when the butler took him aside and informed him that the other servants were gone.

"What do you mean, gone? Have they all mysteriously dropped dead?"



"No, sir, your lordship. They've gone up north."

"Have they now? I must suggest to the Earl that we cut their wages if we're paying them enough to just up and take a holiday en masse."

The sarcasm was lost on the butler who was obviously as put out as Trevor. "They're not on Holiday your lordship. They've gone to Ashford Hall."

"My mother," Trevor said, his tone seething. "And when, pray tell, did her ladyship decide on this little escapade, and why on earth didn't my grandmother put a stop to it?"

"She went along sir, as did Lady Margaret."

Trevor smirked and glanced over at Lucy who was quite bewildered. "Of course my sister-in-law went merrily along. Heaven forbid she should ever use her own mind or do anything without being led." Trevor took a deep calming breath and tugged at his shirt cuffs. "They did it on purpose, just to annoy me. We have more than enough staff at the Hall."

"Maybe something happened up there" Lucy offered, not wanting to dwell on what this intentional slight foretold of her acceptance into the Lynbrook family.

"Perhaps," Trevor said.

Joshua tugged on Lucy's navy serge skirt. "Mama, I hafta pee."

"Perkins."

"I'll take him, Trevor, just tell me which way," Lucy said.

Trevor escorted Lucy and Josh inside and up the first flight of stairs. "Up one more and turn left, my room is the one at the end of the hall, I have a private bath and water closet."

Once Lucy and her son had gone up the next flight of stairs, Trevor bounded down to the entrance hall, his boot heels loud against the inlaid marble floor of the foyer. "What is the meaning of this, Perkins."

"I don't know, sir. They said last night that they were leaving for Ashford Hall, and this morning Lady Charlotte ordered the staff to depart with them."

"What does the Earl say, or he in this as well?"

"I don't think he knows, sir. He went off to see his solicitors first thing and never mentioned leaving the City."

Trevor straightened his cuffs again. "Get on the telephone and get a temporary staff here at once."

"Yes, sir."

"Excuse me," Lucy called as she came down the last flight of stairs. "Could you show me to the kitchen before you make your call? My son would like his lunch."

"Madam—er..." The butler turned to Trevor, quite taken aback by the request.

"Wait a moment and I'll take you to Claridge's."

Lucy grabbed hold of her son's jacket when he tried to climb onto the gleaming banister to slide down to the ground floor. "I'd rather not go out. Josh is getting a bit restless. It's better if we just have lunch here."

"We can't," Trevor told her, conscious that Perkins was latching on to every word. He stepped up to meet Lucy halfway. "There's no one to cook and serve."

Lucy laughed. "So?" She looked down at the butler. "There is food in the house isn't there? "

"Yes, madam."

Lucy stepped past Trevor, never noticing his displeasure. "Will you show me to the kitchen, please, Mr. Perkins?"

The butler looked to Trevor, clearly surprised when he nodded his consent. "This way, madam."

"Lucy—"

"I don't mind. I haven't had to do a lick of housework in three weeks. I miss it." She laughed. "I never thought I'd say that."

Trevor might have found the comment equally amusing if he hadn't taken note of his butler's deprecating expression, quickly concealed of course. He massaged his temples. "You and Josh go on without me. I have to go out for a bit. I'll be back as soon as I can." Lucy's bright smile made this ungodly situation a little more tolerable.

"All right. I'm not really hungry yet, so I'll feed Josh and wait for you."

Trevor smiled. "All right, my love. I shan't be long." He froze with his hand on the

gleaming brass doorknob when he heard Lucy say,

"Will you be joining us, Mr. Perkins?"

Trevor cringed. Thank heaven his mother and sister-in-law weren't around to hear that. Lucy meant well, but one simply did not treat the servants as social equals. He would have to let her know all the nuances he took for granted, lest her friendly, open nature give people the wrong impression.

"Speak of the Devil and he appears," The Earl of Greylock quipped when Trevor burst in to the solicitor's office without knocking or allowing himself to be announced.

"Some bloody fine welcome I received," Trevor growled, dropping down into the closest chair. He tossed his Homburg towards the hat rack and missed. He never bothered to pick it up.

"Forgive me for not bowing to your lordship, but my rheumatism is acting up."

Trevor smirked. "I'm sorry, grandfather, but you would not believe the reception I got at home, or to be more precise, the lack of reception. There was no one there but Perkins. No one."

"What? Alvinia mentioned skipping the races this year and going straight to the country, but you don't mean that she took the servants, too."

"I'm sure that was my mother's idea," Trevor said, accepting the small glass of Port the family solicitor handed him. He watched his grandfather's ruddy complexion pale. "What is it?"

"Have you told Perkins to get other staff? If not perhaps I can round up some people."

Trevor set down the drink untouched and sat forward as tense as a panther about to pounce. "What else has she done?"

"Weeks ago she invited the Yorks for a quiet dinner with the family."

"Oh...my...God..." Trevor sprang from the chair. "You can't be serious! She didn't. She wouldn't." He slammed his fist down on the solicitor's desk. "Damn! Damn it all to bloody hell!" He slammed his fist again. "You have to cancel at once."

The Earl mopped his brow with his handkerchief and downed the glass of port his solicitor handed him. "We can't cancel, Trevor, you know that. One simply does not invite an heir to the throne of England to dinner and cancel for anything short of death, and even then two weeks advance notice would have to be given."

Trevor sank back down into his chair and cradled his throbbing head in his hands. "We're doomed."

"I'm sure we can think of something, my boy." The Earl looked to his solicitor and saw his own skepticism reflected in the man's eyes.

Without warning, Trevor began to laugh.

The Earl gave his grandson a harsh look. "Really Trevor this is not the time to go stark staring mad."

"I can't help it," he said, wiping the tiny tear from the corner of his eye. "Lucy's son has been enamoured of a book I picked up for him in Boston and he's been wanting to see a beheading at the Bloody Tower. After tonight he'll get his wish with my head being the one to roll."

Trevor's hopes were dashed when he returned home to find that Perkins had been unable to secure so much as one single servant and he ordered the butler to canvas the square and beg, borrow or steal help from their neighbours.

"I tried – and failed, my lord." Perkins said, averting his eyes.

Trevor massaged his throbbing temples. "Why do I have the distinct feeling that my dear mother has spent every last cent in the Lynbrook coffers to ensure my social destruction?"

"Because in essence, she has."

Trevor turned towards the door of the study. He gave his grandfather a doleful look that soon changed to one of rising anger. "Why is she doing this? How dare she! How can she?"

The Earl shrugged. "Between the three of them with their connections they have a virtual lock on society." He looked at the butler. "Perkins."

The butler left the room, closing the door behind him.

The Earl walked over to the window and gazed out at the garden a smile slowly replacing his frown. "And that must be your lovely fiancée."

Trevor came to the window, his own glum expression brightening at the sight of Lucy and Joshua following the path of two butterflies, laughing as the path took them in circles and made

them bump into one another. "She's doing it to ruin, Lucy. I just know it. I only wish I knew why, not that it would make it any easier to take."

The Earl looked back at his grandson. "Who really knows. She went on for days because you sent me word of your engagement instead of notifying her directly. It's undoubtedly a combination of that and the fact that Pat's niece is..."

"Not 'our kind'?"

"I'm afraid so, son. Perhaps it would be best if you two went back to America. I'll go to York and try to explain. He's a bit more down to earth than the others, he'll understand."

Trevor gazed down at his family. "No." He turned from the window. "I will not run. I will not let that woman badger me. I wouldn't let her when I was young and I certainly don't intend to let her get away with it now."

"If you want to stay, fine, but I'll try to speak to York just the same. I'll go in a bit. I want to soak in the tub. My rheumatism really is bothering me this week."

Trevor nodded. "I have an ointment in my bag that might help. I'll get it then go down and tell Lucy about my mother's diabolical plot to humiliate her."

"Catch him before he leaves, Trevor. Hurry."

"What? Why?"

"I don't want you to cancel this dinner," Lucy said, rather surprised by her calm reaction to Trevor's news. She wanted to cry at first, but didn't. Her resolve to maintain her dignity growing stronger with each word Trevor spoke. "I mean it. They expect us to be devastated, don't they? Well, let's show them just what we're made of. If we can help to rebuild a town after a cyclone, I think we can handle one little dinner. It's just the two of them, coming, right?"

"Yes," Trevor said softly, not quite believing his ears. He pulled Lucy onto his lap and smiled at her, admiring her courage and raw determination. "But, my love, despite your culinary skills, the fact remains that we have no one to serve. We can't ask Their Royal Highnesses to fend for themselves."

Lucy ran her fingers through Trevor's hair as she thought. Maybe we can—if we do it just

the right way."

"I don't think I like that gleam in your eye, my love. It's a bit too similar to the one your sister had when she showed that knife of hers to me. What exactly do you have in mind?"

"Just some good old American hospitality, Lord Ashford."

Despite the clenching of his stomach Trevor felt himself rise to the challenge his mother saddled him with. He smiled and trailed his fingers down the side of Lucy's cheek. "The Earl and I are with you, my love. If we're going to go down, it will be in a blaze of glory."

## Chapter Eleven

"Thank you again, for taking Joshua to the park this afternoon," Lucy told the Earl shortly before eight that evening. "He's out like a light."

"It was my pleasure, dear. In fact, I do believe the exercise loosened up my back." He turned to his grandson who was nervously straightening his shirt cuffs. "She's a treasure, son, don't ever let her get away."

"I don't intend to, especially if she keeps dressing like this." His eyes swept over Lucy, breathtakingly beautiful in the painted cream gown he'd bought her in Paris. He suggested that she wear the blue satin, but she insisted on this one saying that it fit in more with the quaint, family dinner his mother promised the Duke and Duchess of York.

"Their coach is coming, my lord," Perkins called from the foyer.

Lucy, Trevor and the Earl took a simultaneous deep breath to steel their nerves and Lucy took their hands in hers for a moment. "It's show time, gentlemen."

Trevor's love for Lucy deepened and grew stronger as she was introduced to the Duke and Duchess of York, Prince George and Princess Mary. Although wearing only a fraction of the jewellery the Duchess wore, Lucy's bearing was every bit as regal as the Earl explained the slight change in plans, apologising profusely.

"It appears to be a most unusual ailment Your Highness, and it would seem to be something the Countess, Viscountess and Lady Margaret ate that has affected them and kept them from returning from Ashford Hall as planned."

"And your staff?" The Duchess asked.

Trevor cleared his throat. "I thought it best that they remain up North as well, Ma'am on the rare chance that it might be something contagious."

The Duke and Duchess exchanged a slight sideways look and the Duke spoke. "If you

choose to, you can postpone this evening, Greylock."

"Excuse me," Lucy said, getting everyone's attention. "If your Highnesses have no objection I was hoping that you might allow me to bring a bit of America to you. I've prepared a typical American meal, something we would have when inviting close friends and family for a gathering."

Trevor's heart skipped a beat when the Duke and Duchess exchanged another quick look. His heart returned to its normal rhythm when Prince George gave a short laugh and said in his loud voice, "I'm game to dine American, Greylock, as long as it gets me closer to your dining room. I haven't had a bite since noon and I'm famished."

Lucy had set up a buffet in the dining room with fried boneless chicken breasts, buttermilk biscuits, mashed potatoes, steamed vegetables, gravy, and an apple pie for dessert. Perkins served the Royals and the Earl while Lucy and Trevor helped themselves showing how it was done in the States.

"Ashford," the Duke said. "I hear you've been doing good works ministering to downtrodden natives."

Trevor watched Lucy tense. "That I have. It is how Mrs. Willis and I first became acquainted."

Lucy ate quietly as Trevor carried the rest of the evening's conversation. He was so different than he'd been back in Sweet Medicine. There he'd been the outsider but here he was right in his element, flattering and catering to the Duke and Duchess as they were so obviously accustomed to.

Could she ever get used to this? She wondered, feeling herself slip into the background as The Earl joined in with news of the upcoming hunting season. Did she really want to be part of all this protocol and rigidity?

*Can you bear to lose Trevor if you don't?* Her heart asked.

She honestly didn't know.



## Ashford Hall

### Three days later

"How can you possibly smile?" Trevor's mother asked her mother-in-law in a tone of voice that bordered on a shriek.

"Because the girl showed her mettle and it seems quite obvious to me that my grandson has made a wise choice."

"I find that hard to believe," Trevor's sister-in-law said between sips of tea.

"And why is that, Margaret?" the Countess of Greylock asked sharply.

Before she could reply, the butler announced a visitor. It was Margaret's close friend, Trevor's former fiancée, Gwynne.

Margaret Lynbrook smiled. "I'll let Lady Medford tell you, and mark my words, you won't believe your ears."

The opinion Trevor's grandmother, the Countess of Greylock had of her grandson's fiancée took a turn for the worse once she was able to corroborate the outlandish rumours they'd been told by Trevor's former paramour, Gwynne Medford.

True, the young woman pulled off a tour de force by managing to entertain the Duke and Duchess of York, but to turn around the following day and sweep the front walk was simply too much for any sane person to bear. If she was allowed to keep this sort of nonsense up once she and Trevor were married, why none of them would be able to show their faces in polite society again. No, it did not seem as though this marriage would work to anyone's advantage, especially if one were to factor in the universal reticence concerning the woman's son by her late husband.

Why, even her closest friend would say nothing other than that the child seemed quite sweet and well mannered "all things considered." *All things considered*, what an unusual phrase, one open to endless interpretation. The Countess spread another layer of jam on her scone and took a bite, thinking as she slowly chewed the crisp biscuit.

*All things considered*. Whatever could it mean?

## London

### The following morning

The gentle jostling of the roomy coach lulled Joshua to sleep shortly after they left the confines of London and Lucy snuggled closer to Trevor so that her son could stretch out on the seat beside her, his head in her lap.

"This is nice," she drawled as Trevor draped his arm around her shoulders and rested his head on hers.

"Yes it is."

A peaceful silence surrounded them, and Lucy closed her eyes, drinking in the contentment. It had been foolish to think that she couldn't fit into Trevor's world. She realised that she'd handled herself quite well despite the enormous obstacle Trevor's womenfolk put in her path, and although she resented their brazen disrespect she wouldn't allow herself to despise them for they'd unknowingly given her the push she needed to overcome her fear of their lofty social status. Nothing they could say or do would hurt her and if they didn't approve of her because she was from a humble background it didn't really matter as long as Trevor loved her and his grandfather was on her side. Trevor's future was secure and with his love to support her and Joshua, her future was secure, too.

"Are you sleeping, my love?"

Lucy smiled up at Trevor. "No, I was just resting and thinking."

"If you'd like to sleep you can. I'm quite comfortable with you leaning on me."

Lucy sat up straighter so that she could look at Trevor, for something in his tone bothered her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all, my love."

"No," Lucy said. "Something's bothering you," she said, taking notice of the way he fiddled with his gold cuff links. "Tell me."

Trevor hesitated. He didn't want to but knew that he had no other choice. After all, it was

for her own good. He gave her shoulder an affectionate squeeze. "Do you remember telling me once that we were from two different worlds?" He paused when she nodded. "In a way, you were right but I didn't realise it until we arrived here from Paris." He felt Lucy go stiff in his arms and he ordered himself to continue when she pulled away.

"Go on," she said, her voice as tense as her body.

"The way you rose to the challenge of dinner with the Royals was something no other woman could accomplish. You charmed them totally. They truly enjoyed themselves."

"Don't beat around the bush. I'm not stupid. I overheard Mr. Perkins talking to one of your neighbours' servants."

Trevor's eyes grew cold. "I'll have him sacked at once. I don't care if he's been in our employ his entire life."

"No, Trevor," Lucy interrupted. "He was defending me. The other man was laughing because I'd swept down the front walk and he jokingly wondered if I'd given Prince George's boots a spit polish."

Trevor's expression grew dark and dangerous and he clenched and unclenched his fists. "Who was he? Did you get a look at him? Describe him. I'll throttle him or have him dismissed at once. I'll see that he gets the boot without so much as a one-sentence character reference. He'll be out on the streets with other trash before this day is done."

Lucy was unsettled by the fact that Trevor would do such a thing just to appease her damaged pride. "I did hear the man's name, but I'm not going to tell you and I don't want you to badger Mr. Perkins about it either."

"Good Lord, Lucy—" Trevor broke off when Joshua stirred, jarred by his sudden loudness. He lowered his voice before continuing. "Perkins is Perkins. He is a *servant*. He does not need to be addressed as Mr."

"Well excuse my foolish American ways, Lord Ashford. I was brought up to respect my elders no matter who they are and what they do for a living. That is simple courtesy."

"Not here, not for us. I will not have my wife treating the servants like one of the family."

The silence that descended over them was like an ominous storm cloud.

Lucy moved as far from Trevor as space would allow and battled her aching heart into submission when he moved to the other side of the coach and stared out the window, shutting her out completely.

She hadn't expected this at all and she was at a total loss on how to deal with it. She would gladly be saddled with a hundred unannounced royal visitors in exchange for this incident.

Her heartache turned to all out misery when her stepsister's warning drifted through her mind.

*"...Please, please be careful. Don't let him make you something you're not..."*

Trevor took no notice of the rolling green countryside and was barely conscious of the large tea time spread he sampled when they stopped along the way to his uncle's country home. He wasn't even aware when the air began to take on a salty flavour as the coach neared the seaside village of Ravenscross. All he could think of was Lucy seated across from him, a mere foot away physically, a thousand miles away emotionally.

He felt like a forgotten little boy, much as he had when his mother left him at the gates of Eton when he was seven, and yet the man he was now was determined to stick by his guns at all cost. He was right and that was that. Lucy's transgressions with regard to her station as his fiancée could be overlooked since she was new to the country, but once they married it would be a different matter entirely. The mistress of the house simply did not accept servants as anything approaching their equals. It simply wasn't done and wouldn't be tolerated by their social circle.

Lucy's assumption when she'd met the Earl of Greylock was that Trevor took his looks from the Lynbrook side of the family, but now, as she studied the close resemblance between Trevor and his uncle who was only six years his senior, she knew that Trevor's fair colouring and classic handsomeness came from his mother. Fortunately, Trevor had not inherited the polite insincerity.

"Darling," Lady Hazeltine said to her husband as he instructed their servants taking the luggage from atop Trevor's coach. "Perhaps Mrs. Willis would prefer that her son sleep in a

room adjoining hers instead of in the nursery with our children." She turned to Lucy, her smile syrupy sweet. "I wouldn't want the little dear to be afraid. This is all so new to him and sleeping a floor above may prove unsettling."

"Nonsense," Trevor said, hoisting Josh up onto his shoulders. "You aren't afraid to be away from your mother are you?"

"Heck no! I wasn't even 'fraid when I slept over in Wahannatta's tipi even when the coyotes started howling."

Trevor laughed. "See, Uncle Dickey? If Josh can handle howling coyotes in the American wilderness, he can handle sleeping close by your three little hellions."

The smile fell from Lucy's face as she watched the look in the eyes of Trevor's relations go from surprise to all out revulsion.

The force with which Lucy dug her fingers into his arm halted Trevor in mid stride. "What is it, my dear? Are you ill?"

"No." Lucy replied stiffly, pausing to collect herself. She would not let these people see how'd they'd gotten to her. "Perhaps we should stay at that inn we passed. " She forced a short laugh. "I mean, here we are barely out of your carriage and we're turning Lord and Lady Hazeltine's plans topsy-turvy."

Trevor patted her hand and smiled indulgently. "Nonsense; right Uncle Dickey?"

"Quite, Ashford. Quite," he said, patting his wife's hand.

"See, my dear?" Trevor asked lightly, following his uncle towards the sprawling, ivy-covered stone house. When they reached the covered portico, he set Joshua down and offered Lucy a warm, loving smile. "We're going to have a memorable holiday, my love."

"I'm sure we will," Lucy answered flatly, distressed by the hostility from his relations that Trevor could not or would not acknowledge.

Lucy's curiosity and Joshua's excitement obliged her to look around the manor house as they were led through the cavernous main hall. It was impressive to say the least.

"Mama! Look a knight's suit! A real knight's suit with a real iron shirt thing!"

"It's called a suit of armour, honey, remember? And that 'shirt thing' is called chain mail."

Trevor took the boy's hand from Lucy's and led him to the armour. "If you like old relic just wait until we get to my home up north. At Ashford Hall we have an entire room filled with armour. We even have a set that was worn by one of my ancestor's horses."

"Really, Papa?"

"Really, son."

The revulsion Lucy glimpsed outside on the faces of Trevor's aunt and uncle, coloured their expressions again and was even more pronounced due to Trevor and Joshua's affectionate exchange. Lucy laid her hand across her midsection as the light meal she recently ate churned in her stomach

From the corner of his eye Trevor saw the blood drain from Lucy's cheeks and he hurried to her side. He could feel the cold sweat on her palm. "Get me a chair!" When a servant brought one he urged Lucy to sit. "Please. You don't look at all well. Let me examine you."

Lucy tore her eyes away from the Hazeltines. "I'm all right, Trevor. Really. I'm just a little tired from the trip and I think that I had one too many finger sandwiches at tea time."

Trevor swept Lucy up in his arms only barely conscious of his uncle's critical look. "Which room, Dickey?"

"The red one down the hall from yours."

Lucy tried unsuccessfully to get a word in edgewise as Trevor set her on the high half tester bed and began barking orders to the chambermaid and footman.

"Open that window to let some fresh air in, but draw the curtains half way to keep that sun out of her eyes until it sets. Have cook brew a pot of tea, half strength and send up a few thick soda crackers. Get Mrs. Willis' nightdress from the small trunk and bring a basin of water to bathe her face and neck."

Lucy sat up despite Trevor's order that she lie flat. "Trevor, stop. You act as if I'm dying. I just felt a little sick to my stomach for a minute. I am fine." She shoved his hand aside when he tired to check her pulse. "I am fine so stop this nonsense. You're scaring Josh."

She got off the bed and went to her son standing in the corner beside the high oak bureau. She picked him up and kissed his cheek. "I'm not sick. I just had too much to eat, I think."

"You mean like the other day when I had that extra piece of cake?"

Lucy smiled. "That's right, but I'm feeling better now just the way you did the next day."

Trevor eyed Lucy with a wary gaze. She was far from fine. He could hear it in the strain of her voice and see it in the paleness of her skin. He turned to one of the maids. "Please take Joshua up to the nursery to play with the children for a while." Trevor turned from studying Lucy in time to see his uncle's wife give him a fearful look and he strode over to the doorway where they were, lowering his voice so that Lucy would not hear. "I'm calling in one of those countless favours you owe me." The timbre of his voice added to the fierceness of his gaze.

Trevor's uncle did not reply though he addressed the maid. "Annie, tell nurse to stay with them." He turned back to his nephew with a haughty look then escorted his wife away.

Lucy silently counted to contain her tension, which was ready to burst forth like a river flooding its banks as Trevor locked the door so that they wouldn't be disturbed. "Get us out of here!"

"Lucy, settle your nerves," Trevor said in his patient-soothing tone as he crossed the room.

"*Settle my nerves?*" she screamed, rushing forward. "How can I settle my damned nerves when your aunt and uncle look at my son like he's something filthy they stepped in!" She grabbed her small handbag from the bedside table and counted the few bills she had. "How much does it cost to go to London? How much does it cost to go back home where I belong?"

Trevor grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. "Stop it, Lucy! Get a hold of yourself. I'm not letting you go anywhere. You belong here with me."

Tears welled in Lucy's eyes. "I want to be with you. Josh wants to be with you, but how can we? How can we when your family acts like this." She placed her hands on his chest, "Come with us, Trevor. We can have a good life in Oklahoma or even Boston. You can go into practice with my father or be on staff at Uncle Pat's hospital. You can set up a private practice. Please?"

Trevor gathered Lucy into his arms and cradled her as she broke down. "Hush, my darling. Everything will be all right. You'll see. This is a fluke. Uncle Dickey has always been too much of a snob for his own good. The rest of my family isn't like this. You know that. The Earl adores Josh."

Lucy pulled back, looking up at him with red rimmed eyes. "The rest of your family, Trevor? Do you mean the same women who dismissed your household staff and invited a prince and princess to dinner just to make me look like a fool?" She pulled away, the brief comfort she'd felt in his arms, gone. "They're your family Trevor and I won't ask you to stop loving them, but don't expect me to join you. I don't think I can."

Trevor sank down onto the bed and stared down at the floor. "I am so sorry. If I could take this week away, I would." He looked up. To his great relief, Lucy nodded. "I won't apologise for their awful behaviour even if I could, they don't deserve such courtesy, but they are my family and I can't throw them aside without giving them another chance. Do you understand?"

Lucy sighed. She didn't want to, but she knew that she had no other choice, not if she loved Trevor. She came forward and sat beside him. "I'll give your mother, grandmother, and sister-in-law another chance, but not these people. I just can't."

Trevor took her hands in his. He kissed them, savouring the sweetness of her skin. "I don't expect you to. We'll spend the night at the inn and in the morning we'll go to Cowes. The Earl is meeting us there at his cottage. Is that all right?"

"Yes."



After a long night in the safe haven of Trevor's arms Lucy felt strong enough to venture out into British society yet again. The first two times had been disastrous, but hopefully, the third time was the charm. Surely these friends of Trevor's and the Earl she would encounter would be more like 'real' people. Everyone in Trevor's acquaintance couldn't be as narrow-minded as his uncle and aunt. It just wasn't possible.

Trevor breathed in the crisp salt air as they stepped out of the coach. "Smell that air, Lucy. Isn't it glorious?"

"It's very nice." Something through the trees caught her eye. "Josh! Look! Come here,



honey."

"I'll get him," Trevor said hoisting Joshua up onto his shoulders. "Look at them go, son!" He pointed to the yacht flying the Union Jack. "Cheer the Britannia on!"

"Trevor, really," Lucy said, a little surprised. "It's only a boat race." She laughed when he gave her the kind of look he might give had she said that little purple men from the moon were swarming through Windsor Castle naked in a quest to ravish the Queen.

"Oh, my love. These are more than races. The masculinity of the entire British Empire is at stake—especially where the bloody French are concerned."

Lucy laughed so hard that her jaws began to ache. "Anything you say, Trevor."

"Contain that enthusiasm for the day after tomorrow, Trevor," the Earl called from an upstairs window. "We'll need that energy of yours to beat the Americans. I've got two hundred and fifty pounds riding on your ability at the helm." Trevor grinned and slipped his arm around Lucy's waist. "With the love of my life waiting for me at the finish, how can I lose?"

The Earl nudged Trevor and they both watched Lucy smiling to herself as she sipped her morning coffee, shaking her head as if telling herself something unbelievable.

"This is not the day to have strange, psychotic spells, my love. I'm racing in," Trevor took out his pocket and sprung the latch on the embossed gold case. "I'm racing in only three hours and fourteen minutes. We can't possibly get an asylum attendant here to restrain you."

Lucy's cheeks flushed and she looked up. "I was just thinking that I must be incredibly naive to have expected a 'real' cottage when you told me about this place. You really have to show me in which dictionary you looked up the word 'rustic'."

"Why, this is rustic to us," the Earl chimed in. He got up and went to the ornately carved ebony sideboard where heated chafing dishes were arranged. "Look at this, I have to walk all the way over here, lift this barbarously heavy silver cover, lift this weighty gold trimmed fork and—horror of all horror—lift out the sausages and kippers onto my own plate."

Joshua laughed and spit out some of his milk as Trevor's grandfather made a spectacular show of his 'backbreaking' work to secure himself a second helping of breakfast.

Lucy groaned and blotted up the milk from the shining table top. "What am I going to do with you men?"

"Anything you like my, love, but it will have to wait until I cross the finish line," Trevor quipped, reaching across the table to steal one of the blueberries from Lucy's bowl.

"Maybe Josh and I should have waited at the house," Lucy said as she and the Earl made their way through the throng on their way towards the docks.

"Nonsense, dear." Trevor's grandfather patted Lucy's hand. "You two are Trevor's good luck charms. If you weren't waiting at the finish, he'd never forgive me."

Lucy tightened her grip on Joshua's arm as he tried to rush ahead.

"I can't see nothin', mama!"

"Don't worry, lad. You aren't missing anything yet," the Earl told him. "And we'll have the finest seats in the house on the deck of the royal yacht."

Lucy's nervousness grew. "Are you sure it will be all right? I don't see any other young children here and I wouldn't want the Prince to get mad at you," she said, trying not to let the openly curious stares bother her.

Those curious stares turned to looks of envy when a liveried footman approached through the crowd and escorted them to a small boat that would ferry them out to where the royal yacht was moored near the finish line. Lucy nervously smoothed down the front of her crisp white skirt and adjusted the straw boater on her head as the footman helped her board the light craft. She sat, holding Joshua firmly on her lap. She tried to think relaxing thoughts, of lying in Trevor's arms listening to the gentle slap of waves and the sprightly chirp of birds, to quell her queasy stomach.

It had been nerve wracking enough to dine with the Duke and Duchess of York, but to be with the Duke's parents, Prince Edward and Princess Alexandra of Wales frightened her to death. And if that wasn't bad enough, the Earl told her that joining them would be a number of American financiers. Her imagination ran wild as the boat skimmed the water, closing in much too quickly on the royal yacht, and she pictured herself committing some deadly social gaffe

which would have her deported from England only to find that she'd offended her countrymen enough to have her banished from her own homeland.

Lucy's unease the second the race got under way. It was neck and neck all the way with Trevor's yacht surging ahead then falling behind as the wind shifted in the Americans' favour. They couldn't see anything just yet, but a man posted on the mast relayed each thrilling moment and as soon as they yachts came into view after rounding the final turn Lucy stood at the rail, Joshua in her arms, and cheered Trevor on.

Joshua let out a series of wild whoops reminiscent of an Indian's warrior's battle cry when Trevor's yacht pulled into a commanding lead. Lucy never noticed that the heartfelt outburst drew everyone's attention their way. The men were amused, the women aghast, their shocked expressions turning to ones of distaste when Lucy bounced up and down as the American boat fell even further behind.

"There he is, Josh! Do you see him, on the far side?"

"Yeah!"

Lucy took off her hat and waved it, knowing that Trevor couldn't see her, for he was too intent on the task at hand, helping his crew to shift their sails to catch a final gust of wind. Lucy's hat slipped through her fingers and was swept beneath the royal yacht, but she never noticed for her eyes were glued to Trevor, his shirt unbuttoned, his white cotton trousers damp with the ocean spray, the material clinging to his muscular body leaving nothing to the imagination as far as his masculine attributes were concerned.

Lucy did, however, hear the sharp intake of breath from an aristocratic lady seated at a table directly to her left. She glanced over and saw the woman's opera glasses trained on Trevor and heard her loud whisper.

"Why didn't you tell me what I was missing, Violet? I'd have come back from Italy ages ago! My God, no wonder you said that you haven't found a man who could satisfy you the way he did. Look at him."

Lucy levelled a look at the women that made them recoil. She stepped away, not caring

that they'd snapped open their silk fans and were undoubtedly turning their gossip towards her.

"Mama, look! Papa won!"

Lucy's jealousy was carried away by a swell of joy for Trevor's rousing victory, and she counted off the minutes until the royal yacht was turned back towards the dock for them to disembark.

Lucy found a secluded spot a short distance away from the Royal Yacht Club to wait with Joshua while Trevor celebrated his victory inside with his friends. She wanted to be by his side but knew that this was for the best, the brief uncomfortable glance she'd received from the Earl confirming her own suspicions that it would be better for everyone concerned if she retreated to the background for a time.

It was a long, lonely afternoon until Trevor appeared to take them back to the cottage.

Trevor dismissed his grandfather's valet when Lucy knocked on the dressing room door. He finished knotting his white tie then slipped on his white brocade waistcoat. He put on his black evening jacket then straightened the diamond studs fastening his cuffs, as he turned from the mirror.

"Why aren't you dressed, my love?" He paused and broke into a lewd grin. "I know why," he drawled, coming forward. He rested his hands on her hips then slid them up the silk of her dressing gown. "You want me to help you dress instead of the maid."

"No, I wanted to talk to you..." she said, trying to fight the desire coiling through her. Her valiant efforts went down in flames the moment Trevor tugged at the sash belting her waist. "Please..."

"You don't have to ask, my love. I am only too happy to oblige." He fell to his knees before her, eager to worship the only woman to capture his heart. Lucy pulled away, fastened her robe.

Trevor stood, gazed intently at her. "Whatever is the matter?"

She toyed with the ends of the silk sash. "You can go to the ball alone if you like. You haven't seen your friends in ages and I don't want you to feel that you have to put them off to keep me company."

Trevor tilted her chin up. "Talk to me Lucy. Tell me what's troubling you."

"I think I came across one of your former lovers this afternoon while I was watching the race."

One of his former lovers? He'd seen a good three dozen and glimpsed a few more at the reception afterward. If he didn't know better, he'd think they were convening for a blasted convention. "Yes?" he asked when he realised that Lucy had said something else.

"I said that she was sitting with someone who apparently wished that she'd been around to join the exalted sisterhood."

"Ah, well, she had her chance, whoever she is." He saw sadness creep into Lucy's lovely eyes. He chuckled her under the chin. "None of that my darling. Those nefarious days are a thing of the past."

She simply nodded then turned to the door.

He followed. "Let me help you get dressed."

Trevor sighed inwardly after helping hook up the back of the gem studded blue gown he'd gotten Freddy to sell. Lucy was stunning, like a silk clad angel both innocent and alluring. "Wait right there. I have something for you."

While he returned to his room, Lucy looked at herself in the mirror. She still felt a little guilty over the way Trevor acquired this gown, but part of her was glad he hadn't given up the quest to secure it. She loved this dress in a way she wouldn't have imagined a few months ago. Since being altered, it fit like a glove, clinging to her breasts and down the tops of her hips until it fell in perfectly draped folds into a long train. She turned this way and that, entranced by the way the diamonds captured and reflected the light, smiling when the unusual fabric of the gown did the same.

"Close your eyes," Trevor called as he came through the door.

"What are you doing?" she asked in alarm when she felt something cold and heavy encircling her throat.

"You'll see, but not yet. Keep them closed." Trevor took hold of the diamond earrings that matched the choker he'd bought from their embossed leather case then set the case on the

bed. "Keep your head still, my darling."

Lucy's pulse quickened when she felt Trevor sliding the earring posts into her earlobes.

"What have you done? You've given me so much already."

"I could spend every last shilling I own and it could never compare to the joy you've given me."

Lucy opened her eyes and smiled at Trevor. She twined her arms around his neck, her fingers drifting through the hair at the nape of his neck. "I love you, Trevor. Don't ever forget that."

"I won't."

Trevor tore himself away from the honeyed sweetness of Lucy's lips and stepped away so that she could see his gift in the full length mirror.

"Oh, my," she whispered as she looked at her reflection. The simple diamond choker and ear studs added a new dimension to the fabulous gown. "Oh, Trevor, thank you. Thank you so much."

"It was my pleasure." He remembered something and reached into the breast pocket inside his jacket. "I cannot forget the *piece de résistance*," he said before sliding a delicate diamond aigrette hair ornament into the elaborate chignon crowning Lucy's head.

Lucy looked at her reflection again unable to believe that this was real. "I feel like a queen."

"You are a queen," Trevor whispered, brushing his lips against hers. "You are the queen of my dreams. Long may you reign over the kingdom of my soul."

Lucy would gladly have given up the lure of the royal ball, but a sharp knock on the bedroom door made him end the kiss.

"The Earl would like to remind you of the time, Lord Ashford."

Trevor looked at the clock on the nightstand. "Oh, damn. We've got to hurry." He snatched up Lucy's wrap and pulled her towards the door.

"But, I promised Josh I'd tuck him in."

"No time, love, sorry. Nurse will do it."

Lucy tried to jerk her hand free. "Trevor!"

Trevor stopped at the head of the curving mahogany staircase, his grip on her hand tightening. "I'm sorry, but we have to arrive before the Prince of Wales does. No can come in after."

Trevor alighted from the carriage after his grandfather and helped Lucy out, aware that everyone still outside the club was waiting for her appearance. He felt the air ripple with excitement when they saw her and was glad that he'd given her the elaborate gown and the simple parure which set him back enough to arouse even the Earl's concern.

He placed her arm through his and inclined his head, "Are you ready, my love?"

"Not really."

Trevor patted her hand. "Not to worry. You'll have a smashing time."

Lucy didn't like the attention she and Trevor were getting and the fact that no one approached them, but greeted Trevor or signalled him from a distance, did nothing to calm her mounting nerves. She was only slightly conscious of the men's attention upon her, but the attention of the women marking Trevor's progress ate at her like a ravenous wolf and she thanked heaven that she was secure in the knowledge that Trevor was hers and hers alone.

By the time they'd made it to the entrance of the yacht club, Lucy's nervousness began to take its toll shortly after Trevor introduced her to two of his old school friends and led her to the dance floor. Although she enjoyed dancing and found Trevor to be the finest partner she'd ever had Lucy waited for the waltz to end with mounting agony.

"Dance me outside," she whispered in his ear.

"What?"

"Dance me outside. I need to find a bathroom."

Trevor bit back a raucous laugh and twirled Lucy through the crowd to a side door that led back to the hall. "What's that thing you always tell Josh, 'Make sure you go before we leave home'? I believe."

Lucy blushed and willed her bladder to calm down. "Now is not the time for lectures, doctor."

Trevor laughed and escorted Lucy towards the ladies' lounge area. "Shall I wait here for you," he said playfully.

"I'm sure I can find my way back."

To Lucy's surprise the lounge area and adjoining restroom were empty. She had attended to her needs and was cleaning her hands when the sound of voices drifted under the door.

"I've been dying to ask you, how do you think she managed it?"

"How did who manage what darling?" a second woman asked.

"Don't try to be coy. You know I'm talking about Ashford's American. He was with you just before his accident and sudden departure, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was." The second woman paused and knocked on the bathroom door. "Will you be long?"

"No," Lucy called, hoping she'd made her voice sound British.

The first woman spoke again. "Tell me. What about your husband? I can't believe he tried to kill him."

"That stupid old fool. I wanted to kill *him* that night." She paused and let out a desirous sigh. "I wake up very night dreaming of Trevor. His cock is divine..."

The first woman gasped. "Evelyn, watch your tongue."

The second woman laughed. "Darling, my tongue misses Trevor's cock too." She knocked on the door again. "Please do hurry."

Lucy set her jaw defiantly and exited through to the lounge area, her head high, her eyes cold..

"It's *her*—" one of the women whispered.

*You don't need this*, Lucy's bruised pride reminded her as she made her way down to the main floor. No she didn't need to subject herself to these people, these former lovers, but she couldn't leave and make Trevor look like a fool in front of the Prince of Wales. She would not flee like a wounded child. She could take it. She would take it for Trevor's sake.



Lucy felt a rush of relief until she re-entered the filled ballroom and another round of gossip assailed her during the orchestra break.

*"She's pretty enough if you like the common type, but she's not Ashford's usual style."*

*"Must be out of his mind, why he could have his pick of the finest dowry in all of England..."*

*"Why would he want a woman with a child? I've heard that he's already fathered more than one."*

*"Not Ashford. He's too smart, but have you seen her boy? I hear he's rather...dark."*

*"She brought him to the race. Can you imagine?"*

*"He is dark. No telling what sort of – person – the father was. "*

The last disgusting comment was more than Lucy could bear and she spun around to see who'd spoken it. She recognised the women she'd been standing near on the royal yacht and the smug expression of the one who's lusted after Trevor told her what she need to know.

She strode up to the woman in a rustle of glimmering silk, skewering the crowd of gawkers with her angry eyes. *"How dare you? How dare any of you? What gives you the right to mock my son and slander his dead father? You people stand back on your pedestals and expect the world to worship at your feet but you're no better than the trash lying curbside in the streets, so don't you dare insinuate anything about me or my son!"*

*"Common bitch,"* the woman from the yacht muttered.

Lucy took a step forward, her blue eyes livid. *"I may be common, but I'll never be the bitch you are."*

Trevor watched the show down in open-mouthed surprise until his companion nudged him in the ribs. He looked to where the royal couple sat and his eyes followed the path of the Prince's gaze which was directed towards Lucy who was striding across the room headed straight for the entrance.

*"Don't touch me!"* Lucy shouted when Trevor grabbed her by the upper arm. She tried to shake him off. *"Let me go. I want to get out of here!"*

"You can't, Lucy. You just can't!" Trevor lowered his voice. "Come out to the terrace with me, or upstairs until you settle down. I'll stay with you. You simply can't leave the premises. No one can leave until the Prince does."

Lucy couldn't believe her ears. "I can't leave because your friend the Prince wouldn't approve?" Trevor's grip loosened and she pulled her arm away. "My God, Trevor. You should have heard them. What they said about me was bad enough but I will not stand by while these people ridicule my son's skin colour, and insinuate that his father was some horrible piece of filth that made me too unclean to ever associate with you."

"Mark my words, they'll regret this. Each and everyone who so much as gave you a sideways look will pay. They'll pay dearly."

The injured child inside Lucy wanted Trevor to exact whatever revenge he could, but she knew that to do so would make her no better than them. She pulled back. "Are you sure we can't leave? I just want to go home and be with you and Joshua."

Trevor hugged her close and kissed her forehead. "Just wait here a moment. I'll have the carriage brought around."

Well after midnight Lucy awakened to the sound of angry voice coming from Trevor's study. She tried not to listen but couldn't help it, the windows in both rooms were open to admit the cool sea breeze.

"Have you lost your mind? I had to grovel to keep us from being banished from their circle!"

"Fuck the sacred social circle! I will not have the woman I love treated that way!"

"Then perhaps you should have given more thought to with whom you fell in love. Did it never cross your mind what people would think or say?"

"I don't care."

"Then you should start," the Earl said slowly, his voice hard and without a single shred of sympathy. "I risked my life more than once to keep this family going. I watched four of my five children die, I watched you half drink yourself to death, but I will not sit silently by while the

name of Lynbrook is held up for public ridicule.”

Next came the sound of Trevor's fist striking the top of his desk. “Ridicule by a public worse than any of us could ever want to be? Half of them cheat on their spouses, countless others treat their staff like slaves, and I won't even get in to the sexual debauchery or use of illicit —”

“What they do behind closed doors is no concern of yours.” The Earl's voice softened a little. “I have nothing against the girl or her boy, but you have a responsibility to your family. You know that. And it's not just the family who depend on us. Half our servants are too old to find other positions should the title be put in abeyance. You know how many tenant farmers we have, how many we overlook payment for. You may not care if your mother, grandmother and sister-in-law are out in the street, but what about the others? There are hundreds of others depending upon us for their livelihood.”

Trevor let out a long, weary sigh. “I won't give Lucy up. I won't. I refuse to be a part of the annual marriage market and go shopping for the handsomest dowry.”

“Sometimes it works to everyone's advantage.”

“No,” Trevor said forcefully. “I love Lucy. She will be my wife. That is absolute.”

“Then I suggest you make her fit the mould and act the way Lady Ashford should.”

Lucy stared at the shadows on the ceiling, listened to the slapping of the waves and the ticking of the bedside clock, the argument replaying itself in her thoughts again and again and again, the last of it getting louder and sounding more horrible each time it ran through her mind.

*I love Lucy. That is absolute.*

*I suggest you make her fit the mould and act the way Lady Ashford should.*

*...make her fit the mould...*

*...fit the mould...*

*...the mould...*

## Chapter Twelve

Trevor watched Lucy undress and comb out her hair. She'd been distant these few days since the party and while he couldn't blame her it pained him to see her shut herself and Joshua up in the house, venturing out into the garden or down to the water later in the day when most of the crowd had gone from this part of the shore. He wondered if perhaps there was a physical cause for her lassitude. At least he had remedies for that.

He peeled off his robe and climbed into the wide, soft bed beside her, pulling her into the circle of his arms. He brushed his fingertips over her face and neck, disturbed when she failed to tremble as she did until that disastrous night at the club. "Are you ill? You seem to pale and tired." He paused. "Do you think, is there a chance that you might be pregnant?"

Lucy offered him a sad smile. "No. I've been using the preventive you gave me back home."

"You don't have to," Trevor said softly, trailing his fingers down to her shoulder, her breast. Her nipple responded to the touch. "I'd love for you to have my child." He eased her down onto the plump pillows for a lingering kiss. Slipping his fingers inside her slick passage, Trevor meant to remove the contraceptive device, but found that she hadn't inserted it tonight. He moved his body over hers and kissed her as though it were the first time all over again. "I love you, Lucy. I love you. Have my baby..."

Lucy froze when Trevor eased into her depths. He began to move. She pushed at his shoulders. "No. Please. Don't."

"Please don't stop? My pleasure."

"Get off. Please."

Trevor rolled off her, more concerned than annoyed. "I'll get the blasted Dutch cap—"

"No," Lucy said, scrambling off the other side of the bed. She rummaged through her

bureau drawer and removed a nightgown. It was one of the old, matronly ones she'd brought from home, not the sheerer ones from Paris that he preferred. "I'm sorry. I just want to get some sleep. I'm tired."

"All right, my love," Trevor said tersely, getting out of bed. He pulled on his trousers and the shirt he'd left on the bench at the foot of the bed.

Lucy's heart broke when Trevor left and she went to the window. True to his word, he went just outside the house and paced back and forth gazing out at the sea. What was he thinking as he picked up one tiny rock after another and threw it as far as he could? She didn't know, and didn't think she wanted to know. His relationship with his grandfather had been strained since that dreadful night of the ball and she felt guilty and responsible for the rift, but was proud that Trevor had defied the hypocritical status quo to stand by her.

"Oh, Trevor," she whispered. "I would love to have your baby, but I can't, not yet. I want to be sure first, sure that I can fit into the mould you need me to fit. I don't think I can but I don't want to lose you, either."

Lucy looked up towards the star filled sky and prayed for guidance. So many thoughts were running through her mind that she wasn't sure which way was up and she didn't think she could trust her heart to decide for her. *If you love him, then be with him. It's that simple.*

If only it were so simple...

*"Make her fit the mould and act the way Lady Ashford should..."*

*"Please, please be careful. Don't let him try to make you something you're not..."*

Of the five people who boarded the Earl's private train compartment for the trip to Ashford Heath only the governess and Joshua seemed to be looking forward to the journey.

"Don't tell me," Trevor said, grinding the words out between clenched teeth when he saw which carriage had been sent to take them to the Hall.

"Contain yourself, Trevor," his grandfather reprimanded him.

Lucy gave the governess an apologetic smile as Trevor and his grandfather strode forward to speak with Trevor's valet who'd accompanied the coachman to the station. The man handed

the Earl a sealed envelope. The Earl read it, gave some instructions to the coachman then went inside the railroad station. Trevor threw up his hands in disgust then stalked back their way.

Lucy tightened her grip on Joshua's hand when Trevor bellowed.

"Damn it all to bloody hell and back again!"

Lucy saw the governess blush. "Trevor, your language. Please."

He massaged his temples then straightened his shirt cuffs. "Forgive me." He let out a tired sigh then slipped his hands into his trouser pockets. "That coven of unholy witches has done it again," he grumbled. "They've wrangled themselves invitations to Barton Castle for the weekend and sent word for the Earl to join them. Just the Earl."

He grumbled and ground his molars together. "At least they had the decency to leave the staff in place and have even graciously gone so far as to send the rest of the servants back to London where they belong. Hooray."

"At least it will be quiet – until they get back."

Trevor's glum expression brightened and he raised Lucy's gloved hand to his lips. What a treasure she was to keep smiling and forging ahead no matter the obstacles they put in her path. "Right you are, my love. What is that expression of Mary Red Eagle's – 'If all you've got is a basket of lemons' –"

"Don't stand there puckering, add some sugar and make lemonade," Lucy finished.

Trevor grinned. "Exactly. We'll make so much lemonade those harpies will drown in it." He hoisted Joshua up onto his shoulders and started towards the old suspension less carriage.

"Is that it?" Joshua yelled, pointing out the carriage window. "Is that our new house?"

"That it is, old man. That it is."

"Oh my," Lucy said softly, telling herself that it was foolish to be surprised after seeing the houses Trevor called home. This was the grandest thing she'd ever seen close up. It was enormous and she hoped that Joshua wouldn't get himself lost in its cavernous interior. "It's so – big," she said, blushing when Trevor broke into a hearty laugh.

"I was hoping you'd be a slightly more impressed," he teased as the coachman stopped

the carriage and opened the door. He got out then helped the governess and Joshua down before extending his hand to Lucy. He looked over his shoulder and spoke to the staff assembled on the side of the path leading to the Hall's entrance. "Everyone, I'd like you to meet your new mistress, the future Lady Ashford."

Lucy exited the carriage to a polite round of applause, her embarrassment growing by leaps and bounds. "Was that necessary, Trevor?"

"It was to me," he said slipping her arm through his and leading the way as the butler gave a quick introduction of the staff from the highest position – that of the housekeeper to the lowest scullery maid who was not usually permitted to venture out of the kitchen while on duty unless it was on orders.

It was clear to Lucy that these people cared a great deal for Trevor and that he was the object of much fantasizing from the young women on staff. She wondered how many of them had gone so far as to purchase one of his *cartes de viste* picture cards which were sold along with those of other celebrated persons in shops across the land. The women's eyes shone as he greeted them all by name, inquiring about changes in events or family members since he last visited and Lucy guessed that they all had his picture tucked beneath their bed pillows.

"And this, my love, is Gordon, our inestimable butler who oversees this bunch of uncouth ruffians," He paused while the servants laughed. "If you need anything tell him and he'll see that it's taken care of. Right, Gordon?"

The man snapped to attention so sharp that Lucy swore she heard his bones click into the rigid stance. "Yes, Lord Ashford. I shall be most pleased, sir."

Trevor grinned and leaned in to the older man. "Rest easy, Gordon. Lucy will never be the demanding wench my mother is."

The butler tried valiantly to conceal his pleasure. "Yes, my Lord." He met Lucy's gaze and let the corners of his mouth rise ever so slightly as if testing the waters.

Lucy smiled. "It will be a pleasure to have your help, Mist – Gordon, while we get settled in."

The man clicked his heels. "Rest assured, madam, the pleasure is that of the staff and

myself."

He stepped aside so that Lucy could enter and she smiled to herself when she overheard him whisper to Trevor.

"Fine choice, if I may say so sir. Excellent choice, in fact."

Trevor slipped his arm around Lucy's waist and pulled her into a crushing embrace, heedless of the servants streaming in behind them, returning to their duties or carrying in the volume of baggage, most of it Lucy's new Parisian wardrobe.

Trunks were still being carried in when their kiss ended and Lucy gave Trevor a critical look. "I know I didn't choose that much clothing in Paris. What have you done?"

Trevor ran his hands up and down her back, delighting in the way she trembled beneath his fingers. "I haven't done anything, my love, but you may have inspired my good friend Jean-Philippe to such an extent that he designed a few more pieces of finery in your honour and had them sent to my grandfather's solicitor for my approval."

"Oh, Trevor. It's too much."

"Not for you." He kissed her again, happy beyond measure that the distance between them last night was gone. He took her by the hand and told the governess to follow with Joshua. "Come. I'll give you all a tour."



The fatigue and uncertainty with which Lucy awakened that morning melted away as Trevor led them on a leisurely romp through his ancestral home. Up and down broad staircases, past ancient tapestries, down dim corridors and through hidden passages they went. Each impressive artifact had a story, each room had been host to some important historic personage so that the world of Lucy's school books came to life in her imagination, the scenery real before her.

"Mary Tudor's priest hid in this very hole during the purge," Trevor said as he showed them the hidden closet of a room.



"Oh, my," Lucy said. "I knew the rooms had to be small to keep them hidden, but look, another foot or less and Josh would find it difficult to stand. I can't imagine a full grown man being cooped up in here."

"I know. I used to come here and hide when I was small, because it seemed to be the securest place. The rest of the Hall is overwhelming at times, but here I felt safe. It was my world and I could control the environment completely. Look," Trevor said, pulling aside a faded tapestry stored there.

On the wall a picture had been meticulously etched into the stone. Tears formed in Lucy's eyes as they travelled over the scene drawn by a very lonely, very frightened little boy. With her free hand she traced the simple figure manning the roof of little thatched cottage with an army of toy soldiers by his side as they defended their serene little place against the horde of hungry dragons approaching the all sides. "Oh, Trevor," she said quietly, slipping her hand into his, reading the meaning behind the childlike drawings as clearly as if he'd written it down.

Trevor cradled Lucy's face in his hands, brushing the tiny tears away with his thumbs. "Those days are gone, and I swear to you that Joshua will never, feel that way in this house. Never."

"Oooh, they're gonna do that kissy stuff again!"

Trevor stepped back into the spacious corridor. He winked at the governess and bent down to ruffle Josh's hair. "Mark my words, old man, you'll be very fond of that 'kissy stuff' in a few years."

Joshua's chubby face screwed up. "Oooh, no!" His look of aversion swiftly changed. "Why are you all laughing? What's so funny, Mama? Papa? Minty?" He tugged on the governess' skirt. "Minty! Miss Mintwood, why are you all laughing?"

"You didn't have to use the cap you know," Trevor whispered in Lucy's ear as he continued to savour the way her body gripped his as they drifted down from the forceful climax that had their hearts thundering in unison. "I do want us to have a baby, Lucy. Many babies. Many chubby, laughing, happy babies. Josh needs companions."

*And you need an heir to carry on the hallowed title,* Lucy thought. An heir and a spare — that was the phrase she'd heard the Earl use when speaking of someone's latest family addition back in London. She hadn't been sure what it meant at first but it was crystal clear in light of all that had happened. He loved Joshua, of course, but her son, the half Indian blooded son could never hold the same position as a legitimate heir.

Trevor began to move within her again as he tenderly suckled the skin over her collar bone.

She felt nothing this time, nothing like she usually felt. She turned her head when he tried to kiss her. "Please let me up."

"What is it? What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she lied. "I just need to use the water closet, that's all."

Trevor moved off of her and gave her naked bottom a playful squeeze. "Hurry back, my love and think about leaving the cap behind."

"I can't."

Lucy buried her face in her pillow the following night when Trevor went to his own room, shutting her door with a slam. He never even looked her way and hadn't spoken a single word to her since they'd tucked Joshua in two and a half hours ago despite the fact that they'd both spent the remainder of the evening in the smaller of the two downstairs drawing rooms, he reading through some recent medical journals and expense ledgers for the estate while she wrote letters to Mary Red Eagle and her stepsister, Star. She told them about all the wonderful things she'd seen and done, purposely colouring everything brighter than it was, ashamed to admit that she may have made the biggest mistake of her life.

Trevor tried to ignore the ache invading every inch of his body. He wanted Lucy so badly that it was killing him, but he wouldn't approach her, not until she told him what the blasted problem was. He tried to get it out of her this afternoon when they returned from church and the governess took Joshua for a picnic lunch at the lake a half mile from the house, but Lucy refused to confide in him. She kept insisting that it was "nothing", that she had "a few little

things on her mind, that's all."

"That is not all," he muttered, trying desperately not to acknowledge that the sounds he heard drifting beneath the door were Lucy's muffled sobs. "If only you would talk to me, I'd set the problem right, or die trying."

"Tell you what, old man," Trevor said Thursday evening as he and Lucy went to tuck Josh in for the night. "I'm supposed to meet with a few of our farmers tomorrow afternoon, but I think I can squeeze in a picnic lunch by the lake. Perhaps we'll do some fishing."

"I don't know," Lucy said. "Joshua is starting to fall behind in his reading because he's been too busy exploring and sightseeing, and I really don't want him playing around that lake. It's too dark and slimy-looking."

Trevor knew that she was grasping at straws and his physical frustration was taking its toll, eating away at the control he had over his temper. "For God's sake, Lucy. I'm not going to let the boy fall in and drown. I have enough sense to watch over him."

"I never said you didn't have sense, Trevor, I just don't like the looks of that lake."

"That lake has been fished in and swam in for generations."

"And one of your uncles drowned there," Lucy reminded him.

Trevor ran his hand through his hair. His expression softened as did his voice. "I'll be careful, I promise. Trust me, Lucy. Please."

Lucy knew that he was no longer speaking of her objection to the lake, but she didn't want to get into the real issue, certainly not here in front of a six year old and a governess. "Don't let him go in. I'm afraid."

"I won't, and you shouldn't be." Trevor reached out, wanting to touch her, needing to touch her, but she shied away. He stood by silently as she kissed her son then hurried from the room in a swirl of pale yellow silk and chiffon.

"Papa, can we go fishing tomorrow or not?" Joshua asked, too innocent to understand the undercurrent of his parents' words.

Trevor turned back and sat on the edge of the high oak bed that had once been his. "Of

course we're going, old man. I promised and I never break a promise to you, do I?"

"Nope." Joshua smiled when Trevor ruffled his hair and kissed his forehead. "Papa?"

"Yes, son."

"Do you promise that you and my mama will love each other for ever and ever?"

Trevor saw the confusion in the child's large dark eyes and knew that he sensed the tension he and Lucy had been trying to hide. "Of course, old man. And you know what, that will be the easiest promise to keep because your mother and I love each other very, very much; as much as we both love you."

Trevor's heart began to ache when Joshua smiled. If only he could truly believe the words. He still didn't know if the incident back at the yacht club was the problem or if it was something else. She wouldn't talk to him. She refused to approach the subject or let him anywhere near her for that matter, except of course as propriety demanded such as at the dining table.

As he passed the little sitting room next to Lucy's dressing room he heard her discussing the following day's menu with the housekeeper and he paused. She suggested that they contact the proprietors of the travelling Wild West show they'd seen advertised at the train station near Cowes concerning the purchase of some buffalo meat.

"It might be interesting to see if the cook could prepare roast buffalo tongue. Perhaps we'll barbecue it. Yes, we'll dig a pit right outside the kitchen and fill it with hot coals. We'll buy an entire buffalo and hire one of the show's Indians to cook it in the old manner."

"Yes, ma'am. If that is what you wish, ma'am," the housekeeper said as politely as she could.

Trevor had to make an effort to contain his laughter for he pictured the stone-faced old woman who undoubtedly hadn't smiled since before Lord Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. He imagined her rocky face developing a myriad of cracks and fissures as this unbelievable order was thrust upon her.

"Yes," Lucy said, adding fuel to the fire. "Perhaps they'll sell us a live buffalo and rent us a number of warriors to chase it over the grounds so that we might have a real hunt and celebratory dance. Joshua would like that, Trevor might, too. He earned a Cheyenne name, you

know, bestowed upon him by the chief himself."

"Really, ma'am. I had no idea. Well, I should be going."

"Oh no, Miss P. You really should stay awhile and let me tell you all about Trevor's adventures with the Cheyenne." Lucy lowered her voice. "The Indians have made the most scandalous use of white men's trousers. They cut out the middles and wear them that way."

The ancient housekeeper gasped and Trevor held his breath.

"Really, ma'am? How interesting."

Trevor bit his tongue as he pictured the expression to go with the old woman's torturously spoken words.

"I hope if we hire a few Indians they don't wear those kinds of trousers," Lucy said. "I wouldn't want to offend anyone's sensibilities or give Lord Ashford any ideas which might cloud the high opinion you all have of him."

"Lord Ashford, ma'am?"

The old housekeeper's voice was a good octave higher and Trevor bit his tongue to contain his laughter as he pictured her, picturing him running around half naked chasing a buffalo."

"If that's all, I'll be going." the housekeeper mumbled apologies as something was knocked over. "I'll clean someone to send this, I mean I'll have someone clean this up —"

"Miss P.," Lucy said gently. "Please don't get flustered. I was only joking. I'm sorry."

"Joking, ma'am. You mean his lordship isn't going to show us his — Yes, ma'am. It was quite amusing, ma'am." Something else fell. "I'll have this cleaned soon."

Trevor stepped back as Lucy showed the older woman out. The housekeeper dropped her leather-bound notebook at the sight of him and he retrieved it, not giving it back until she looked him in the eye.

"Here you go Miss P." He grinned and looked over her shoulder to Lucy. "Darling, do I have any old trousers lying about? I know I should have brought the ones from Oklahoma, but I didn't think I'd feel like going *au natural* out here." He switched his gaze from Lucy to the housekeeper and was amazed by the strange things happening beneath her granite-like skin.

She seemed to pale and colour and pale again while her face remained perfectly immobile. He stepped aside. "Do forgive me for blocking the way, Miss P. There you go."

The woman hurried away as quickly as her old legs would carry her muttering under breath something Trevor couldn't quite make out. When she reached the end of the long hall and turned to go down the short corridor to the stairs Trevor broke out laughing and Lucy quickly followed suit.

"Napoleon could have brought the entire French Army to her doorstep and she wouldn't have showed a single trace of emotion but you, my dear, certainly roused something in her. I imagine she cracked, or tried to crack a smile of relief when you told her you were joking."

"Actually, I think she was disappointed."

"Really? Old Miss P? No."

"Really," Lucy said leaning back against the door jamb, her arms folded in front of her. "You should have seen her face. That stern expression didn't actually change, but something in her eyes told me that she would go to her grave a very happy woman if she had the chance to see you *au natural*."

Trevor shook his head in disbelief. "Who would have thought? Certainly not me. I would imagine that her female parts have shrivelled and sealed shut by now," he said looking down the hall the way the housekeeper went.

Lucy let out a wistful sigh and voiced her thoughts without thinking. "The sight of you naked could get a bronze statue wet..." She shrank back when Trevor whipped around. She turned quickly towards the sitting room.

"Oh, no you don't," Trevor said, stopping the door with his sizable palm. He followed her in and locked it behind him. "This is the closest I've been to you in days, and you're not getting away."

Lucy's eyes darted from here to there seeking another escape route. Finding none, she stepped back. Trevor stepped forward. She stepped again and again he followed.

"Lucy," he said, his voice cold and uncompromising. "There's nowhere left to run so stop and face the music."

Lucy didn't stop retreating until she ran up against the locked door. She fumbled behind her back trying to undo the latch, her eyes opened wide, never leaving Trevor's angry face.

He reached into his coat pocket and held up a small brass key. "Looking for this?" He snatched it away when she leaned forward. "I think not. We need to discuss a few things, my dear."

Lucy's heart was pounding so fast, that she had to touch her hand to her chest to make sure it was still inside her body. "Discuss a few things?" she asked weakly.

"Don't try to play for time, because I'm not in the mood."

He stepped closer, so close that Lucy could see a tiny muscle spasm at the corner of his mouth, that wonderfully wicked mouth that gave her limitless pleasure, that spoke such sweet, incredible words of love.

"I want to know why you're doing this. Why are you behaving this way?"

Lucy's bottled up emotions began to tear through her tissue thin self control. "I can't help it! I can't fit into your mould! I can't change what I am inside!"

Trevor stepped back in surprise. She leaned back against the panelled door, needing the support. "I'm sorry, all right? I shouldn't have led Miss P on, but I couldn't help it. It's so damned dull with nothing to do all day. I can't be the perfect Lady Ashford you need me to be. I can't!" Her emotions broke free and tears began to stream down her face.

Trevor gathered her into his arms and cradled her, gently stroking her soft golden hair and her quaking back. "Oh, Lucy love." He pulled back. "Look at me."

She did. "I'm sorry. Tell them to see you about the daily details if you want."

"No, love," Trevor said, wiping her tears with his handkerchief. "This is all so new to you. It's my fault for not preparing you, telling you what was expected of you. Things are more relaxed out here when we're alone. If cooking or straightening up is what you feel you have to do you can to a degree. I won't stop you, but there is an unwritten code of public behaviour in London and elsewhere."

"But there shouldn't be." Lucy pulled away despite the glorious feel of Trevor's strong arms.

"There shouldn't, but there is and I'm bound by it whether I like it or not." He paused.  
"And as my wife, you're bound by it, too."

"But I'm not your wife."

The quietly spoken words were like a vicious slap and Trevor reared back. He began to pace the room like a wild beast while Lucy remained in her little safe spot near the door. He spun and stalked her way. To his surprise, and unconscious delight, she held her ground, her head up, her eyes filled with courage.

"Do you want to end the engagement?"

"Do you?"

"You're the one who is unhappy."

"I never said that. Did you hear me say that?"

Trevor's rigid stance relaxed a fraction. "Can you honestly say you're happy?"

Lucy kept her chin up though it took most of her energy to do so. "Do you want me to?"

Trevor laughed from the absurdity of it all. "You can keep that mouth of yours arguing all night, can't you?"

"I don't want to," she replied, lowering her eyes to the parquet floor. She felt a surge of warmth when Trevor pressed his fingertips to her chin and lifted her head. He cradled her chin with a powerfully gentle touch that she couldn't have escaped from even if she wanted to.

"What do you want, Lucy?" he asked as his free hand defied his unspoken order and began to caress the side of her flushed face.

"I only want what I've always wanted. " Her hand placed itself upon his. "I want you, Trevor."

The surge of warmth heating Lucy's blood turned to a torrent of flaming passion when Trevor's mouth took hers. She wrapped her arms around his neck, her fingers sifting through the silkiness of his hair, her body pressing forward moulding itself to his larger, firmer frame. She'd missed him so much and her starved body thanked her before the pleasure of his lips made it tremble and grow weak. She felt her knees give way and gripped Trevor's shoulders, not realizing the pressure she exerted.



Trevor mistook the action, assuming she was having second thoughts. He pulled free from the stirring kiss, his breathing ragged, his eyes blazing from the heat of his blood. "Don't turn me away, Lucy. Don't."

Lucy offered him a tremulous smile. "I won't. I can't." She kissed him again, hungry for his taste, her body screaming for his to possess it, to fill it to the limit. She inhaled sharply feeling the slick heat flow between her legs at the thought. "Love me, Trevor," she begged in a low, dusky voice, reaching out to stroke his hard shaft through his trousers. "Love me now. Here. Anywhere..."

The costly silk tea gown became a worthless rag for Trevor's impatience compelled him to rip it from her body. The filmy lingerie was destroyed even quicker and his own clothing fared no better. A priceless oriental vase perished next when Trevor swept it from the marble topped stand to his left. He set Lucy on the stand and impaled her in his haste. Her only reaction was a cry of joy.

The scent of their lovemaking filled the air. Her moans, his harsh breaths, their bodies giving and receiving with soft, sucking sounds broke the stillness of the night. Their release was rapid, almost violent in its intensity, but there was no violence, no anger, no coercion involved, and as soon as he had the strength, Trevor carried Lucy to the antique brocade divan and laid her down gently, placing a small embroidered pillow, a gift from a long dead princess beneath her head.

He sank to the floor beside her, and smoothed back the damp wisps of hair which clung to her flushed face. "That wasn't very gentlemanly of me, I'm sorry."

Lucy laughed, or tried too. "Am I complaining, my lord?" she teased, brushing her fingers through his hair, inhaling the musky scent which rose from his sweaty skin.

"Will you complain later?"

"Should I?"

Trevor laughed and squeezed her breast. "That mouth of yours is too much at times."

"Are you complaining now?"

Trevor's reply had to wait until he'd finished sampling her inviting nipple. He traced the

outline of her mouth, that soft, hot mouth that made him hard all over again. "How could I ever complain about something that can do so very many things."

Lucy smiled. "Right now it would like to kiss you."

Trevor's blood, so pleasantly warm since his reunion with Lucy that morning turned to ice in his veins when he saw the liveried footman riding towards the lake at breakneck speed. "Stay put, Josh."

With a gesture he told the footman to remain mounted. "What is it? What's happened?"

"Her ladyship —"

Trevor looked to Josh. He was still concentrating on baiting his hook, thank God.

"What? Is she hurt? Sweet Christ! I told her not to explore the upper west wing —"

"No, sir. It's your mother, grandmother, Lady Margaret. They've returned, sir."

"Bloody hell! I should have known they'd show up unannounced. I should have warned her —" He ran his hands through his hair. "You take Joshua back to the house. Have Miss Mintwood clean him up and put on his best suit."

Trevor rushed towards Josh. "Look, son. There's something I have to attend to straightaway. Dudley will take you back to the house. We'll have to finish this another time." He forced a smile and vaulted onto his horse, tied close by.

"Sir!" the footman called. "There's someone else who's come — Lady Medford."

Trevor growled in frustration as he kicked his horse into a wild gallop. Gwynne. That's all Lucy needed.

## Chapter Thirteen

Trevor slid from his gelding's back before it came to a full stop at the rear of the house. Gordon was standing in the opened back door. "How's Lucy holding up?"

"Admirably, sir." He followed Trevor to the servant's stairs. "Your clothes are on your bed, sir," he called. "There's hot water in the basin."

The cook came over when Gordon returned to the kitchen. "I'm praying for them, Mr. Gordon."

"Aye. Me too."

Lucy's icy, pasted-on smile warmed and became genuine as soon as Trevor entered the drawing room and in his presence she felt the invisible stranglehold around her throat loosen.

"Forgive me, my love," he said, leaning down to give her a kiss.

"It's all right," she said, strengthened by Trevor's public display of affection. She squeezed his hand, then let him go to greet his family and their guest, his former fiancée who'd been doing everything in her power to make her squirm. It was Lucy's pleasure to have denied her repeatedly.

Trevor greeted his grandmother with a glancing kiss to the cheek and his mother and sister-in-law with curt nods. He ignored Gwynne Medford completely, to his relations' consternation.

Really, Trevor," his mother said sharply. "Has your time in American turned you into one of their crude citizens?"

"Americans are no more crude than many other inhabitants of the world," Trevor answered with a smirk.

"Manners, Trevor," his grandmother said. She paused while the parlour maid and footman were setting down the heavy sterling tea service and plates of sweet treats. "Don't be

rude. Lady Medford has graciously agreed to be our guest for a fortnight," she informed him, emphasizing the final word.

*Two weeks!* Lucy's brain screamed. She looked at Trevor, hoping she'd misread the look of rage forming in his eyes. She hadn't.

"No," he growled, his deep voice striking his mother with enough force to make her flinch. "You have no right. Invite her to the cottage or to Grosvenor Square if you like, but not here. "Not now."

The Countess of Greylock delicately cleared her throat to get her grandson's attention. "May I remind you, Trevor, that as long as William is alive and well, this is *my* home. I will welcome whomever I choose."

Trevor sat next to Lucy taking her hand in both of his. "May I remind, you, Grandmother, that he won't live forever and someday, the decisions will be mine to make. Mine and Lucy's."

He raked his gaze over his womenfolk with such distaste that Lucy almost felt sorry for them. Apart from his grandmother who was fortunate enough to have a steady income of her own, the other two women would one day be at his mercy if they wished to remain in the life to which they'd become accustomed. Their husbands had squandered the monies they'd brought in dowries.

Lucy took it upon herself to break into the tense silence which filled the room. "Hopefully, the Earl will be with us for a great many years to come."

Trevor kissed her again and released the firm hold he had on her hands. "Quite right, my love."

Silence descended once again. Trevor's sister-in-law broke it the second time as she poured their tea.

"Where is your son, Mrs. Willis? Trevor spoke highly of him when he wrote us of your engagement."

Lucy shot Trevor a questioning look. Apparently he wasn't sure either if this was a genuine burying of the hatchet or another attempt to goad her. She chose to believe that it was the former and she smiled graciously as she took the dainty tea cup. "Perhaps you should ask

Trevor, Lady Margaret. He took Joshua on a fishing expedition.”

“To that nasty little lake?” Trevor's mother asked. “All manner of slimy, squirmy things abound there.” She shivered.

Lucy smiled. “You see, Trevor. I told you so.”

He had to smile as well, feeling the tension begin to slip away. “It's not so bad — especially once the first slimy thing slithers against you.” As he hoped, his jest brought a quiet round of laughter — from everyone except his former fiancée.

“I think I hear Josh now,” Lucy said, as the sound of her son's excited rambling grew closer to the drawing room.

Trevor greeted Josh and Miss Mintwood at the door. “Ladies, it is my pleasure to present Master Joshua Jason Willis; soon to be Joshua Jason Willis-Lynbrook.” He led Joshua forward to greet his relations as he'd been taught.

Lucy beamed as her son graciously bowed, kissed their hands and greeted them each by their appropriate title. He stopped and looked to Trevor for assistance when he came to a face he did not recognise.

“This is Lady Medford, son. She's a friend of the family.”

“It is a pleasure, Lady Medford,” Josh said carefully.

Tension slashed through the air again when Gwynne Medford turned up her nose. “I would prefer not to,” she snapped, pulling her hand away.

Anger coiled through Lucy as Josh gave her a confused look.

“Gwynne, really,” Trevor's mother said tersely. “He's just a child.”

“Yes, I suppose.”

Lucy took Josh by the hand, saying gently, “Come on, honey,” and left the room.

Miss Mintwood followed and after a few seconds so did Trevor.

“Lucy. Wait,” he called, bounding up the stairs to intercept her. “Lucy, wait.”

“For what? To have her insult him to his face even more? He's a little boy, for God's sake!”

The governess eased Joshua's hand from Lucy's tight grip and ushered him up to his room.

Trevor took hold of Lucy's shoulders as she shook from the effort it took to contain her temper. "I assure you, Gwynne is being dressed down even as we speak."

"I don't give a flying fig," Lucy said coldly, her eyes angrier than he'd ever seen them. "Get us out of here, Trevor. I refuse to spend two weeks with that so-called lady." She pulled herself free, almost tripping down the stairs in the process.

Trevor's heart skipped and he grabbed her in the nick of time. "Be careful!" He stepped aside so that she could go to the second floor. He followed her to their room and was not surprised when she headed for her dressing room and began to toss things into a large leather portmanteau. She slammed the bureau drawer shut with enough force to topple the small standing mirror on top.

Trevor took hold of Lucy's shoulders to keep her still. She did not resist and his heart ached for her and Josh when he saw the great pain in her eyes and knew that she was thinking that she would have to go through this same sort of thing for the rest of her life.

"Then make her leave."

"It isn't that simple," Trevor said as he considered the social implications of tossing one's guest out on her ear. He didn't care, but he knew that his female relations would and that the Earl would go with their wishes on this. "If she can't get her free room and board for the next two weeks she'll cause even more trouble."

"Then Josh and I will go," Lucy said.

"You mustn't. I couldn't bear it." He peered deeply into Lucy's sad eyes. "I would love to bodily remove her myself, but I can't. This is still my grandparents' home. I won't run from this. I have to show Gwynne, show them all, that I intend to stand my ground."

Lucy took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Trevor, but I will not stay here with that woman under this roof and I will not subject my son to her prejudice. I won't."

She began to pack another bag as Trevor watched. She stopped when he grabbed her wrist.

"You don't have to go. There's another way."

"Shall we do away with her and make it look like an accident?" Lucy inquired

sarcastically.

"I meant that you, Josh and I – and Miss Mintwood, of course, will stay elsewhere – here in the Hall. You said it yourself, one could get lost here. We can move into the west wing. It has no plumbing to speak of, but I'm sure we can manage. It's no worse than Sweet Medicine."

"I miss Sweet Medicine," Lucy said quietly, sitting on one of the tufted velvet benches that lined the left wall. "We didn't have much, but we had good friends and each other."

Trevor sank to his knees in front of her and took her hands in his, rubbing his thumbs back and forth across her clammy skin until it warmed. "We still have each other, my love, and believe it or not, I have some very nice, very sincere friends. I just haven't been able to round them up yet."

"All I want is to be with you and Josh and away from that Medford woman for the next two weeks."

With Gordon's help in the rearranging of the servant's duty schedules, Trevor was able to move into the closed west wing of Ashford Hall.

The air seemed to have a permanent mustiness which constant airing couldn't eradicate, furnishings were showing a great deal of wear and tear, but Lucy and Miss Mintwood managed to create a comfy little suite of apartments on the ground floor. Trevor found little comfort in the outmoded sanitary facilities, but knew that he could survive it for a mere fortnight.

Unfortunately he never counted on Gwynne being able to wrangle an additional two weeks' stay out of his grandmother.

"You have got to be joking," Trevor said in a near shout when the countess warned him of the change in plans so that he could break it to Lucy. "No more free rides! Toss her out on her fat arse! I'll do it for you!"

"Really, Trevor, do use a shred of the decency we tried to instil in you. You know the girl's circumstances. And I should think you would be more lenient, considering that Gwynne's clothing allowance for the year is about half of what your Lucy's green tea gown cost."

Trevor bristled and fiddled with his shirt cuffs. "Lucy deserves it and more for all the joy she's given me. Besides, if you recall, Gwynne went into her money squandering marriage of her own free will."

The countess sighed. "Yes. Charlie's high-living ways lured her from you, she had no way of knowing that he was living on both borrowed time and money."

Trevor rubbed his throbbing temples. "Two more weeks, no more."

Gwynne Medford sat at the desk in her comfortable room overlooking the old west garden and tapped one finely manicured fingernail against her teeth. She had ten days left before she had to move on. She thought she might be able to wheedle a few more days, but that old bat refused to budge, despite the entreaty of her dear best friend Margaret. Of course, Margaret knew precisely where the butter for her bread came from and she refused to do more than ask quietly – once.

"Shit," Gwynne muttered, reverting to one of her favourite expressions from the old days when she'd slaved in that cesspit of a hospital tending to all those filthy charity cases under the guise of "good works" hoping and praying that her unselfishness would garner the attention of someone important. It had, but she was too naive to realise that one day he would have far more going for him than a promising career and family connections. Oh, she knew about his incredible physical attributes, but it had been just the one time and damn it all to hell, she'd insisted that he protect them both from an unwanted pregnancy.

If only she'd had the nerve to risk a possible scandal or denial on Trevor's part, she could have had it all instead of the pocketful of nothing Charlie left her with. How could she ever have believed his assertions that as the second son of a second son Trevor would have no future to offer except being the wife of a doctor – a tradesman practically, getting his hands filthy on beggar's entrails.

A vicious snarl filled the quiet room when Gwynne caught sight of Trevor's new love and that vile little dark skinned child of hers. The thought of Trevor lying with that woman made her want to retch. She had to get that little blonde whore out of the way, but how? She couldn't



get near her. She'd tried, ready to rail against that half breed boy, knowing that to hurt him would drive the woman away, but that old bastard Gordon guarded the entrance to the west wing like a sentry, the rest of the staff had followed suit, besotted by that American trollop...

Gwynne's thoughts broke off when the door opened a crack and the old crone of a housekeeper peeked in to check that the chambermaids had done their morning's work.

"Oh, do forgive the intrusion, Lady Medford. I thought you might have gone to luncheon with the others."

"Wait, Miss P," Gwynne said in her sweetest tone. She rose from her seat and glided towards the small divan near the fireplace. She sat and patted the cushion next to her. "Please, do sit."

The housekeeper did, obviously impressed by the honour.

"Can I take you into my confidence, Miss P?"

The housekeeper's stony face nearly cracked. "Me, ma'am?"

Gwynne batted her big brown eyes and let out a theatrical sigh as she flipped open her painted silk fan and began to wave it to and fro. "Yes. I am so terribly concerned about Lord Ashford." She lowered her voice as if sharing a secret. "I hate to say it, but frankly, I don't trust that Mrs. Willis. I have no proof, of course, but I am convinced that she is just a fortune seeker after Trevor's money. I mean, how can she be anything else with that wardrobe he bought her...at her insistence, I hear."

The housekeeper nodded. "To be truthful, my lady, I've had those same worries. Have you seen her blue gown? It's decorated with real jewels."

"No. You can't be serious."

"It's true. She told me herself. Bragged about it in fact."

"Oh," Gwynne exclaimed, fanning her face furiously. "How awful, how *positively awful*. And the way she's coerced Trevor into letting that boy of hers call him 'Papa'." Gwynne shuddered. "It is a disgrace to the entire Lynbrook family. They all think it, but are far too polite to expose her for the type of woman she is."

"If only there was some way to save his lordship before he actually married her..."

Gwynne lowered her head to conceal her smirk. This was too, too perfect. She looked up, making sure to wear her best concerned expression, the one she'd developed to make

Trevor think she actually cared about his patients. "Whatever could we do?"

"Perhaps if you spoke to him, ma'am, your being such an old friend and all."

Gwynne sighed. "I've tried, but Gordon won't let me. It's as if that awful woman has enticed him into doing her bidding." Her emphasis on the word 'entice' told a story in itself.

A few new fissures erupted on the housekeeper's granite-like face. "There might be a way."

Gwynne leaned in and touched the old crone's hand in a carefully considered gesture of friendship. "Please tell me. I simply must help Trevor, for his own good."

"His lordship asked me to have a special luncheon prepared this Friday because he's meeting with a number of the town councilmen about some public projects."

"But how can that help me talk to him?" Gwynne asked innocently.

The housekeeper's dour mouth almost lifted into a smile. "Well..."

"You hafta come, Papa, you hafta!" Josh pleaded.

Trevor lifted Joshua up onto his lap, playfully snatching one of the two strawberries in his hand. "Sorry, old man, but I have a very important meeting this afternoon. We're going to talk over plans for a new children's hospital and day nursery." He smiled at Lucy. He was doing this for both of them. In this way she could oversee the operation, which would help him immensely once he took over his grandfather's work. It would also give her the outlet she needed to feel productive and not like mere window dressing for Ashford Hall.

"But don't you wanna be in the show like me and Minty? Uncle Frank said she gets to ride in the stage when it's 'ttacked by the robbers! I gets to be a Indian policeman just like Uncle Jason and save Minty and the others!"

Trevor gave Lucy a skeptical look over the top of the boy's head.

"In the rehearsal," she explained. "For the actual show he has to ride in the stagecoach, but he does get to throw a few rubber knives at the bandits."

Joshua grinned. "I can throw real good. Aunt Star taught me."

Trevor sipped his tea. "Now why does that little tidbit of information not surprise me?"

Trevor finished his tea then set Joshua down. "Well, I have to make the round of the tenant farms, so I probably won't be back before you leave. He gave Josh a kiss on the forehead and Lucy a long, slow kiss that almost made him forget the entire day's business.

Lucy's face was alight with pure joy as they entered the outdoor arena in the adjoining town. Part of her high spirits were due to the wide-eyed excitement of her son and his governess, but mostly she was excited by her own plans for this afternoon. When the invitation and free tickets to the Wild West Show had arrived at Ashford Hall last week she knew that it would be the perfect opportunity to have her suspicions confirmed. With the help of Gordon she was able to locate a reliable physician and arrange an appointment for this afternoon.

Lucy laughed as Miss Mintwood gasped and tried to pull Joshua behind her when a fearsome, buckskin-clad warrior, his face painted with crimson slashes, and countless locks of hair hanging from his war lance, charged out of the assembled throng of performers and headed towards them. "It's perfectly safe, Minty."

The Indian laughed and dismounted, removing the waist-length black wig he wore. He scratched his head vigorously. "Hate wearin' that thing. Guess I should just let my hair grow out like cousin Jace's."

To Lucy's surprise and Joshua's delight, Jason's cousin swept them each into a bear hug and swung them around. "It's been too long, Lucy girl. Hell, I haven't seen this little fella since he was cradled in your arms at Jace and Star's wedding." His dark eyes swept over them. "Seeing you two is like havin' a little piece of home right here. We've been tourin' for two years now. Been all over, France, Italy, Russia even. When Star's wire caught up to us in Scotland I knew I had to juggle the schedule to make this the last stop."

"You remind me of home, too, Frank," Lucy said seeing that familiar Hillhouse grin. Miss Mintwood's quiet clearing of her throat made Lucy laugh again. "Allow me introduce Joshua's governess, Miss Mintwood. Minty, this is one of my brother-in-law's many cousins, Frank

Hillhouse."

The governess shrieked with a mixture of surprise and delight when the tall Indian scooped her up and delivered the same raucous greeting as he had to Lucy and Josh before escorting them forward to introduce the members of his troupe.

Lucy stayed for the dress rehearsal and the opening of the show, checking her locket watch every few minutes. As planned, she slipped out of the packed arena after Josh saw her watching his performance in the stagecoach and Miss Mintwood took him to the backstage area to watch the remainder of the show.

Lucy returned to the arena fairly bursting with her news. She wanted Trevor to be the first to know and asked Miss Mintwood if she would keep Josh for awhile longer. "Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Oh, no, ma'am," Miss Mintwood said. "I think Joshua and I will have a lovely time at Mr. Hillhouse's..."

"Farewell shindig," he supplied. "Don't you worry, Lucy girl, I'll get them home to you safe and sound."

Lucy shrugged off the strange tiny chill she felt when she arrived back at the Hall and attributed it to the constant dampness of the old structure. She changed into another gown, a soft embroidered silk meant to be worn 'at home'. Made without stays and cut to allow free movement, it had been designed to mould itself to her womanly curves by the careful placement of seams and darts. It was one of the gowns Trevor had purchased without her knowledge and he'd been wanting her to wear it, saying that he would ravish her with it still on, that the feel of the mousseline against their flesh would create a delicious friction.

"We'll soon see, my lord. As soon as I find where you're hiding," Lucy whispered to her reflection, checking her coiffure one last time.

She went over to the main part of the house and inquired as to Trevor's whereabouts. No one was certain, as they hadn't seen him since he showed out the town councilmen, but the cook

thought he might be in his dressing room. He'd mentioned that he'd misplaced his medical bag and needed an ointment for a cut one of the grooms had gotten that morning.

With that information, Lucy bounced up the stairs, a brilliant smile on her face.

"She's coming up the stairs!" old Miss P. said in a ragged whisper.

"Well, get under the damned bed and do what I told you! Hurry!" Gwynne took hold of the unconscious Trevor's hands and held them against her breasts, moving them with her own hands as if he were fondling her. "Move the mattress, damn you! No, not too hard. Do what I told you – bounce it, pause then do it again and again. I'll do the rest."

"But he's so heavy!"

"I know. I dragged him in here!" Gwynne snapped, trying to conceal Trevor's flaccid penis beneath her. "I hear something," she whispered. "Start moving and don't forget to make some noise."

*I'm not hearing this. I'm not hearing this. I'm not hearing this!* Lucy's brain screamed as morbid curiosity drew her towards the door connecting Trevor's dressing room and bedroom.

"Yes, Trevor!" a woman's voice cried.

Lucy peeked through the crack in the door and froze, unable to scream, unable to flee, unable to do anything but stare at the unholy tableau before her. This could not be real. Trevor was not being straddled by Gwynne Medford. Trevor could not be having sex with another woman.

Gwynne collapsed against Trevor's chest and ran her fingers through his hair. "Oh, darling, thank you. Thank you for getting her out of the house. I couldn't wait another day, not after the night."

Lucy wanted to run, but she couldn't move her shell shocked body – the body in which his child was growing.

"Oh, Trevor, don't wait another day," Gwynne murmured, still lying upon Trevor's chest. "Make her go at once, tonight – You will?"

Lucy was too hurt to see that Trevor was unnaturally still. The pain in her heart was too great for her to realise that the mumbled voice she heard was not his.

Lucy turned away from the door and almost threw up. She stumbled through the other door and fled down the corridor, tears pouring down her ashen cheeks.

“Lord Ashford! Wake up!”

A splash of cold water roused Trevor enough to open his eyes and he immediately grabbed his pounding head. “Wha – happened?” he slurred, trying to sit up, thankful when Gordon and a footman helped him. He tried repeatedly to rub the blurriness from his eyes. Why in God's name, was he stark naked? “Wha – what's going on?”

“She's gone! Mrs. Willis is gone. She ran from the house in tears an hour ago, demanded that one of the grooms take her to West Haven.”

It took the words a long time to sink into Trevor's partially numbed mind. When they did, the resulting rush of adrenaline began to clear his head. He jumped out of bed and pulled on his trousers, muttering under his breath, his expression stark and dangerous. “Where is Gwynne?” he demanded, pulling on his shoes.

“I don't know, sir,” Gordon replied, handing over Trevor's discarded shirt. “The other ladies went calling this afternoon.” He followed Trevor out of the bedroom, explaining when Trevor stopped to stare at the splintered door. “We couldn't find you and these doors were locked tighter than a drum. I had Dudley, here, use King Henry's battle axe –” The butler broke off as Trevor bolted down the stairs.

Trevor's temper soared to new heights when the members of the travelling Wild West show refused to acknowledge that Lucy and Joshua had ever been there.



The train screeched to a halt, jarring Lucy out of her self-imposed trance. She shielded her eyes with her hand then peered out the window. “This isn't any stop. What happened?” she

asked in a flat, faraway voice.

"I'll go have a look-see," Frank Hillhouse said. "You ladies keep the shades drawn till I get back."

Lucy leaned back and closed her eyes, reaching out to stroke Joshua's head as he dozed on the seat beside her. He'd cried himself to sleep less than a half hour ago, heartbroken, confused, trying desperately to make sense of something Lucy had no way of explaining other than to say, "It's best that we go home for a while."

Lucy's eyes snapped open when she heard the distant commotion, for she knew that it was Trevor. That was him cursing. There was no mistaking that voice or the way it hurt to hear it.

"Mama?"

"Shhh, honey. Close your eyes." Lucy gestured for the governess to take her place then left the private compartment and went to the next compartment up.

The sight of Trevor so big, so menacing, rocked her insides.

"Lucy! Lucy, listen!" Trevor bellowed, shaking off the conductor who sought to pull him back, and trying to get past Frank Hillhouse, who blocked the way in front.

"Go back inside, Lucy girl. I'll get rid of him," Frank said with deadly calm.

Trevor pulled back his arm to punch the man but stopped when Frank pulled a Colt .45 out from under his jacket. "Lucy, I need to talk to you."

"She doesn't want to hear it." Frank cocked the gun and aimed it. "So be on your way."

"Frank, don't," Lucy said, coming forward, touching his arm, not wanting Trevor hurt despite what he'd done to hurt her. She gasped and pulled back when Trevor touched her hand.

"Lucy. Please. You have to listen."

Tears filled Lucy's eyes and nauseating pain crept into her stomach. "I heard enough. I saw enough."

Trevor reached out again, his own stomach knotting at the sight of her sunken cheeks, her desolate expression. "Come with me. I haven't done anything wrong. I can explain."

"I doubt that," Lucy said in a hoarse whisper, struggling to hold onto her composure.

"Please, Lucy. Give me a chance to explain. We'll stay on the train if you like. Let's just have some privacy."

Lucy might have laughed if it didn't hurt so much. He'd betrayed her in the worst way possible, and now he felt the need for privacy. "I'd rather not."

Trevor thought she'd had a change of heart when she held out her hand and he reached over the tall Indian's shoulder again to touch her, but all she did was drop the engagement ring he'd given her into his open palm.

She turned and walked away.

"Lucy!"

Frank Hillhouse aimed the gun at Trevor's head. "Leave her alone."

Trevor let the conductor lead him off, but ran alongside the train as it built up steam. He searched the faces staring out the windows until he saw her. "Lucy! Lucy! I love you! I love you!" He watched her cover her mouth as if to contain a scream. He saw Joshua's tousled head appear. "I love you, son!"

Joshua stuck his hand out the opened window. "Papa! Papa!"

Lucy pulled her son back and the governess drew the shade.

Joshua's anguished cry echoed in Trevor's ears long after the train pulled out of sight.

Gwynne Medford was sleeping soundly, a satisfied smile upon her lips when Trevor seized her by the shoulders and dragged her out of bed.

"What did you do to Lucy? What did you say to drive her away?"

Gwynne yawned. "I didn't do or say anything, darling."

Trevor tightened his grip on her shoulders, wanting very much to tighten his hands around her throat. "I am not in the mood for bloody games," he said grinding the words out between clenched teeth, his anger spinning out of control like the cyclone that hit Sweet Medicine. He let Gwynne go with a shove that sent her tumbling backward on the bed. To his disgust, she lifted the hem of her nightdress to reveal her nakedness.

"Come on, Trevor. Let's do it. For real, this time."



Trevor's hands balled into fists at his sides and he stood next to the bed, glaring down at Gwynne Medford. "Tell me."

Gwynne sat up, smiling. "You know, if being in the theatre wasn't a disreputable sort of profession, I'd go on the stage." She paused, her smile growing wider as Trevor's jaw tensed and his eyes took on the sheen of a sword blade. "It was a wonderful performance, darling, too bad you weren't awake to enjoy it." She knelt on the bed began to writhe and moan as she had over Trevor. "Of course, it was more effective with you naked beneath me, and me holding your hands on my tits."

Trevor reached for her throat but managed to restrain himself despite the haunting mental picture of what Lucy must have seen. "It won't work. You won't get away with this. She loves me. She'll understand."

Gwynne waited until Trevor was halfway out the door before delivering her parting shot. "She'll understand everything when I show her the marriage agreement you signed." She was impressed by the speed with which Trevor crossed the spacious room.

"What...did...you...say?"

Gwynne simply smiled, watching the way his broad chest expanded with each deep breath he took. "You heard me, darling," she cooed as she walked over to her jewel case and extracted the document signed, witnessed and properly notarised. She held it up for Trevor's inspection, pulling it back when he lunged for it. "I should let you rip it, since I have several copies. All discreetly hidden, of course."

Trevor struggled to recall what had happened when she barged into his study after his meeting with the councilmen. She'd brought glasses of the Earl's best brandy and spoke of letting bygones be bygones since the best woman had won. And now, as he thought of it, she had shoved papers in front of him as whatever she'd slipped in his drink took effect.

"I wrote you a cheque, to get you out of my life forever."

Gwynne rolled up the document in her hands, her dark eyes flashing. "And a tidy cheque it was. Thank you. It will buy the most divine wedding gown and a few dozen others. Of course, I'm willing to wear the unused ones your little American left behind —"

"I signed a cheque."

"You already said that, and besides, I was there. You had trouble with the pen, remember? At least that's what I told you before I gave you the new one and slid this in front of you."

Trevor lunged for the paper, but Gwynne slipped away. She wagged it in front of her face. "No, no, Trevor dear. Because, you see, this might be the forgery and the real one could be on its way to my uncle's solicitor. Then again..."

"You will not win. I will not marry you."

"I think you will, darling. Especially when I announce my pregnancy."

"It's not mine if you are."

Gwynne smirked. "Do give me some credit, Trevor." She paused and gave him a cold calculating look. "Do you know how many tall, good looking fair-haired men I've met since you returned to England? A lot. "

"The Earl will help me," Trevor said confidently striding across to the door. "You won't win."

"But I already have, darling," Gwynne said as he left. "I've won because I'm still here, and she's not."

## London

Trevor banged his fist down on the solicitor's desk. "I do not want to hear this! Don't sit there and tell me there is no way out of this bloody blackmail scheme!"

"The fact remains whether you want to hear it or not," the Earl informed him.

"Someone wake me from this sodding nightmare before it kills me," Trevor said sourly before laying his aching head down on his folded arms. He looked up, his eyes dull. There were several small nicks on his jaw where he'd cut himself shaving. He ran his hands through his hair and tried not to remember how wonderful it felt when Lucy did that. It seemed as though he'd been away from Lucy for a lifetime when in fact it had only been two weeks. "There has to be a way out. There has to be."

"I suppose you've tried the obvious?" the solicitor asked.

A wry smile twisted Trevor's mouth "I offered her everything but my eternal soul and she won't budge. Gwynne won't take a pay off if she can have it all forever by being my – wife." He swallowed hard, wanting to retch at the thought of Gwynne Medford acquiring the title.

"An annulment?" the solicitor asked, hoping that the obvious had eluded them.

"Not with a child on the way," the Earl said.

"It isn't mine." Trevor sat up, his back rigid with indignation. "You don't believe me, do you?"

His grandfather said nothing at first. "Gordon told me that there's been talk in the servants' hall."

Trevor got up and paced the length of the office. "There is always talk in the servants' hall."

The Earl looked casually at his pocket watch. "You can bet your last quid that Gwynne will have them called forth in the event of any legal action on your part. I will not have this family dragged through the muck."

Trevor stopped pacing and hit his grandfather with a vicious look. "It's far better that I suffer for the greater good, eh?" His grandfather's silence filled him with disgust.

"She does come from a good family and her uncle hinted that he might be willing to settle a few hundred a year on her as a wedding gift. Besides, she is already well accepted in society."

Trevor grabbed at his violently churning stomach. "You've got to be joking."

"You don't seem to have much of a choice at this point."

## Chapter Fourteen

Lucy crumbled a lemon cookie over the saucer in front of her as she sat at Ben and Mary Red Eagle's kitchen table the afternoon she returned to Sweet Medicine. She stared out the kitchen window and watched Mary's three younger children sitting at the picnic table, held spellbound by Joshua's and Miss Mintwood's tales of England and their ocean voyage.

She'd offered the governess her meager savings and a letter of recommendation once they reached London, but Miss Mintwood had politely refused, saying that she'd take the chance of finding suitable employment in America. Lucy hoped that the governess wouldn't regret her decision as she regretted her own...

Mary Red Eagle's voice jarred Lucy out of her thoughts.

"The woman who replaced you was really nice and after the first week I thought she might make it, but Angry Wolf scared her off. The doctor your uncle sent is still here, but I don't know how much longer he'll last. He's been courting one of the mayor's daughters and is talking about leaving to set up his own practice in Oklahoma City if Agent Ames doesn't give him more money." Mary poured Lucy a fresh cup of tea and moved the serving plate of cookies to her side of the table. "Why that man needs more money is beyond me. He doesn't do anything and hasn't since he got here. Angry Wolf won't let him near the camp... And you could care less."

"I'm sorry, Mary. I don't mean to be rude."

"You aren't rude, just heartbroken. Do you want to talk about it?"

"Things didn't work out," Lucy said, absently stirring her tea.

Mary patted Lucy's hand. "I'm a little surprised that you came back here, though, considering. Is your family not supportive?"

Lucy grimaced. "Actually, that's what drove me back here." She pushed the cookie crumbs around the saucer. "I know they meant well, but they were suffocating me. I felt like I was ten years old again instead of a grown woman and when they found out about the baby —"

Lucy cringed although she knew it was foolish. She couldn't hide her shame forever.

Mary came around the table and hugged her friend. "Oh, Lucy, I don't know if I should congratulate you or cry with you," she said, wiping the tear gliding down Lucy's pale cheek with the hem of her apron. "Trevor doesn't know, does he? If he did, I can't imagine him letting you go."

Lucy's sad expression turned cold. "He doesn't know and I don't think he'd really care."

"He'd care."

Lucy shook her head as she tried to banish the sickening image of him and Gwynne Medford from her mind's eye. "If he cared, he wouldn't have been unfaithful."

"I'm sorry," Mary said simply as her husband came into the kitchen to wash his hands.

"Do you have any plans for what you'll do? I hear they're planning on opening a school over in Martinsburg."

"Actually, I think I'll ask Christine for my job back, since the other teacher is gone. Perhaps I'll go out and see if Angry Wolf will agree to send the children to me." Lucy's voice drifted off as she saw Mary and Ben exchange a quick look. She looked over her shoulder to

Ben. "What is it?"

"Nothing," Ben said quickly, flashing a smile. "There's just been a few changes out at the camp since you left." He paused and looked at his wife as if silently asking her help.

Lucy looked to Mary, for she had the distinct feeling that they were trying to keep something from her. "Changes?" she asked.

Mary got up and began clearing the table. "I think all your lectures to Angry Wolf paid off."

Ben picked up when Mary's voice trailed into a strained silence. "Yeah. Remember those donations that came in after the cyclone?"

"Yes," Lucy answered.

Ben turned away for a moment to get a glass of water, which he gulped. "I managed to talk Angry Wolf into letting me look into a business deal I overheard a couple of eastern dudes talking about when I went to see my banker about an improvement loan."

"Really?" Lucy asked, still feeling that she wasn't being told the entire story.

"Really," Ben said with a smile. "Apparently they were looking to invest some money in a cattle deal that fell through and I thought of Angry Wolf because he did pretty good with the herd the last Indian agent got the government to sponsor. They did real well with it until the pencil pushers in Washington screwed it up." He gave his wife the empty glass he'd been holding. "I'd better get out to the store. You know Benjy, he'd rather daydream and write stories than add up a customer's order."

Lucy smiled. "Your son has a gift for words. I'm sure he'll be a published author someday."

A mother's pride lighting her smile, Mary came back to the table. "He's been working on a story."

Lucy listened for she was genuinely interested and was more than willing to let the nagging feeling that Ben wasn't telling her everything fall by the wayside.

That feeling fell further away when Lucy received a reply from her friend Christine Ames concerning her teaching position and Ben offered Miss Mintwood a job at the mercantile, as he drove them out to the house Early that evening.

"Maybe now I'll be able to bring in those customers that still refuse to transact business with an Indian."

"But surely," Miss Mintwood said. "If dealing with you bothered them in any way they could simply ask your wife to handle the transactions. You do operate the only establishment like this for miles."

Ben shook his head and laughed. "For an educated woman, there's a lot you don't know."

"She's not alone," Lucy muttered, thinking that she could have used a few lessons in judging character and resisting temptation.

"What?" Ben asked.

Lucy waved her comment away. "Nothing. I said it's nice to be home." She pointed to the buildings in the distance. It did feel good to see the familiar outlines of her school and know that with Angry Wolf's cooperation she would be able to get back to teaching at least until the baby

came.

The thought of raising another child alone tempered the good feelings, but Lucy knew that she could teach as soon as she regained her strength, provided that Christine didn't fire her on moral grounds and Angry Wolf didn't keep his people away for the same reason. No sense worrying about it now, Lucy told herself. There would be enough worrying to do once her pregnancy began to show and she had to deal with the condemnation of Sweet Medicine's inhabitants.

*No! It isn't possible!* Lucy's brain screamed when Trevor came out the front door on his side of the house. She rubbed her eyes. Of course it wasn't possible and it wasn't Trevor, she realised. This man was thinner, a few inches shorter, and had darker hair.

After Ben made the introductions the doctor offered to help carry in the baggage.

"Once you're settled in, Mrs. Willis, perhaps you and Miss Mintwood, and your son, of course, would like to join me for dinner some evening. I make a decent Yankee Pot Roast and it seems such a waste to have that fancy dining room go unused."

Lucy clenched her jaw, as she forced the memories away. "No, thank you, doctor. Joshua and I will dine in our own kitchen. It was a pleasure to meet you. Good day."

Lucy managed a weak smile as she hung up her old serviceable wardrobe in the small closet that wouldn't have been able to hold a quarter of the extravagant clothing Trevor had given her. Her father had often chided her and her mother of being born pack rats, but at least it paid off, even if the circumstances were heartbreaking.

She ran her hand over her navy broadcloth skirt before taking it out of the small trunk. She couldn't help but remember the wonderful time she had at Fourchet's in Paris and how very special she'd felt in that incredible, diamond studded gown. Lucy sank down onto the narrow bed wondering how Trevor could have been so generous and loving and yet so deceitful, so horribly unfaithful.

"Wow," Joshua said quietly as his mother slowed the wagon on their approach to the

Cheyenne camp.

"Oh my," Lucy added as her eyes fell on the groups of men constructing a number of small wood frame houses in the distance.

Some of the children caught sight of Lucy and Josh and ran forward, shouting with joy.

"Look at my pretty dress, Miss Lucy! And look at Wahanassatta's new boots!"

"Angry Wolf has bought us books and slates to mark our letters!"

"Come see the picture I made!"

"Did you cross the endless river, did you see the giant spouting fish in Josh's book?"

"My tooth hurts, where is Doctor Trevor?"

The smile faded from Lucy's face and she struggled to ignore the way her stomach lurched. "Dr. Lynbrook didn't come back with us." She turned to her son. "Josh, why don't you tell the children all about your trip? I'm going to look for Angry Wolf."

Lucy forced herself to smile as she greeted the parents of her students and deflected their questions concerning Trevor's whereabouts. Her smile became warm and genuine when Angry Wolf's daughter-in-law, Kimimela approached her with her son, Little Raven. Lucy laughed for the first time in weeks when Kimimela set her son down and allowed him to show off his new found crawling ability. She picked him up when he crawled to her.

"Hello, white woman."

"Why, hello," Lucy said, more than a little surprised to see Angry Wolf dressed in denims, boots, and a dusty, white cotton shirt. If it weren't for his long hair and the wide hair pipe choker he wore, she wouldn't have recognised him. "Ben wasn't joking when he said things were changing around here." She kissed Little Raven then gave him back to his mother. She turned back to the Angry Wolf and gestured. "What prompted this?"

"I will tell you when I am ready, white woman." He took her by the hand. "Come. There is much I wish to show you."

"Well," Lucy said a short time later before taking a seat on the ground next to Angry Wolf. "Are you ready to answer my question?"



"I did," he told her, never taking his eyes off of the men dancing around the large fire. He laughed when some of the older boys pulled Joshua into the circle and he stumbled until he picked up the rhythm. Angry Wolf smiled. "It is good that he remembers the old things. Do you still let him speak the language of his father?"

"Of course. I won't let Josh forget that he's half Choctaw." Lucy returned her son's wave before turning back to the chief. "You're avoiding the subject, aren't you?"

"I do not understand this, white woman."

Lucy grinned. "You understand every word." She pointed to the unfinished houses in the distance and to the side of beef being roasted over an open fire off to their right. "What is all this? Why are you doing this?"

Angry Wolf turned to face her, his dark eyes shining bright in the yellow glow of the fire. "Is this not what you wanted? Did you not tell me again and again to let my people blend in with the world of the whites?"

"What made you change your mind? Why did you wait until I was gone? Why did you drive me away first?"

Angry Wolf opened his mouth to speak but stopped himself. "I do not explain myself to you." He stood and pulled Lucy up by the hand. "Come and eat, you look hungry."

Angry Wolf saw to it that Lucy and Joshua were served first then called for the other women and children to get their share of the barbecued beef.

Lucy was sopping up the remains of the beef juices with her third helping of fry bread when Angry Wolf joined her and Josh. The chief laughed. "I told you that you were hungry, white woman."

Lucy grinned before taking the last bite of bread. "It's very good. I missed this kind of meal." Her expression grew solemn and she set down her enamelled tin plate.

"I can't finish, Mama. Can I play now?" Joshua asked, handing Lucy his plate.

"All right, but no running just yet. Let your food settle." Lucy watched her son scamper away towards his friends who were gathering around the large campfire then set his plate atop her own and stared down at the small piece of beef he'd left behind. She hated the thought of

wasting even this small amount, but couldn't bring herself to eat it either, for her mind was filled with memories of all the dinners that she and Trevor had shared in their short time together.

She remembered the quaint meal they'd eaten in his kitchen when she'd imagined how nice it would be to be surrounded by the luxuries he was accustomed to. It hadn't been at all what she thought, none of it, especially not his betrayal.

Lucy overturned Joshua's plate when Angry Wolf placed his hand atop hers. "I'm sorry."

"It is nothing," Angry Wolf said gently as he tossed the sliver of meat to a nearby dog. He placed his hand over Lucy's again, frowning when she pulled away. "Tell me what the *waquini* did to you."

"There's nothing to say. If you'll excuse me, Josh and I should be getting back home."

Angry Wolf stopped her from rising by laying his strong hand over her ankles. "I will take you home when you tell me."

"I can't." Lucy said. She averted her eyes from his piercing dark gaze. "I'd rather not."

"I should have killed him."

Lucy's head snapped up. "No—" She paused, unable to admit that a part of her still loved Trevor, or rather, loved the Trevor who'd lived here and taken her with a fierce passion she would never forget. "I'd like to go now. Please."

Angry Wolf nodded.

"These just arrived for you, sir."

Trevor looked up from the cup of cold tea he'd been staring into since the rest of his family left the breakfast table some thirty minutes ago. A faint spark of hope brightened his dull eyes when he took the envelopes, but the spark quickly died when he saw that the top envelope was the unopened ten page letter he'd sent to Lucy. Scrawled across the front in her handwriting was, *addressee unknown*.

The next was a wire from Lucy's Uncle Pat in Boston. *Suggest you contact my niece for information you seek.*

When Trevor saw the return address on the last envelope he was tempted to tear it in half as he'd just done to the others for it was from Lucy's stepsister, Star Hillhouse. "Oh, what the hell," Trevor muttered as he slit open the envelope with his butter knife.

*I should have cut your miserable throat when I had the chance, but unfortunately I pride myself on being a lady. While I think you've done more than enough damage to my sister, My husband has insisted, ad nauseam, that you have a right to know that Lucy is carrying your child.*

*STOP WHERE YOU ARE AND FINISH THIS!*

*I firmly believe that finding you in bed with that other woman wounded Lucy even more deeply than watching Seth die, and if you have any trace of decency in that cruel heart of yours, you'll leave her be.*

*I saw her just this past weekend and she seems to have gotten over the worst of the hurt. She's teaching at the Cheyenne school and she seems to have become quite/close to their chief. I trust you will keep your distance and let her find the happiness she deserves.*

*However, I fully expect you to set aside suitable provisions for the child you fathered. Rest assured that I will let you know should Lucy ever find herself in financial need.*

*Star Hillhouse.*

Trevor's hand shook as he read through the letter a second and then a third time before dashing from the dining room, almost colliding with a footman as he raced from the room.

"Has the Earl left for London yet?"

"The coach just pulled out, m'lord"

Trevor was out the door before he finished the sentence.

Trevor was gasping for breath as he pulled himself inside the coach.

"What's happened?" the Earl asked excitedly.

Trevor struggled to catch his breath. "I...just received word from...Lucy's sister... Lucy is pregnant with my child. I can't marry Gwynne. I won't marry Gwynne now."

The Earl sank back into the thickly padded coach seat. "Any chance she'll give the child to you to raise?"

Trevor's jaw dropped. "What? Have you lost your mind? I intend to be with Lucy! I intend

to marry her!"

The Earl stroked his chin. "I'll postpone my trip to London for another day and wire the solicitors about this latest development. I need your word that you won't do anything rash. I want you to stay right here until we see if there's anything we can do"

Trevor said nothing, unable to believe that his grandfather still expected him to go through with a marriage to Gwynne. "I'll give you twenty-four hours before I go to America."

"Forty-eight."

"Twenty-four," Trevor said.

"An illegitimate child cannot inherit the title."

"My child will not be illegitimate. I assure you that."

Trevor was sitting in his study late that night rereading Star's letter. Lucy was having his baby – their baby. He counted off the months. She couldn't be too far along. Their child would be due in May or perhaps June.

He imagined Lucy holding their baby, sitting in a field of deep green grass, colourful wildflowers scattered around her, beams of warm summer sunlight bathing them in a golden glow.

"Trevor?"

Trevor looked up, his expression hardening at the sight of his mother. "What do you want?"

"I want to apologise."

Trevor got up and crossed the room, his back turned to his mother. "A bit late for that, don't you think?"

Charlotte Lynbrook crossed the room. "I am sorry, Trevor, especially now."

Trevor shook his head in disbelief but said nothing, nor did he turn.

"The thing I'm most sorry for is not being a better mother to you and Ellis."

Trevor turned, certain that he'd misunderstood.

Charlotte looked down at the toes of her satin slippers. "It's true." She looked up. "Seeing

your Lucy with her son made me admit to myself all that I'd done wrong. Joshua is a delightful child. He reminds me a little of you – what I saw of you when you were that age.”

Tears welled in her grey blue eyes. “I'm sorry, Trevor, I truly am.” She reached out to her surviving son, but pulled her hand back.

Trevor stared at his mother. He wanted to spurn her, wanted to turn his back on her as she had always done to him, but he didn't. He couldn't, for if he ever needed a mother's love and understanding, it was now, when he hurt the most. He took hold of his mother's hand then showed her the letter from Lucy's sister.

“Oh, Trevor,” she said quietly, a tear trickling down her cheek. “It will be a beautiful baby,” she said quietly, stroking Trevor's cheek.

Trevor sank down onto the padded window seat, his heart breaking into a million pain-filled pieces. “I love her with all my heart, mother, but what if she won't have me? I'll be lost without her. I *am* lost without her.” Trevor's eyes brimmed with unshed tears and he hugged his mother close when she clasped him to her bosom in a gesture of comfort that meant more to him than words could say.

“I'm sorry for bringing Gwynne here. If I hadn't...”

“Gwynne would have found a way, mother,” Trevor said miserably. He pulled away. “She's had her eye on the Lynbrook fortune since March if not longer.”

Charlotte Lynbrook's eyes took on a coldness that even Trevor had never seen. “She won't get it. She won't get you.”

“Don't do anything rash, Trevor,” the Earl cautioned. “Just wait her out. She's bound to trip herself up and give you an excuse to break the engagement.”

Trevor grabbed his jacket from his valet. “There is no engagement to Gwynne Medford. I am betrothed to Lucy. I am going to America to marry Lucy. Cut off my allowance. Disinherit me. I don't care.”

“Don't do this, Trevor,” the Earl said between clenched teeth.

“Goodbye.”

Trevor's mother, grandmother and sister-in-law were waiting in the marble tiled entrance hall.

"Have a safe journey, Trevor," Alvinia Lynbrook said.

"Thank you, grandmother."

Margaret Lynbrook offered her brother-in-law an apologetic smile and gave him a small oil portrait of himself and his late brother painted when they were children. It was framed in gold filigree and attached to a length of black satin ribbon. Margaret averted her eyes. "Please tell her I'm sorry."

Trevor kissed her cheek. "Thank you."

Trevor's mother embraced him and hugged him so tightly that it pained his ribs. She kissed him on both cheeks and hugged him again before pulling back. "Have a happy life with your Lucy."

"I will, mother. Thank you." Trevor turned to leave but his mother grabbed his sleeve.

"I have something for you." She signalled to her maid who came forward carrying a velvet bag about the size of her hand. Trevor's mother took it and removed a solid gold, jewel encrusted box from the bag. "Give this to Lucy. Tell her I'm sorry. If she doesn't wish to accept it, it's all right. You sell it and put the money away for that grandchild of mine."

Trevor tucked the heavy box into his pocket and gave his mother another quick hug. "I love you."

Charlotte smoothed a fallen lock of hair back from her son's forehead. "I love you, Trevor. I always have."

The butler walked Trevor out to the waiting coach. "Please give Miss Lucy our best, sir. Tell her that the entire staff enjoyed serving her and hope to have the pleasure again."

Trevor smiled as he climbed up into the coach. "I will, Gordon. Thank you."

"Thank *you*, sir."

Charlotte Lynbrook stood in the doorway of Ashford Hall until the coach disappeared from sight. She was half way across the hall when the Earl called to her from the stairs.

"That son of yours will bring ruination on this family."

"My son is going to have the happy life his father and brother should have had, William." She moved closer to the stairs. "Don't you give me that holier than thou look," she said fixing him with an icy stare. "Francis drowned so you moulded Arthur in your image and made him marry me for the land holdings I brought and he got his revenge by drinking himself to death. Next, you took Ellis under your wing and made him give up the woman he loved because she had no connections or money to offer in return for the Lynbrook name. He made Margaret's life a living hell and then killed himself."

"It was a hunting accident, Charlotte."

"Was it, William? No one will ever know, but I know how miserable my son was and I'll not let you do the same to Trevor. I was wrong to goad him into giving up medicine, but I'll not force him into a loveless marriage and I won't let you or Alvinia do it either."

"I have no intention of doing any such thing," Trevor's grandmother said from the door of the ladies' parlour where she'd gone when Trevor left. She looked at her husband. "She's right, William. About everything." She held up her hand when her husband began to disagree. "I know you didn't want Arthur and Ellis to be unhappy, but they were. You and I grew to care for each other because we were expected to. Trevor isn't us. Let him find his own way."

The Earl came down the stairs, his head bowed, his hands in the pockets of his pin striped trousers. "But what about Gwynne? She has Trevor's signature on a marriage contract. When she gets word that he's gone she'll try to bring the roof down on our heads." "Don't you worry about Gwynne Medford," Charlotte said. "We'll find a way to handle her."

"But where do we start?" the Countess wondered out loud.

"I think I know."

All eyes turned towards the parlour doors where Margaret Lynbrook had been standing silently.

"Gwynne mentioned a photographer last year around the time those pictures of Trevor were sold. I don't know his name, but Gwynne hinted at some — things."

Charlotte hurried across the hall, her heels clicking furiously on the marble tiles and took

her daughter-in-law by the arm. "Come, darling. Let's talk about these things."

Lucy bit down hard on the inside of her cheek when she caught a glimpse of Josh's former governess stealing a kiss from Frank Hillhouse behind a tree in Mary and Ben Red Eagle's back yard after church services the last Sunday in November. Frank had come with Star, Jason and the children to celebrate Thanksgiving with her and Josh and decided to stay on since his troupe was wintering in the eastern part of the territory.

"Mixed marriages seem to be on the rise," Mary Red Eagle said lightly, removing the bread plate from Lucy's reach.

"Do you think they'll get married?" Lucy asked.

"Phyllis sure wants to. She's been talking about Frank and his wild west show since the day she started working in the store. When she found out that he was coming along with his cousin and your sister to visit, she was walking on a cloud and spent half her time trying on new hats."

"She doesn't know him that well," Lucy said miserably. "He might break her heart. If not right away, then down the road."

Mary placed her hand on Lucy's. "Don't begrudge her happiness or the chance to learn from her mistakes."

"I'm certainly the expert on that, aren't I?" Lucy said before leaving the kitchen.

She sat on the porch outside the Red Eagle's mercantile and stared down Sweet Medicine's main street. Everywhere she looked there were couples. Happy, laughing couples. It was enough to make her want to retch right here in public. If her morning sickness hadn't passed she probably would.

She placed her hands over her thickening waist and thought of her unborn child. The child conceived during a moment of nothing but unbridled lust. *You don't believe that and you know it*, Lucy's aching heart corrected. No, she didn't believe it, but she hoped that by convincing herself that she and Trevor shared no love those nights, the pain would go away. The painful, searing emptiness that haunted her every moment she was alone, especially at night.



The doctor using Trevor's side of the house had left at the beginning of the month and many nights since then she'd taken her key and let herself inside. She'd even cried herself to sleep in the centre of his wide soft bed, dreaming of the night they'd first made love. It had been wicked and passionate and more incredible than anything she'd ever imagined, but it was over. Her dreams for the future were over. All she had now were the memories. The memories and Trevor's baby.

"Do not cry, Lucy."

Lucy flinched when Angry Wolf brushed the tears from her cheeks with a gentle touch of his fingertips.

"When did you get here? I didn't hear you ride in."

Angry Wolf knelt beside Lucy's chair and took her hand in his. "I have been here long enough to know that you cry for the *waquini*." He raised Lucy's hand to his lips and kissed it before pressing her palm to his swarthy cheek. "Why did you not meet me today?"

Lucy moved her hand away and got up, pulling her shawl tighter around her shoulders. She walked to the far end of the porch, hoping that Angry Wolf would not follow, knowing that he would. "I forgot that it was Sunday. You know that Josh and I never miss church."

She tried not to acknowledge the warmth and strength of Angry Wolf's large hands when he placed them on her shoulders. He'd become a very good friend to her these past weeks and she knew that if she said a simple, yes, he would marry her and be her faithful husband for the rest of their days. He would raise Joshua and her unborn child as if they were his own. He would be everything she'd ever wanted. Everything, but Trevor.

She turned. It was plain that Angry Wolf read the answer in her eyes, but she had to say it. "I appreciate your listening to me and being there when I needed a shoulder to cry on, but I can't marry you. I'm sorry. I care for you, but I don't love you. I don't think I can love anyone ever again."

Angry Wolf gave Lucy a weak smile and pressed his palm against her gently rounded belly. "You will love this one with all your heart the way you love Joshua. You have much love in your heart."

Lucy did not reply and Angry Wolf left as quickly and silently as he'd arrived.

She shifted her gaze up towards the moon and thought of all the times she and Trevor watched it and planned their future. "Why do I still love you, Trevor? How can I stop?"



Trevor kept his eyes glued to the moon as the train rushed through the night taking him to Lucy with agonizing slowness. He'd stopped in Boston and then in Warburton to make his peace with Lucy's family and explain what Gwynne had done. Lucy's Uncle Pat and his wife had been understanding as had Lucy's parents. As he expected, Lucy's stepsister and her husband were harder to convince. The most he had accomplished was gaining their grudging respect for walking away from his family and fortune in an effort to win Lucy back.

"Martinsburg!" The conductor called as the train began to reduce its speed.

*Soon, love. We'll be together soon.*

As Trevor hoped, Ben Red Eagle was waiting outside the depot for him in response to the telegram he'd sent prior to departing the Indian Territory. His train left before Ben's reply could be sent and it was comforting to know that at least one other person was on his side.

*Or not*, Trevor thought seeing the stern look on Ben's usually happy face. "Thank you for meeting me, Ben. I didn't want to risk getting lost on my way back to Sweet Medicine."

Ben stood beside his wagon his arms crossed in front of him, ignoring Trevor's outstretched hand. "I figured that I owed you a ride considering what you did for my father's people."

"I was happy to do it—"

Ben held up his hand. "Why did you cheat on Lucy?" he asked point blank.

Trevor set down his large portmanteau. "I didn't, Ben. I swear it."

"I'm a man. I know all about men's urges. I really don't think that Lucy imagined what she told my wife she saw going on in your room."

Trevor ran his hand through his hair then pointed to a bench in front of the train depot.

"Sit down and let me explain from the beginning."

Although the house was dark, a light was burning in the schoolroom and Trevor checked his gold pocket watch in the yellow glow of the lamp mounted to the buggy he'd secured in town. It was half past eleven. Lucy should be in bed. She needed her rest. She was working entirely too hard, he knew it. He felt it.

Although his first urge was to rush in and whisk Lucy off her feet, he contained himself and wondered, as he had been doing since he first hit American soil, how he could ever get Lucy to listen to him, to trust him, and hopefully, to love him again.

Not wanting Lucy to hear his approach, Trevor unhitched the buggy and walked the rest of the way to the barn. After securing his horse for the night he made his way towards the school as quietly as he could. His heart lurched when he saw Lucy leaning back in her chair, one hand resting lightly across her abdomen, the other holding the sheet of paper she was reading. She set the paper on her desk, wrote a few comments then picked up the last paper to check.

Her mouth curved into a tiny smile, but soon the smile faded and Trevor noticed the quaking of her hand. In the glow of the blown glass lamp on the desk he saw a tear trickle down Lucy's cheek and it took all the self control he could muster not to leap through the window and vanquish the emotional dragon that was tormenting her. It was the same emotional dragon he'd unwittingly unleashed that could destroy them both.

A sliver of wood from the window frame snapped free from the force with which Trevor gripped it, drawing Lucy's attention to the window. Trevor ducked down and waited to see if she would investigate. She didn't and he peered back inside struck again by the sadness on her beautiful face as she continued to read the assignment in her hand.

*My very bestest friend is Trevor Lynbrook. He made my mamma sad but I still love him because I was portant to him. He let me sail his big white boat and let me meet his friend the Prince. I feel grown up when he calls me old man and asks me to help him learn Cheyenne. I miss him. I wish he was my papa again.*

Lucy circled Josh's spelling errors and marked his paper with her equivalent of an 'A' and a small stick figure with a smiling face. She got up and bent from side to side to stretch her aching back muscles then wrote the next day's assignment on the blackboard before going back to the house.

She went to her room and slipped into her old cotton and lace nightdress then went to her closet and dug out the framed photograph she couldn't bring herself to unpack before now. It had been taken right after Trevor's yacht defeated the American racer at Cowes. The crew of the *Osprey* were gathered on the ship's deck bottles of champagne in their hands. Trevor was at the centre of the group, his chest bare, his sandy hair damp with salt spray. His smile was the brightest of all and on his shoulders sat Joshua happy and so very proud to have been included in the celebration.

"I'm sorry, honey. If I could give you your 'papa' back I would," Lucy whispered. "This is the best I can do." She took the photograph to Josh's room and set it atop his nightstand.

Lucy paused in the hall outside her bedroom door when the light from her small lamp reflected off the shiny brass knob on the door leading to Trevor's half of the building. As it had done many nights before, the door beckoned to her, taunted her to open it.

Lucy tried to resist the pull but couldn't and lifted up the corner of the small braided rug beneath the pine wall table and took out the key.

*This is the last time*, she told herself as she inserted the key into the lock. *The very last time.*

A bout of light-headedness hit Lucy when she stepped into the small parlour adjoining Trevor's bedroom. Being here was not a good idea. She was imagining things. Feeling Trevor's presence when he was half a world away – in the arms of another woman. She needed to return to her own room and her own bed. Yes, that is precisely what she'd do.

Lucy's feet led her forward instead of turning her back and the light-headedness hit her harder when she entered Trevor's bedroom. *I'm losing my mind. I must be*, she thought when the unseen presence grew stronger and she imagined that she smelled Trevor's sandalwood cologne.

Her attention was diverted to the window and the way the moonlight shone through the

opened draperies. Hadn't they been closed the last time she was here? Lucy wondered if her mind really was beginning to slip when she remembered that she'd let the rooms on this side of the building air out this morning. She was certain that she'd closed all the windows and drawn the draperies.

Lucy yawned and decided that fatigue was the cause of her faulty memory and vivid imagination. She looked towards the bed, her tired eyes missing the slight wrinkling of the quilted coverlet. She shouldn't torture herself like this. She shouldn't sleep in his bed, shouldn't dream of the blissful nights in his arms. She shouldn't. She wouldn't.

After tonight she wouldn't.

Trevor watched the lamp light go out from beneath the edge of the bed's dust ruffle. He held his breath when the bed springs faintly creaked. This couldn't be happening, could it? He waited for what seemed a lifetime before easing himself out from beneath the bed and waited for the sound of movement. There was none.

He sat up just enough to peer over the edge of the bed and bit his tongue to keep from shouting Lucy's name. As the combined joy and shock wore off, Trevor became conscious of a sound. The soft crying sound that Lucy was making. The sound tore at his heart. He ducked back down when she shifted.

Every nerve in his body pulsed at her nearness and his hands trembled, wanting desperately to touch Lucy, to hold her in a crushing embrace and never let her go. His lips begged to kiss her sweet skin, to speak her lovely name. His eyes longed to feast on the delicate beauty of her face and his heart prayed that she would forgive him.

He waited until the crying turned to ragged breathing and until that turned to the familiar, steady breathing that meant Lucy had drifted off to sleep. Trevor knelt beside the bed. He should leave here. He should go downstairs to his office, or better yet the barn. It was folly to remain and run the risk that she would wake and find him. At the very least she would be frightened. She might even flee and injure herself in the dark, injure their unborn child. Yes, he should leave now and approach Lucy in the calm light of day, in the presence of others.

Trevor stood, wanting to reach for the shirt he'd stuffed behind the nightstand when he'd heard Lucy enter the outer room. Instead, he found himself easing ever slowly into the bed, stopping frequently, waiting to see if Lucy stirred.

Mere inches separated them. Trevor closed his eyes and willed his hands to remain still. They pleaded for the right to caress her hip, to confirm that what the eyes told — that Lucy had begun to gain weight, that her hip was rounder, softer, more luxuriant to the touch than before.

*Just one touch, old man. One, tiny, infinitesimal touch. A gentle brush of the fingertips. That's all.*

Holding his breath, Trevor reached out, his strong hand, quaking. He stopped and counted to twenty, then lowered his hand to the curve of Lucy's lush hip. He clamped his eyes shut and held his breath as the feel of her skin, so soft beneath the thin material of her nightdress, shot electricity through his veins.

*Enough!* Trevor told his willful hand. *You touched her. She's real. She's warm. She is softer and rounder than before. Leave her. Leave.*

Trevor slid his hand across Lucy's hip until his fingers brushed her belly. It, too was rounder, softer than before. He increased the pressure ever so slightly. He knew that it was too soon to feel anything. His medical training reminded him that her uterus hadn't enlarged enough to feel the child nurtured within, but Trevor refused to listen, certain that his child was stirring in the womb, pushing its miniature hands against the tissues of Lucy's body, acknowledging its father's presence.

Lucy's quiet murmur broke the room's silence like a crash of shattering glass and Trevor tried to pull his arm away, but Lucy turned more to the right, instinctively grabbing his hand in hers as she had done countless times before. Trevor had no choice but to move with her, and his instinct responded by cradling her against him, curving his body with hers.

The feel of her heated his blood and drove away the dank chill that had settled over him when she went out of his life.

That night, Trevor slept soundly for the first time in months.

"Lucy. Lucy. It's time to wake up."

The voice drifted down through the layers of Lucy's consciousness. At first the voice calling her name was deep and soothing and painfully familiar, but as she awakened, Lucy realised that she'd been dreaming and that it was Phyllis Mintwood was calling to her, not Trevor at all.

"What time is it?" she asked, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Just half past six, but you're usually up so early, I thought I should check. I can teach for you today. I'm sure Ben and Mary won't mind."

Lucy smiled. "I'm fine," she said getting out of the bed. "In fact, that was the best night's sleep I've had since we came home..." Her voice trailed off and she glanced back at the bed, Trevor's bed. The dream came back to her and she remembered imagining the feel of him holding her close, whispering her name.

"Are you sure you feel up to teaching today?"

"Yes," Lucy answered a little unhappier than before. She remade the bed then turned to pull the velvet drapes. They were already closed. They'd been open last night, hadn't they?

Trevor spent the morning sitting in his desk chair, peering at the school through a slit in the draperies. He caught sight of Lucy several times through the opened door and was struck by the happiness on her face. She was totally in her element here amongst these people and he'd been a fool to take her away from this before she was ready. He'd been a fool to take her away at all.

He should have stayed. He should have learned to like this simple existence or transferred the bulk of his wealth and invested to help make Sweet Medicine the kind of bustling, modern city he was accustomed to until the day he had no choice but to return to England to oversee the Lynbrook estates. Even then, he'd be able to relegate the daily management to others once he'd settled the legal formalities that inheriting the Earldom would entail.

Trevor banged his fist on the chair arm. What a right jackass he'd been not to think of these things sooner, but by God, he'd do it right this time – once he figured out the best way to approach Lucy.

Lucy got up, rubbing her aching back as she came around to the front of her desk. "You can eat your lunches now and play outside when you've finished. It would be a shame to waste this sunny day. I think our spelling test can wait until tomorrow." Lucy laughed when the children cheered that piece of information. "Benjy, please keep an eye on the younger children while I go make myself a cup of tea."

Trevor paused with his hand on the swinging door that lead to Lucy's kitchen when he heard her melodic humming. Blast. She should be giving her spelling lesson now. Trevor debated for all of forty seconds before easing the door open and slipping inside the room. "Lucy?"

Lucy froze the instant she heard her name, spoken as only Trevor could speak it. Her heart beat madly in her chest and she feared that she was hallucinating. She wanted to turn towards the door but was even more afraid that it wasn't any hallucination. She heard the footsteps on the bare pine floor and her hand began to quake. The enamelled canister fell to the counter, spilling its contents.

"Let me clean that for you."

Lucy turned and moved away when Trevor stepped forward to scoop the tea back into its container.

"You must have read my mind, love. I was dying for a cup of tea."

"Why are you here?" Lucy demanded to know, her tone rising steadily higher with each word.

"I'm here because I love you, because I need to explain."

Trevor stepped forward and Lucy moved until the table separated them. "If you truly loved me there wouldn't be anything to explain," she said, clenching her hands at her sides. He looked as weary as she'd been feeling until this morning.

Lucy gasped. "It *was* you last night. I wasn't dreaming. You were there with me. You touched me!"

"I had to, Lucy. I was dying without you. I haven't had a decent hour's sleep in two months."



Trevor came around the side of the table, but Lucy backed away until the table separated them again. "Listen to me."

"I know what I saw, Trevor—you and Gwynne having sex," Lucy muttered, swallowing back the bitter bile that rose in her throat.

"You saw what Gwynne wanted you to see. She drugged me."

Lucy's head shot up. Anger stiffened her spine and blazed in her eyes. "You didn't seem drugged to me. "

Trevor darted around the table and grabbed Lucy by the shoulders before she had time to react.

His grip was firm, but did not hurt, and Lucy found herself powerless to resist the pull of his eyes, more intense than she had ever seen them.

"Think, Lucy. Please. Remember when we made love in the mirrored salon at the house in Paris. Did it look the same? Did I touch her the way I touched you? Did I move the way I moved beneath you? "

Lucy clamped her eyes shut when the mental image assaulted her, but her objective side made her analyse it in a way she hadn't been able to do before. Trevor hadn't cupped Gwynne's breasts. She'd been holding his hands, pushing them against her. Although the bed had been jostling, Trevor's hips hadn't been moving as they should have been. "I suppose," Lucy said quietly, still unsure. Trevor's grip relaxed and she pulled away.

"Why has it taken you so long to come here, to tell me this?"

Trevor took a deep breath before speaking. "Gwynne tricked me into signing a marriage contract before I passed out. She was using it to blackmail me."

Lucy sensed that something was not right and she folded her arms in front of her, suddenly feeling a chill. "Did you marry her?"

"No," Trevor said emphatically. "She threatened to bring a lawsuit, but it doesn't matter. She can take every cent we have and choke on it for all I care. I want to marry you, Lucy. I want to be there when the baby comes."

Lucy paled. "Who told you? Uncle Pat? Miss Mintwood?"

"Your sister wrote to me. She also told me that you and Angry Wolf have become close." He broke off when the door flew open.

"Papa!" Joshua shouted merrily, rushing into the kitchen. He threw himself into Trevor's arms. "I missed you so much!"

Trevor kissed Josh's cheek and hugged him close. "I missed you too, old man. " He looked at Lucy. "I missed you both, and we'll never be apart again."

Although Joshua's happiness warmed Lucy's heart, Trevor's certainty that all was well and good, brought her indignation to life. "Josh, we have to get back to class." She took Josh from Trevor's arms despite his protests.

"Come, papa! Come to school with us!"

"No," Lucy said sternly. "He can't. He has to go to town. He just stopped by for a moment. Isn't that right?"

Trevor's shoulders sagged. "That's right, but I'll see you soon. I promise."

Lucy pulled the kitchen door shut with a bang and Trevor pounded his fist into the table with a muttered, "Bloody hell."

## Chapter Fifteen

Lucy glanced at her locket watch when Angry Wolf appeared in the doorway of the school that afternoon. No wonder the children had become restless. She'd carried this geography lesson forty minutes beyond the usual school day.

"We'll stop here, children. Leave your books on top of your desks. I'll see you all tomorrow. Joshua, wait a moment."

The anxious look in Josh's dark eyes touched Lucy and she didn't have the heart to keep him from looking for Trevor; not yet, anyway. "I'll see you at the house when I'm through."

Josh's face lit up. "Okay!" he yelled, tearing out the door towards Trevor's side of the house.

Lucy began to straighten the children's desks, conscious of the fact that Angry Wolf was still standing in the doorway watching her. "I'm sorry about the time. You all must have been worried. "

"There is something more you have to say, Lucy."

Lucy looked up. "Trevor came back today – last night," she corrected, not wanting to remember how rested and content she'd felt when she awakened this morning. It had nothing to do with Trevor being here, lying there beside her, cradling her in his arms just as she'd dreamt.

*Did it look the same? Did I touch her the way I touched you? Did I move the way I moved beneath you?* Trevor's voice asked inside her head.

Angry Wolf's voice broke through her thoughts.

"I will drive him away," he said in a low, menacing tone. The expression in his eyes turned ruthless.

"No."

Lucy ran after Angry Wolf who outdistanced her quickly. She heard him yelling at Trevor even before she reached the front porch. She heard Joshua cry for them to stop arguing. By the time she ran through the opened door, the confrontation had turned physical.

"Stop this, both of you!"

Lucy's shout fell on deaf ears as Trevor and Angry Wolf continued to struggle, throwing and deflecting blows, toppling over furniture, shoving each other into the walls. The sounds of splintering wood, shattering glass, and bellowed curses mingled with Lucy and Josh's cries.

"Stop this!"

"Papa! Angry Wolf! Don't fight!"

Angry Wolf got the upper hand after Trevor struck his head on the mantle. He unsheathed his knife and held it aloft. "Tell her white man! Tell her how you paid us to turn her away! Tell her!"

Lucy gaped as Trevor looked to her. The truth was confirmed in his eyes and she felt this betrayal cut as deeply as his liaison with Gwynne Medford had.

"Lucy! Don't listen! It wasn't like that."

"You lie, white man! You die!"

"Don't hurt my papa!" Joshua shrieked, launching himself at Angry Wolf as he slashed his knife down towards Trevor.

The Cheyenne chief barely had a chance to react.

Time stood still as Lucy watched the big, shiny blade of the hunting knife slice into her son's little arm. She saw gallons of blood spurt from the wound and when Josh collapsed to the floor some blood splashed onto the fire in the hearth with a sickening hiss.

She felt the scream rise in her throat until it exploded from her lips and she continued screaming until Trevor's command roared, drowning her out.

"Lucy! Help me!"

Lucy rushed to her son's side, tears streaming down her cheeks. Josh was so still, so frightfully pale. "Ohmygodno!"

Trevor had torn off his necktie and tied it around Josh's arm above the wound. He grabbed Lucy's shaking hand and twined the end of the tie around it. "Pull on this! Keep it tight while I lift him!"

Instinct made Lucy obey as Trevor picked Josh up and rushed him into the treatment room next door. He dumped the contents of his instrument box on the tray near the operating

table with one hand while pulling Lucy's arm with the other.

"Keep it tight!" Trevor shouted, as he pulling the instruments he needed from the pile before dousing his hands with an antiseptic. He cut away the cloth of Josh's jacket and shirt, forcing himself to see a wounded patient not the unconscious little boy he loved with all his heart.

"Lucy! The antiseptic!" Trevor ordered, one hand clamped around Josh's wound, the other grasping a suture needle and thread.

The contents of the brown bottle splashed on Josh, Trevor, the table and the floor from the shaking of Lucy's hand. "My baby! My baby!" Lucy cried as the antiseptic diluted her son's blood, splattering it further.

He was just a little boy. He couldn't have enough blood to keep him alive.

"Don't let him die!"

"I won't let him die!" Trevor told her as he stitched the long, gaping wound with brisk precision. "Give me the other needle!"

Lucy did although she wasn't away of it. She was cold. She was numb. She prayed with every ounce of her being as her tormented eyes watched Trevor's skilled hands. The wound seemed endless. The more Trevor stitched, the more there was to close. He couldn't do it. It wasn't possible. Joshua didn't have the strength or blood to survive this ordeal.

Only after he'd tied off the last stitch and cleaned the wound a final time, did Trevor feel the pounding of his heart slow to a normal rhythm. He rinsed his blood stained hands then bandaged Josh's arm, removing the boy's bloody clothing and washing his small body with infinite care.

Lucy came around the other side of the table and dried her son's skin with a soft white towel. Her hands were steadier, her voice was not. "He's so pale. He isn't breathing."

"He's breathing," Trevor assured her, taking hold of her hand and placing it near Joshua's nose and mouth. "He'll be all right, Lucy. I promise."

Trevor bandaged Joshua's arm then gently lifted him and carried him to the bed in the adjoining room. He pulled a chair to the bed for Lucy to sit on then returned to the treatment

room to clean it before going to his bedroom to change out of his bloodied clothes.

He went back downstairs through Lucy's side of the building, intending to clean the blood from the parlour. Ben Red Eagle and his children were standing in the doorway staring at the toppled, broken furniture and the crimson line which trailed from the fireplace to the door set in the wall.

"What the hell happened, Doc?" Ben asked, gesturing to the wreckage. "Benjy said Angry Wolf stabbed Josh."

"He was after me. Josh got in the way. It was a serious laceration, but he'll recover." Trevor's expression grew hard, his eyes cold. "Where is Angry Wolf?"

"He jumped on his horse and rode off after you and Miss Lucy took Josh into the clinic," Ben's son said.

"Cowardly bastard," Trevor muttered, righting the upended velvet divan.

Ben shook his head as he bent to pick up one of Lucy's needlepoint side chairs. "He's no coward. He left out of shame."

Trevor's reply was an indecipherable mumble.

They replaced the toppled furniture, removing the broken pieces and shattered lamps. Ben sent his eldest son to the kitchen to get a bucket of soapy water then sent the boy outside with his younger siblings.

"I'll finish cleaning up, Doc. You go back to Josh."

Trevor gave Ben a nod of thanks then went back to the clinic. Lucy was sitting on the bed next to Joshua, holding his uninjured hand tightly in hers. She looked up, her blue eyes wide with fright. "It's still bleeding! Do something! He'll die!"

"He will not die, Lucy. I won't allow it," Trevor told her, his eyes shifting to Josh's bandaged arm. He took a fresh dressing from the supply cabinet then knelt on the floor beside the low bed to unwrap the wound. "Look," he said, his voice softer. "Lucy. Look."

"I can't."

"You can. You're a doctor's daughter and once a hospital nurse. You've seen worse, love."

"Nothing is worse than seeing your son almost die before your eyes."

"True," Trevor agreed. "But as far as physical injuries go, this one will heal. Look. The bleeding is minimal now."

Still afraid, Lucy slowly lowered her gaze from Trevor's confident face to her son's damaged arm. The cut was long, going from near his shoulder to below his elbow. There were dozens of tiny even stitches closing the wound but Trevor was right, the bleeding was stopping on its own.

"It was deep," she said quietly.

"Yes," Trevor said gently wiping a healing ointment along the line of silk stitches. "It's deep, but not deep enough to cause an impairment." He re-bandaged Joshua's arm then laid it gently on the bed. "I'll stay with him. Why don't you go next door to change out of that dress."

"I won't leave my son. I can't."

Trevor came around the bed and laid a comforting hand on Lucy's shoulder. "I'll sit right there. I'll hold his hand until you get back."

"No," Lucy said not looking up.

"Please, love. Do it for Josh. If he sees you with blood on your hands and dress when he wakes it will frighten him."

Lucy looked at Joshua's still face and then over her shoulder at Trevor. "All right, but if he starts to wake up, you call me as loudly as you can. I'll hear you."

"I promise."

Lucy retched at the sight of her son's blood tinting the basin of water atop her bureau. *It's such a large cut, and he's such a little boy*, she thought again as she rinsed her mouth with clean water. She feared that Trevor was deceiving her, keeping Josh's true condition from her to keep her from becoming hysterical. She pulled on a clean dress then ran down to the clinic, certain that her son was near death.

"Here she is, old man," Trevor said softly, smoothing Joshua's hair back with a gentle touch of his hand. "I told you she'd be along presently," he added, getting up so that Lucy could sit in the chair.

Lucy kissed Joshua's forehead and caressed his cheek. "Here I am, honey. I'm right here. I

was only gone for a moment. I won't leave you alone again. I promise."

"Wasn't alone," Josh said in a weak voice. "Papa was here."

"And I'll be right here until you're well enough to run around," Trevor said going around to the other side of the bed. He bent down and ruffled Josh's hair. "Are you thirsty? Would you like some water?"

"Juice?" Josh asked.

Lucy looked at Trevor. "There's some fresh apple juice in my kitchen. "

Trevor brushed a kiss across Josh's forehead. "Be back in a flash, old man."

Josh gave him a tremulous smile.

Trevor returned with the cup of juice and helped Josh sit up holding the cup for him. "Not too fast. Just a sip for now. You can have more later. " He set the cup on the small bedside table.

"Rest for a while, honey. Please," Lucy said.

"Don't wanna."

"Listen to your mother, old man. That's an order from your doctor." Trevor checked Joshua's pulse and respiration. "You need to sleep now, and don't tell me you aren't tired. I can tell."

"Maybe."

"Definitely. Now close those eyes and rest. Your mother and I will be right here when you wake up and if you feel like it, you can have some of that delicious looking rice pudding I saw in the icebox."

"Okay," Josh mumbled, closing his eyes. He drifted off to sleep quickly.

Lucy waited until Joshua's breathing became even before whispering to Trevor. "You don't need to stay here. I know what to look for. If there's a problem I'll let you know."

"I'm staying, Lucy. I belong here."

Lucy opened her mouth to protest, but the words refused to come. All she could say was, "You didn't call me when he woke up. You promised and you lied."

The tone with which Lucy said the last words made the deeper meaning crystal clear.

"I didn't lie about anything," Trevor said firmly. "He woke just as you came into the outer



room. However, I did ask Angry Wolf to stop his people from coming to school before we left. I was wrong and if I could go back I wouldn't have done it. I wouldn't have taken you to England and subjected you to the people whom I thought were my friends. I'm sorry and If I could make it up, I would." Trevor reached out and laid his hand atop Lucy's "The only thing I can do is ask your forgiveness."

Shaking her head, Lucy pulled her hand away. "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now. The only thing I care about is seeing that my son recovers from this."

"He will," Trevor said, reaching out again. "But something else does matter, Lucy. I love you and intend to make you my wife."

Lucy said nothing until Trevor reached into his vest pocket and removed the beautiful aquamarine engagement ring she'd returned to him on the train in England. She moved her hand away when Trevor reached across the bed to slip the ring on her finger.

"There are a lot of things we need to discuss, Trevor, but I can't; not until Josh has recovered."

"Fine," Trevor answered, slipping the ring back into his vest. "Take all the time you need. I'm not going anywhere."

Before Lucy could respond, there was a knock on the door. Trevor answered it.

"Oh! Lord Ashford." Phyllis Mintwood said glancing back over her shoulder to her fiancé, Frank Hillhouse, whose displeasure rumbled deep within his throat. "How, how is Joshua? We saw Ben on the road – Might I look in on Josh? How is Lucy holding up?"

Lucy came up behind Trevor and motioned for Phyllis to enter. "He's resting, but you can see him for a moment," Lucy said quietly, leading her towards the bed.

Frank made a move to enter as well, but Trevor blocked the way, pushing the door closed in his face. "No visitors. Only immediate family."

Phyllis kissed Josh's forehead and hugged Lucy. "I'm going to start dinner. I'll bring you both a tray. Is it all right if I ask Frank to stay?"

"No –"

Lucy cut Trevor off. "Of course it's all right. Thank you."

"Excuse me, my lord," Phyllis said, passing in front of Trevor.

Lucy retook her seat beside the bed. Trevor sat opposite her. He checked Josh's pulse and took a quick look inside the dressing on his arm. The bleeding had stopped. "So, Mr. Hillhouse has appointed himself your protector, has he?"

Lucy shot Trevor a cold look. "Frank is my friend, but if you must know, he and Phyllis are engaged to be married. I expect they'll have a long, happy life together." She returned her attention to Joshua.

"How lovely," Trevor muttered, tugging at his shirt cuffs

Trevor was staring out the window when Phyllis Mintwood brought their dinner on an etched sterling tray. He turned when Lucy spoke. They were the first words she'd uttered in over two hours.

"Oh, Phyllis, you went to too much trouble," Lucy said looking at the roasted chicken, boiled potatoes, carrots, rolls, and baked apples. "I think all I can handle is an apple and a cup of tea."

"Nonsense," Trevor told Lucy, taking the tray from Miss Mintwood and setting it on a low table. "You need to eat a nourishing meal, not only for yourself and the baby, but for Joshua. Sitting here with him is even more draining than what you're used to."

"Lucy moved her chair to the table just as Trevor was about to do it for her. "I'm not a frail, aristocratic lady, Trevor, I never was."

Trevor retrieved his own chair and set it down with a thud.

Phyllis cleared her throat and addressed Lucy. "If you need anything, Frank and I will be in the kitchen."

"Thank you," Lucy answered, offering a tired smile. She sat at the table and watched as Trevor carved the chicken.

Trevor looked up upon hearing Lucy's faint chuckle. "What?" he asked as the sound of her soft laugh began to warm the room's chilly atmosphere.

Lucy gestured to his hands, poised over the chicken. "I'm sorry; it's just that you have the

habit of carving meat as though you were performing surgery."

Trevor gave her a sceptical look then glanced down to find that she was correct. He was holding the wooden handled knife as though it were a scalpel. With a short laugh of his own, Trevor bisected the chicken's breast and placed the halves on the porcelain dinner plates while Lucy served the vegetables.

"It's a pity our Minty is getting married," Trevor said after taking his first bite. "I should like to hire her as a cook."

Lucy nodded in agreement. "It is quite good. Josh loves her scones. I can't get the hang of making them for some reason. I guess you have to be English."

Trevor set down his knife and fork. "You don't have to be anything you don't want to be Lucy, and I was a bloody fool for not realizing that sooner." He reached out to touch her hand. "I wanted to share my life with you. I wanted you to be pampered and have everything you've ever dreamed of. I never meant for you to be unhappy."

The silence dragged on as Trevor waited for Lucy to reply. Finally she did, after placing her hand atop his.

"I didn't want to be an embarrassment to you, Trevor, but I'm not used to people waiting on me hand and foot. I don't feel right about having people do what I can do for myself."

Trevor caressed the back of Lucy's delicate hand with his thumb, delighting in the softness of her skin. "I realise that now, and things will be different. I promise. Once we're married."

Lucy pulled her hand away. "How can you even think of marrying me, Trevor? You said that you signed an agreement to marry Gwynne Medford."

Although Lucy's voice was low, the pain she felt sharpened her words so that they slashed through Trevor's lonely heart. "I was tricked. I won't marry her. I told her. I never intended to marry her, Lucy."

"But she does have a legal document with your signature on it."

"Yes, but—"

Trevor stopped short when Joshua stirred and called for Lucy. She and Trevor went to the bedside. "Hello, sleepyhead," Lucy said, smoothing her son's hair back from his forehead.

"How do you feel?"

"Kinda hungry. Do I smell chicken?"

Lucy blinked back a happy tear. "Yes you do. Minty made it."

Josh tried to sit up, crying out when he put pressure on his injured arm.

"Easy, old man. Here, let me help." Trevor plumped the pillows and gently lifted Josh to a sitting position. He grinned when the boy's dark eyes locked onto the table across the room. "I don't know, Lucy. I think he shouldn't eat anything heavier than some of that cornmeal mush Mary Red Eagle gives to her children when they're ill." He winked.

"Trevor is right, Josh," Lucy said seriously. "No drumsticks, no potatoes, and certainly no glazed cinnamon apples."

"Please?" Josh begged, looking from Lucy to Trevor and back again. "I feel okay. It doesn't hurt too bad, and I'm really hungry."

Trevor laughed and ruffled Joshua's hair.

After Joshua ate, Trevor played a game of checkers with him. Lucy watched and worked on a piece of embroidery.

"Can we play again?" Josh asked, stifling a yawn.

Trevor cleared the game from the bed. "I'm afraid not. It's getting late and you need a lot of rest to help heal that arm. But tomorrow, I'll play you two games."

Josh yawned again. "Okay. Goodnight, papa."

Trevor kissed him. "Good night, son."

Lucy kissed Josh as well and tucked him in. "Goodnight, honey. I love you."

"Love you, too. Mama? Are you and papa gonna get married now?"

"It's too late to talk about such things. You close your eyes. Go on."

Lucy avoided Trevor's piercing stare as she sat beside the bed and held Josh's hand until he fell asleep. She soon stifled her own yawn.

"You need your sleep as well, Lucy," Trevor said simply, taking a dust cloth off one of the three adult sized beds along the far wall. He unrolled the mattress and began to place clean linens on the bed and pillow. "You can stay right here. If he calls for you, I'll let you know."

Lucy thought it over, trying to silence the tiny voice inside that begged to sleep in Trevor's arms again. "All right," she said at last. She slipped off her shoes then sat on the bed.

"You'll be uncomfortable," Trevor said without looking up as he made the third bed for himself, leaving an empty bed between them. "You can sleep in your chemise and drawers. I'll leave the room until you've gotten beneath the covers."

"I'm fine this way," Lucy said flatly. She got into the bed and turned onto her side away from Trevor, trying not to remember the many times she'd fallen asleep in his strong arms, their naked flesh touching, keeping them warm, making her feel secure.

Lucy closed her eyes, picturing the marriage contract that Gwynne Medford had made him sign. She doubted that Trevor's family would allow him to break the agreement and cause them further embarrassment and a loss of their wealth. No, there could be no future with Trevor Lynbrook. There was no point in even trying to bridge the gap Gwynne's underhandedness had put between them.

Trevor shrugged out of his jacket, vest and shirt then kicked off his shoes and climbed into his bed.. He stared forlornly at Lucy's back, listening as her breathing became slow and even. *How am I going to get through to you, love? How can I make you trust me again? How in heaven's name can I get Gwynne and her bloody paper out of the picture?*

Despite tossing half the night, Trevor was up at dawn. He pulled on his shirt, checked on Joshua, then went to where Lucy slept. He raised the blanket up higher on her shoulders then planted a tender kiss on her lips, wanting desperately to truly kiss her, to hold her, to make things go back to the way they'd been before he'd uprooted her and spoiled the only real happiness he'd ever known.

Trevor vowed to regain that happiness as he let himself out of the room.

"I do hope you have a scone or two to go with—" Trevor broke off when he opened the kitchen door to find Frank Hillhouse alone at the table, a dainty china cup nestled between his large coppery hands.

Trevor cleared his throat. "I thought Miss Mintwood was here."

"I imagine Phyl is still sleeping. She was up late, frettin' over little Josh. He really going to be okay?"

"In time," Trevor answered brusquely. He considered leaving, but knew that he had more right to be here than the arrogant showman seated at the head of Lucy's kitchen table.

He poured himself a cup of coffee and took the seat at the opposite end of the pine table.

The strained silence was intense.

"Why in the hell did you cheat on Lucy?"

"I didn't."

"That's not the way my cousin Jace told it."

Trevor pushed his chair back from the table and faced Frank Hillhouse. "Your cousin wasn't there, was he? He didn't see the way I was drugged or physically manipulated into a compromising position, did he?"

"Please don't argue," Phyllis Mintwood asked as she came to her fiancé's side.

Frank slipped his arm around her shoulder and gave her a light kiss. "We're not arguing, darlin', just setting a few things straight."

"I'm ecstatic that you believe me," Trevor replied.

"The way I see it, a man would have to be telling the truth or out of his ever lovin' mind to cheat on a woman like Lucy – or my Phyl," he added diplomatically.

"Your support thrills me," Trevor mumbled, getting up to pour the remainder of his cold coffee down the sink. "I'm going back to the clinic. Minty, will you able to make something for Lucy and Joshua's breakfast? Lucy will want to do it herself, but I'd rather she conserve her strength."

"Of course. I planned to."

Trevor nodded his thanks then walked past her and Frank. He paused in the doorway when Phyllis called to him.

"I heard something from one of the chambermaids at Ashford Hall when I went to retrieve my clothing after....before we left England."

Trevor's heart thumped. "What was it? Was it about Gwynne?"

"I'm not certain, of course, but she said that your housekeeper, Miss P. had been acting rather strangely, as if what happened between you and Lucy was affecting her personally in some way. "

"Of course!" Trevor shouted. "Gwynne couldn't have pulled this off alone. No wonder that old crone looked twice every time our paths crossed and rushed away from me." He swept Phyllis up into a quick hug. "Thank you, Minty! You may have saved my life! Can you get into town and send a wire to my grandfather?"

"Of course, my lord. I'll go at once."

Trevor thanked her and went back to clinic to wake Lucy with the good news.

## London

The Earl let Phyllis Mintwood's cable fall onto his solicitor's desk then dropped down into the nearest chair. "Why couldn't that fool girl have remembered this sooner?" he asked miserably before taking a long sip of the Irish whiskey the solicitor handed him. "It's no wonder old Miss P was so out of sorts these past months. We all thought she was getting on in years, what with those palpitations she'd been having since Trevor left. If I thought she had any knowledge of what Gwynne had planned, I never would have suggested that she take that holiday." He finished his drink. "Of course, she probably would have keeled over at the Hall as she did on the train."

"Unfortunate timing, that," the solicitor agreed. "I suppose you spoke to the rest of the staff"

"Of course. Charlotte grilled each one personally. Besides, if they'd known anything they'd have gone to Trevor directly. They like him a great deal. Damn." The Earl paused. "I suppose that was Gwynne's man I saw strutting out of here as I arrived."

"Yes, sir. Her uncle has retained Barnaby Venable expressly for the purpose of suing you and Trevor for breech of promise, public defamation of character, and whatever else he can make fit the situation." The solicitor sat on the edge of his desk. "Venable is very good at this

sort of thing. Last year he took the Duke of Maynard's son for over a million pounds after convincing the judge that young Maynard had proposed to the younger daughter before marrying the elder. I understand that Venable took great delight in having the newly wedded couple literally thrown out into the street once the verdict came down."

The Earl winced "I told Trevor to marry the chit and keep his American on the side," he grumbled. "As it is, we stand to lose everything because Trevor is 'in love'."

The solicitor cleared his throat. "Last week you mentioned that Lord Ashford's mother had an idea."

The Earl sipped his drink. "Charlotte thinks she can discredit Gwynne in someway, but I doubt it."

"Perhaps things will work out, sir," the solicitor said hopefully, if not sincerely.

## Chapter Sixteen

Joshua was up and around the third day following his wounding, driving both Lucy and Trevor to distraction with his constant desire for 'something to do', since he couldn't go outside and play with his school friends whom Miss Mintwood had been teaching in Lucy's stead.

Ben Red Eagle came into Lucy's kitchen with an order of groceries in time to hear Josh's



latest complaint that his toys and books were 'boring' him.

"We've been through this, honey," Lucy said tiredly. "I told you that you could go over to the school for a little while, but you have to keep still for a few more days. Isn't that right, Trevor?"

"I'm afraid so, old man," Trevor confirmed, setting Josh on his lap. "You may think you're in perfect health, but you lost a lot of blood. You can't do too much and wear yourself out."

"Awww."

"Excuse me, folks," Ben broke in, setting down the second box of groceries. "What if I take Josh back to my place until after dinner? My kids will keep him keep him company and give him something to do, and Mary will make sure he doesn't do any running around."

Lucy bit her bottom lip. "I don't know."

"An excellent idea," Trevor said. "How about that, Josh? Would you like to play with Sam and Benjy?"

Josh's glum expression brightened. "Yeah. Long as the girls don't make me play with their dolls."

Ben laughed and ruffled Josh's hair. "I'll keep my girls out of your hair."

Lucy plucked nervously at her skirt as Trevor gently helped Josh into Ben's wagon, setting him in the back with Benjy and Sam, while Ben's daughter tried to coerce Josh into playing house with them once they reached town.

"Are you sure about this? What if his stitches come open?"

Trevor silenced Lucy with a touch of his finger to her lips. "He's fine, love. You saw me change his dressing. The laceration is healing well. He'll be fine for a few hours." Trevor slipped his arms around Lucy's waist. "To be quite honest, I can use the respite. I love that boy dearly, but being beaten at forty-five consecutive games of checkers, three hands of old maid, and two rounds of dominoes, is more than any man should have to bear."

Lucy laughed quietly, and raised her hands to Trevor's neck. They'd begun to rebuild their emotional bond these past few days although the spectre of Gwynne Medford haunted them from the fringes. "It does seem awfully quiet all of a sudden, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," Trevor replied, pulling Lucy closer. He was about to test the waters with a kiss, but fate intervened in the form of Phyllis Mintwood who came around the side of the house from the school, a leather-wrapped parcel in her hand.

"Lucy, one of the Cheyenne left this for you when he came to escort the children back to their camp. I believe it was the man they call Three Fingers." She handed Lucy the small parfleche. "He said that it was from Angry Wolf and he asked that you give it to Joshua."

"Get rid of the blasted thing," Trevor muttered, reaching for the package.

"No," Lucy said pulling it back. "Not until I see what it is." She sat on the porch step, and untied the rawhide lace closing the parfleche, cautiously drew back the topmost flap. "Oh, my."

"What on earth?" Miss Mintwood asked.

"Good God!" Trevor exclaimed, snatching the horrific necklace from Lucy's shaking hand. He studied the grotesque beads carefully to make certain that his eyes weren't deceiving him. "They're human finger bones, the first and second joints. How disgusting."

Miss Mintwood gasped. "It's positively barbaric."

Lucy stood. "No," she said softly, taking Angry Wolf's offering from Trevor. She rewrapped the parfleche and retied the rawhide lace. "It isn't barbaric or disgusting. It's an apology. Angry Wolf mutilated the hand that wielded the knife. It's his way of atoning for the accident."

"You're actually going to give that to Josh?" Trevor asked sceptically.

"Of course not," Lucy answered. "Not now at any rate. Perhaps when he's grown. I don't know. Excuse me while I put this away."

When Lucy did not come out of her room within twenty minutes Trevor gave up hope of spending the evening trying to rebuild their damaged relationship.

"Shall I start dinner, Lord Ashford?"

"I'm not very hungry and I doubt that Lucy will want to dine with me in any event." Trevor glanced at his gold pocket watch. "Why don't you go freshen up? I'll give you a lift into town. I'm sure that your dashing fiancé would love to take you to dinner."

Trevor was pleasantly surprised when he returned from dropping Miss Mintwood in town and found Lucy in his kitchen busily stirring a soup pot and checking on an apple pie in the oven.

"Did you bring Josh back?"

"No. Ben will bring him around seven. "Where were you?"

Lucy turned from the stove. "I thought that I'd rest for a moment, but I dozed off. It's one of the 'hazards' of being pregnant."

Trevor beamed and approached her. It was the first time she'd spoken to him of the baby she carried. Their baby. "Josh has kept you busy. You should rest. You don't need to do this."

"I want to. Is Phyllis spending the evening with Frank?"

Trevor nodded, sweeping Lucy into his arms. "We'll be alone for the next three and a half hours."

"Good. We have a lot of things to talk over."

"Yes we do," Trevor said with a smile

Trevor persuaded Lucy to leave the dinner dishes soaking then carried her up to his second floor parlour where he laid a fire in the hearth. He sat next to Lucy on the plush sofa and gathered her into his arms, content just to hold her, as he resisted the urge to ravish her on the spot. "God, I've missed this."

"Me, too," Lucy said snuggling closer, rubbing her cheek against Trevor's crisp cotton shirt, inhaling his sandalwood cologne. "I shouldn't have run away. I should have confronted Gwynne on the spot. I should never have doubted you. I'm sorry."

Trevor tilted Lucy's face up towards his. "Please don't apologise, love. I should have tossed Gwynne out on her greedy arse the moment I set eyes on her. Everything that happened is on my shoulders."

"We both made mistakes, and hopefully, we've learned from them."

"I've learned more than you can know, Lucy."

Lucy welcomed Trevor's scorching kiss, savouring the faint coffee taste in his mouth when he parted her lips with a gentle prodding of his tongue. The press of Trevor's hands against

Lucy's back made her trembled all over and the low, pleasurable sound he made when she pressed her breasts against his chest, made her heartbeat quicken in anticipation.

And yet, although Lucy wanted very much to feel Trevor's naked body against hers she let the kiss end and pulled away. "I want you, Trevor, but I'm afraid. Gwynne will drag your family through the mud and they'll blame you. And you might blame me."

"No," Trevor said forcefully, gripping Lucy's shoulders. "I told them where they stand. I don't want to see them hurt either, but they know that I love you and intend to marry you. Gwynne can take every cent I have. I don't care. I can support us here, or we can move to Boston or Warburton, or anywhere. As long as I have you and Josh and our baby, I'll be the richest man in the universe."

Lucy's eyes brimmed with tears. "But your mother —"

"Understands. She gave me her blessing. So did Margaret."

A tear slid down Lucy's cheek. "Your grandparents —"

Trevor kissed the salty tear away. "My grandparents are from another era. Their marriage was arranged. They care for each other, but I don't think either of them has ever known the kind of love I feel for you. "

"You're sure then, about marrying me, living here in America, being a simple doctor?"

Trevor's loving smile outshone the fire in the hearth. "I have never been more certain about anything, my love."

Lucy kissed Trevor with a wild abandon that bespoke her need for him. She tugged at his shirt, popping the buttons free. She touched his shoulders and chest, caressing and kneading his heated flesh as though she had never felt it before.

"Make love to me Trevor," she whispered in his ear, her voice thick with longing.

Without a word, Trevor scooped her up and carried her to his room.

Lucy felt like a virgin when Trevor began undressing her with gentle caresses and tantalizing kisses. She went weak in the knees when he brushed his palms over her tender breasts. She groaned when he rolled her sensitive nipples between his thumbs and forefingers and cupped a breast in each hand, lifting them just enough to gauge their weight.

"They're growing heavy already. They'll be enormous once they're filled with milk," he said in a husky tone, rubbing his palms over the nubby tips again. Trevor eased Lucy down onto a velvet upholstered side chair and knelt between her thighs. He suckled her breasts, delighting in the soft mews escaping her lips.

He ran his hands up and down her bare back, feeling her grow warm beneath his fingertips. "Your skin has the most incredible taste," he murmured before trailing his kisses down her abdomen. He teased her rounded belly with his tongue and let his hands caress her thighs and calves.

Lucy shivered again and again as Trevor continued with his exquisite torture, touching, kissing and licking her everywhere but where she wanted it most. She arched her hips forward until her bottom was at the end of the chair. "You have no idea how sensitive it is down there."

Trevor laughed wickedly. "I'm a doctor, love. I know exactly what pregnancy does to a woman's body." He stroked between her moist folds with his index finger, grinning when she shivered, and inched forward.

"Please, Trevor. Hurry."

"Oh, no my love," Trevor said, slowly rising to his feet to finish undressing. He took his time removing his clothing, become more and more aroused as Lucy fidgeted on the chair, as her heightened hormones wrecked havoc within her. She moved to touch herself and he wagged his finger. "No touching."

"You're a bastard," she said with a grin.

"Well if you don't want me..." He bent to retrieve his shirt.

"I wouldn't go that far."

He grinned and rubbed his hand along the length of his cock pressing at the front of his trousers.

Lucy made a guttural sound when he removed his under drawers, exposing his rampant erection to her view, squeezing the swollen head until precome oozed from the tip. She licked her lips and Trevor had to contain his own voice as his body responded to the delicious memory of her mouth on him. "Do you want me?"

"You know I do," she answered, clutching the arms of the chair.

He stepped closer, just out of arm's reach and lowered his hand to massage his balls

"You're rotten to tease me."

Trevor grinned. "I know," he said sinking down to his knees before her.

Lucy jumped when he slid his hands up her calves, the pleasure from this .ple touch shooting straight through her. When he lifted one leg and licked the skin from her ankle to her knee she became wet enough to leave a spot on the chair. "Stop teasing."

"All right then," he said standing.

Lucy grabbed his hand. "I want you Trevor. Love me."

"I love you more than anything," Trevor said, tugging her hand until she stood.

She gazed into his eyes almost afraid that this was a dream but when he dipped his head down and drew her into a slow deep kiss she knew it was very real indeed. His kiss was full of desire yes, but the tenderness it conveyed, the sweet endearing love that washed over her was almost too much to bear. Surely it was fatal to feel to happy so completely in love.

When the kiss ended, Trevor smiled and caressed her flushed cheek with a wispy touch of his fingertips before lifting her and carrying her over to the bed.

He lowered her gently, eased down beside her and pulled her into another slow kiss, his hand snaking down between them, fingers dipping inside and almost making her come the instant he stroked her from within.

He lifted her left leg over his hip and positioned the tip of his cock at her entrance then slid into her as he reached around to cup her rear and pull her as close as their limbs would allow.

Trevor pumped his hips slowly and each gentle thrust sent a tiny shock through her sensitive flesh, raising her temperature, until her skin was covered with beads of perspiration.

She whimpered when Trevor licked the salty wetness from between her breasts and she almost came when stroked across her breast with his tongue then latched onto her nipple and sucked until she quaked.

"You have no idea how hot your pussy is inside," he whispered when he moved to kiss her neck.

"About as hot as you," she said, licking the perspiration that dotted his shoulder. Trevor groaned and kissed her once again, the tempo of his hips quickening. She moved to meet his deep strokes, each bit of friction against her clit sending tiny tremors through her until she came in a torrent of tiny spasms, her inner walls contracting, her own wetness flowing like never before.

Trevor came with a throaty grunt and kissed her fiercely, his kiss softening, becoming almost reverent as he slid free of Lucy's body and held her close.

"It seems sinful to be so happy," Lucy said.

"Not sinful," Trevor assured her. "It's well deserved."



Trevor was extremely happy in the days following his reconciliation with Lucy. He was so happy that he was the one to suggest travelling back to Warburton for a double wedding with Phyllis Mintwood and Frank Hillhouse.

Lucy set her book of fashion plates down when she realised that Trevor hadn't heard a single word she'd said about the gown she was buying. She tickled his cheek with her index finger to get his attention. "We don't have to do this. We can stay here and be married."

Trevor flashed her an apologetic smile. "I want to be married with your friends and family present and celebrate Christmas with them."

"But you'd like your family there, too," Lucy added, taking hold of Trevor's hand. "I understand and I want you to know that I won't ever keep you from them." She placed Trevor's hand low on her belly, smiling when he massaged her. "When the baby is old enough to travel we can go to England for a visit if you'd like."

Smiling, Trevor pulled Lucy onto his lap. "You are a treasure, my love. Thank you."

They cuddled in front of the fire, in silence, savouring each other's presence and thinking about the bright future that awaited them.

"I received a letter from my friend Niall the other day," Trevor said as the guilt mantle

clock struck the passing of another hour. "He said that Gwynne's uncle Gerald is making the rounds at all the important parties, quite pleased with himself while Gwynne 'rests' in the country. It seems that the strain of my jilting her has brought on an endless bout of the 'vapours.'"

Lucy ran her fingers through Trevor's sandy hair. "She'll get hers someday."

"We can only hope."

## **Ashford Hall**

### **One week later**

Gwynne Medford surveyed the main hall of the Lynbrook's mansion, mentally dividing the furniture and artwork into two categories – those she would keep and those she would sell once she gained possession of Ashford Hall and the bulk of their family fortune for the great embarrassment and distress Trevor had caused her.

She smiled to herself before lifting the black veil covering her face and following the grey-haired butler into the hall's most spacious parlour. Her uncle and their lawyer were already there, presenting an outline of their settlement and their plans to publicly ruin Trevor should his family fail to meet their terms.

"Here, dear, sit down," Gerald said, taking his niece by the hand and leading her to his comfortable chair. "Are you feeling up to this?"

The Countess of Greylock groaned. "Really, Gerald. Do spare us the performance of the doting uncle and the distraught niece."

The Earl stood and addressed Sir Gerald's lawyer. "Stop beating around the bush and just tell us what you want to leave us and my grandson alone."

Barnaby Venable stood and paced in front of the carved stone fireplace as though he were parading in front of a jury box. "We would like your grandson to abide by his agreement and marry Lady Medford, thus sparing her the indignity of bearing an illegitimate child, but taking into account Lord Ashford's recent public humiliation of Lady Medford – witnessed by no fewer



than seven persons – we would consider the child's open acceptance as a Lynbrook to be sufficient."

"Trevor insists that he is not the father."

"I know he is," Gwynne interrupted despite her lawyer's admonishing look. "His American whore saw it with her own eyes."

"Gwynne."

Gwynne dismissed her uncle's rebuke with a wave of her gloved hand. "I want it all. I want what I am entitled to as the mother of Trevor's child. I want Ashford Hall and the surrounding properties. I want the cottage at Cowes and the yacht. I want the house in London and I want your American gold and copper mines."

She daintily removed her gloves and set them in her lap. "However, I am quite willing to let the ladies keep their clothing and jewellery, and whatever monies you have in your bank as of noon today."

"Oh thank you, Lady Medford," the Earl said, giving her his best bow.

Gwynne smirked, her dark eyes raking over the rest of the Lynbrook family. "You're quite welcome."

Trevor's mother cleared her throat. "Before you rush out and spend all of our money, I want you to see something." She removed an envelope from beneath the damask pillow to her right. With calculated slowness she took out a half dozen lewd photographs showing Gwynne in all her naked glory reclining on a tiger skin blanket, her womanly secrets spread out for all the world to see.

Gwynne blanched as Charlotte divided up the obscene pictures and gave them to Sir Gerald and Barnaby Venable.

Gwynne shook with suppressed anger. "I was coerced. He got me drunk. I had no idea what that horrid man was doing to me."

"Isn't that interesting?" The Countess of Greylock said. "William, didn't Trevor say much the same thing about his – encounter – with Gwynne?"

"I believe he did, Alvinia."

Charlotte took the photographs back. "I suppose this settles things."

Barnaby Venable cleared his throat. "I believe that we might come to a mutually satisfying compromise, considering that Lady Medford is carrying Lord Ashford's child."

The countess studied her well manicured fingernails. "By the way, Gwynne, exactly, why did you purchase a number of *demi temps* in varying sizes," she asked innocently, referring to the padded undergarments said to be used to simulate advanced pregnancy.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Uncle Gerald let's get out of here. These people are insane."

"You can't go yet, Gwynne dear," Charlotte said, placing her hand firmly on Gwynne's shoulder and pushing her back down to the chair. "Margaret, darling. Please ring for Gordon."

"We don't need any refreshments, Lady Ashford," Gwynne's uncle said tersely.

"I had no intention of offering any."

The butler came in and took the seat offered by the countess. "Gordon, you have relatives in domestic service in London, don't you?"

"Yes, my lady," Gordon replied. "Lord Ashford was kind enough to help them secure fine positions. In fact, my niece Sarah was fortunate enough to become lady's maid to a fine family in Kensington. "

"Who cares about a blasted servant girl?" Sir Gerald broke in.

"You shall," Charlotte said coyly. "If you let Gordon finish." She nodded to the butler for him to continue.

"As I was saying, my lady, my niece was married to a valet she'd met when his employer came to stay in Kensington while looking for a house close to the medical office he was opening."

"No," Gwynne mumbled.

"Do finish, Gordon. This is so very interesting," Charlotte said, smiling wickedly as Gwynne Medford began to squirm.

"Uncle Gerald. I want to go. Now. "

"I think we'd better hear the rest," Venable said.

Gwynne sat back down, twisting her kid gloves so hard that the leather began to stretch.

"Gordon," Charlotte said.

"Well, my niece's husband happened to overhear his employer speaking with a colleague. It seems that this other doctor was recently summoned in the middle of the night to tend a lady who'd miscarried. Apparently, the lady kept her face covered and sent the doctor's payment round the next morning. She paid him triple his customary fee and added an extra hundred pounds with the request that he keep the matter as quiet as possible."

"Sir Gerald, might I speak with you in private?" Barnaby Venable asked. The men stood and moved to the furthest corner of the room.

"Would you like Gordon to pour you a drink, Lady Medford?" the Earl asked lightly.  
"You don't look at all well."

"I'm fine," Gwynne muttered, twisting her gloves into a knot. She lowered her head as the Lynbrook family and their butler shared a triumphant smile.

## **Warburton**

### **Indian Territory**

Trevor glanced at his pocket watch. "It's close to midnight. This reception has been going on for twelve hours, and from the looks of your Uncle Pat's supply of champagne, it might go on for twelve more."

Lucy laughed. "I told you that this would be a wedding reception you'd never forget." Lucy laughed again when her friend Phyllis shrieked as another of her new husband's relatives swept her onto the dance floor.

Trevor chuckled. "I hope our Minty has enough stamina to be a member of the Hillhouse clan."

"I think she does."

Trevor wrapped his arms around Lucy's waist. "Let's go back to our hotel room, Lady Ashford. I believe it's time we consummated our wedding vows."

Lucy pressed closer. "I believe you're right, Lord Ashford."

Their hotel room was filled with hothouse roses and lit by a multitude of tall white candles in sparkling crystal holders. The small round table in front of the fireplace was set with more candles and flowers, a tray of dainty sandwiches, small sugared cakes, a bowl of ripe berries and a chilled bottle of champagne.

A joyous tear trickled down Lucy's cheek when she looked up at her husband. "Oh, Trevor, you shouldn't have. These flowers must have cost a fortune, and wherever did you find raspberries in December?"

"I didn't," he said sheepishly.

"But who?"

Trevor took the large flat parcel he noticed on the mantle. He opened the folded note attached to the front. He read it aloud.

*"Dear Lucy,*

*Jason and I hope you enjoy our post reception snack and its accoutrements. I wish you a lifetime of happiness and hope that the Lord blesses you with many more children. The gift is from Uncle Pat via a colleague who recently returned from a trip to England. Trevor, although I still think you are a pompous ass, it's clear that my sister is madly in love with you and so I welcome you into our family with open arms.*

*All my love,*

*Star."*

Lucy laughed at Trevor's biting impersonation of her sister.

Trevor let the note flutter to the floor and unwrapped the package. It was the framed front page of one of London's more gossipy newspapers. The banner headline exclaimed:

*PATERNITY SCANDAL! LADY "M" FLEES COUNTRY IN SHAME!*

Trevor grinned. "Perhaps we'll mount my mother's letter with all the gory details and hang the lot in our bedroom."

Lucy took the framed newspaper from Trevor's hands and placed it backwards on the

mantle. "No, we won't."

Trevor picked up Star's note and looked at it once more before tossing it into the fireplace.

"A pompous ass, indeed."

Lucy laughed and slipped into Trevor's embrace. "Love me, love my family."

Trevor slid his hands down to cup Lucy's bottom and pull her close. "I love you completely, but the best I can do is tolerate your sister. How has Jason survived living with her?"

Lucy laughed and tugged off Trevor's jacket then unknotted his black silk tie. "It must be the grand passion they share."

Trevor undid the buttons of Lucy's cream velvet bodice, teasing the swell of her full breasts with feathery brushes of his fingers. "We have our own grand passion, my love," he whispered, untying the thin silk ribbon holding together the lace trimmed edges of her chemise. He pulled the bodice and chemise off her then rained countless heated kisses across her neck and down each arm before laving at her taut, rosy nipples until she moaned and arched against him.

Trevor lifted his head and gazed into Lucy's passion filled eyes as he reached down to unfasten her skirt, petticoat, and drawers. He took a half step back and feasted upon her naked beauty. Her breasts were like ripe fruit, heavy, their tips jutting out in a sensual invitation. Her hips were full and lush, her belly soft and becoming rounded.

He took Lucy into his arms, kissing her and feeling her until her knees turned to jelly. Her head spun when he swept her into his arms and carried her to the bed. She reached out to him when he climbed onto the bed and knelt beside her. He kissed her hand, suckling each finger in turn until she could hardly stand it.

"I intend to ravish you," he said in a husky tone, easing himself over her.

"Until I beg you to stop?" she asked weakly.

"Until the end of time..."

## About the Author

Award winning novelist Barbara Sheridan lives in the eastern United States with an unruly menagerie including two children, one grandchild, an older brother, a bird, assorted goldfish, a turtle that thinks it's a cat, and five cats – one of which “sees things” and has a mad crush on a Japanese musician.

She grew up a fan of historical novels, TV westerns and all things paranormal and that leads her writing interests to this day.

She's having the time of her life collaborating with cover art goddess Anne Cain on the GLBT Blood Brothers/Dragon's Disciple/Orange Moon series.

Barb loves old movies, character driven movies and is a mad fangirl for numerous Japanese rock bands.

Email: [bsher213@yahoo.com](mailto:bsher213@yahoo.com)

NAME loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.totalebound.com>.

## Total-e-bound eBooks



[www.totalebound.com](http://www.totalebound.com)

Take a look at our exciting range of literagasmic™ erotic romance titles  
and discover pure quality at Total-e-bound.