



Madoc (Cutler Brothers Book 2)

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## Chapter 1

Madoc Cutler still couldn't believe that his little brother, Cade, had actually gotten married. When Cade had called to tell him that he was engaged, Madoc had been surprised by the news, but that had been nothing compared to how stunned he had been when he'd learned that not only was the woman his brother had fallen for in the Witness Security Program, but that he'd known her for all of a whole week before he proposed! What the hell had Cade been thinking? All that stuff Cade had spouted about knowing true love the moment he saw it and not being able to live without Riley just seemed insane to Madoc.

Madoc, being five years older and much wiser than Cade, had tried to talk some sense into his brother, but it had done no good. Cade was completely head over heels for Riley Barnett. Though Madoc could certainly understand being attracted to the beautiful blonde, he couldn't understand why his brother had felt the need to marry her. Cade should have just done the smart thing and moved in with her, Madoc thought. That way, he wouldn't have been tied down. But when Madoc hadn't been able to dissuade his brother from making one of the biggest mistakes of his life, he had finally agreed to not only attend the wedding, but to also be Cade's best man.

Of course, it didn't help that their parents absolutely loved Riley and were completely thrilled that Cade had finally found a nice girl and settled down. Now that he thought about it, Madoc supposed he should be happy Cade had gotten married. At least now his brother would be the one having to listen to their mother and father constantly harp about not having any grandchildren. That was a headache Madoc would happily let his brother put up with.

For his part, Madoc could never see himself having kids. Actually, he couldn't even see himself getting married. He just wasn't the marrying kind. Sure, he liked women - a lot - but every one he'd ever gone out with seemed to want to rein him in. They all thought his job as a U.S. Marshal was a phase that he would get out of, and when it became apparent that he wasn't planning to leave his job any time soon, his girlfriends usually started throwing around ultimatums. That hadn't worked out too well for them, though, because he had always chosen the job over them. He probably always would. What woman could produce the same thrill and excitement that he got from being a Marshal?

Madoc reached up with his free hand to rub the back of his neck. Deciding to drive from where he lived in Denver to Seattle for his brother's wedding had seemed like a good idea at the time, but he was barely halfway through

Montana on the return trip and he was already exhausted. Staying up late partying the night before probably hadn't helped, he supposed, and now, it looked like the weather was turning against him. He frowned as he scanned the sky. It was getting really gray and looked like it was going to snow at any minute. He had heard on the radio earlier that it was supposed to snow sometime that day, and he hoped it wasn't heavy. He still had a lot of driving to do before he got home.

He had hoped to make it to Billings before he had to stop for gas again, but glancing down at the gauge, he saw that it was almost on empty. As he took the exit for the next town, Madoc chided himself for not leaving Seattle earlier that morning. He had taken almost a week off already, and there would be a pile of work on his desk when he got back. Plus, his boss would be royally pissed if he called in to ask for more time off because he was stuck in the snow.

As he stood filling his gas tank a few minutes later, Madoc surveyed the small town of Flint Rock. It was one of those towns that had sprung up simply because there needed to be a gas station at that point along the highway. There were a few fast-food places and a diner, as well as the requisite tourist traps. Other than that, it didn't have much else to offer.

Thinking that he should probably get something to eat as well, Madoc decided he wasn't really in the mood for fast food and settled on the diner instead. The place looked like it could have been any of a dozen different chain diners, and probably had been over the years. The building was at least thirty or forty years old, and could use a little fixing up. But he didn't really care what the place looked like, as long as he could get something good to eat, fast.

Pushing open the door, Madoc scanned the inside of the diner. Other than a handful of people sitting at the counter, the place was empty, he noticed as he made his way to the restroom. When he came back out, he debated for a moment whether to sit at the counter, but then slipped into a booth near the window. That way, he could keep an eye on his truck.

Reaching for the menu resting against the napkin dispenser, he was about to look at it when he caught sight of the pretty, dark-haired waitress behind the counter. Dang, Madoc thought. She definitely stood out in a small town like this. Even wearing glasses and a drab waitress uniform, she was a knockout. Then again, he thought appreciatively as he took in her rounded breasts and slender waist, the uniform did hug her curvy figure quite nicely. And he had to admit that the oval-shaped glasses with their black frames were surprisingly flattering on her. It made her look like some tame librarian-type that had a wildcat inside of her just waiting to get out.

"What can I get for you, sugar?"

Startled, Madoc tore his gaze away from the girl behind the counter to see a short, plump, gray-haired waitress standing beside his table. He had been so distracted by the younger waitress that he hadn't even realized the woman was there. Or that she had set down a glass of ice water in front of him.

His brow furrowing, Madoc looked down at the menu in his hand and ordered the first thing he saw. "Meatloaf."

"Do you want fries or mashed potatoes with that?" the woman asked, her pen poised above the order-pad she had in her hand.

Madoc glanced over at the younger waitress behind the counter again to find her studying him with big, brown eyes. Tucking a strand of long hair behind her ear, she gave him an embarrassed smile and looked away.

Realizing that the older woman was waiting for an answer, Madoc forced his attention back to her. What had she asked him? Oh yeah, what he wanted with the meatloaf. "Mashed potatoes will be fine," he told her.

She scribbled his order on the pad, and then tucked it into her apron before giving him a smile. "Coffee okay?"

He nodded. "Coffee would be great."

"Coming right up," the woman said.

As the plump, little woman made her way back to the counter, Madoc found himself secretly hoping that the younger waitress might bring his coffee over, and he was disappointed when the gray-haired woman picked up the coffee pot and started over to his table again. Even so, he couldn't help but play a little fantasy through his mind involving the younger waitress bringing him coffee. In it, she would lean way over to place the mug on the table, which of course would cause her breasts to strain against the confining buttons of her uniform. And then...

Unfortunately, the older waitress reached his table before Madoc's fantasy could go any further. He tried hard to concentrate on what the nice, old woman was saying, even letting her know about his job and why he had been out to Seattle, but his gaze kept being drawn to the girl behind the counter again. She was laughing with one of the customers, and the sound was warm and rich as it drifted across the diner and over to where he sat.

Telling himself that it wasn't polite to stare, Madoc picked up a packet of sugar and emptied it into his coffee, and then turned to look out the window. But the gray sky and the tiny town of Flint Rock wasn't enough to hold his interest for very long, and every so often, he would let his gaze wander over to the pretty, dark-haired girl behind the counter again.

Madoc was staring at the darkening sky outside, wondering just how much longer the snow would hold off when he heard the sound of a plate being set down on the table. Realizing that his food had arrived, he turned to thank the waitress, and was pleasantly surprised to see the pretty, dark-haired girl standing there. Up close, she was even prettier, he thought, taking in her full lips, pert nose, and light dusting of freckles across her cheeks.

"More coffee?" she asked with a smile.

Her voice was soft and sweet, just like the rest of her, Madoc thought. "Please," he said.

As she leaned over to pour the coffee, Madoc's gaze automatically went to her perfectly rounded breasts. His fantasy had been right on; they did strain nicely against the uniform. As he tried hard not to be too obvious about staring at her breasts, he caught sight of the plastic nametag on the front of her uniform, and frowned when he saw that her name was Jane. It wasn't that there was anything wrong with the name, of course. It was just that he had expected the pretty waitress to have a more exotic name.

"I don't think I've seen you around before," she said, giving him another smile.

He tore his gaze away from her perfect breasts. "Just passing through," he told her.

Madoc thought he detected a hint of disappointment in her dark eyes at his words, but it was gone before he could be sure.

"Where are you headed?" she asked.

"Denver," he said.

She looked at him in surprise. "Denver?"

His brow furrowed. "Have you ever been there?" he asked curiously.

She reached up with one hand to adjust her glasses in what he was sure was an unconscious gesture. "Me?" she said. "No. I've never even been out of Flint Rock."

Madoc regarded her for a moment. That was difficult to believe. "Really?" he said. "You kind of look familiar. I

thought we might have run into each other back there.”

That probably sounded like some sort of pick-up line, and a really lame one at that, Madoc thought, but it was true. Though he hadn’t noticed it when he’d first seen her, the more he looked at the waitress, the more sure he was that he’d seen her somewhere before. Then again, maybe it was just wishful thinking.

She let out a nervous, little laugh as she reached up to fiddle with her glasses again. “I don’t think so,” she told him. “I’m sure I would have remembered if we had.”

He gave her a smile. “You’re probably right,” he agreed.

She returned his smile with one of her own. “Well, have a safe drive to Denver,” she said, picking up the coffee pot from the table. “And be sure to watch out for the snow. I hear that it might be heavy. You wouldn’t want to get snowbound out here in the middle of nowhere.”

“I don’t know,” he said, his grin broadening. “Maybe I would.”

She gave him a sexy smile that immediately made his jeans feel tighter in the crotch, before turning to head back to the counter, an extra little sway in her step.

Damn, Madoc thought as he watched her walk away. Getting trapped in the snow with a woman like her might just be worth the hell he’d catch from his boss for taking more vacation time. Drab it might be, but the curve-hugging waitress uniform she was wearing definitely showed off her assets. He’d always been an ass-man, and the not-so-plain Jane had one hell of a sexy bottom. Not to mention extremely shapely legs, he noticed. Yep, getting snowbound in the middle of nowhere with the cute waitress would be downright fun.

Picking up his fork, Madoc was about to turn his attention to the food he had ordered, but he couldn’t resist glancing over at the counter again. Jane had set down the coffee pot and was talking to the older waitress. From the way the women glanced his way, he had a sneaking suspicion they were talking about him, and he found himself hoping that Jane would come over to talk to him again, but a moment later, she disappeared into the kitchen.

As Madoc ate, the feeling that he’d seen the dark-haired waitress somewhere before came back to him. He was good with faces and usually didn’t forget one, something that served him well in his line of work. But if he had met her, he told himself, surely he would have remembered such an attractive woman. Hell, he probably would have asked her out.

A thought so absurd it was almost laughable popped into his head then, but it gave Madoc pause just the same. It was possible he might have seen her in passing somewhere, but there was also another place he might have seen her. He found it hard to believe, but he did spend a lot of time scanning the faces on the fugitives’ list put out by the U.S. Marshals Service. Actually, he checked on the database almost daily.

Madoc shook his head. There was no way that cute waitress could be wanted in connection with anything more criminal than breaking a few hearts, he told himself. For all he knew, he’d seen her in a magazine somewhere; she was certainly gorgeous enough to be a model.

Putting the ridiculous notion that she was a criminal out of his head, Madoc finished his meal, then paid the check and left the diner. As he did so, he looked back one more time, just to get another look at her, but she hadn’t come out of the kitchen.

Outside, it had begun to snow, hard. He’d better get moving, Madoc thought, or he really would be stuck in this town. He quickened his step, only to halt beside his SUV, his hand on the door handle. What if he were wrong about the girl? What if she really were a fugitive? It wasn’t really that big of a stretch. He was becoming more

and more convinced that he had seen her face, and the wanted list was where he spent most of his time looking at people. It could actually be possible she was fugitive. And if she were, then it was his job to bring her in.

Knowing he wouldn't be able to leave without checking it out, Madoc was about to head down the street to the police station he'd passed on the way to the diner when he spotted the small public library across the street. Deciding it would be easier to log onto the U.S. Marshals' fugitive database there instead of explaining his suspicions to the local sheriff, he walked across the street and into the library.

Giving the elderly librarian at the desk a nod, he sat down at one of the computers and connected to the Internet. With his password, logging onto the Marshals' fugitive database was simple, and within a few minutes, he was typing the parameters into the search engine. His search came up with almost a hundred female fugitives fitting Jane's description, and as Madoc scrolled through each one, he found himself praying that the cute waitress wouldn't be among them.

But Madoc's worst fears were confirmed when he pulled up the next page of fugitives a few minutes later. Gazing back at him from the top row of photos was the cute, dark-haired waitress from the diner. Even without the glasses she'd been wearing as a disguise, he recognized her easily. Swearing under his breath, Madoc clicked on the wanted poster and began to read.

Name: Shayna Matthews

Alias: None Known

Description:

Sex...Female

Race...White

Date of Birth...June 4, 1976

Place of Birth...Colorado

Height...5'9"

Weight...125

Eyes...Brown

Hair...Brown

Skintone...Medium

Scars/Tattoos...None Known

Wanted for...Unlawful Flight – Embezzlement and Suspicion of Murder

Warrant Issued...District of Colorado

Date of Warrant...August 8, 2006

Matthews is wanted for Unlawful Flight to avoid prosecution and by the Denver County Sheriff for Failure to Appear. Matthews jumped bond after her arrest by the Denver, Colorado police for Embezzlement and Suspicion of Murder.

"Shit," Madoc muttered.

Despite what he had just read, he couldn't believe that the sweet waitress he'd met at the diner was wanted on suspicion of murder. Or maybe he just didn't want to believe it. But there it was, in black and white, and as much as he wanted to just forget that Shayna Matthews, aka Jane the waitress, was a fugitive, he couldn't. He was a U.S. Marshal, which meant that it was his duty to bring her in.

His hand tightening on the mouse, Madoc clicked on the print button, and then logged out of the database. Folding the wanted poster of Shayna Matthews, he shoved it into his coat pocket and strode out of the library and across the street to the diner.

Shayna's hands trembled as she hurriedly shoved what little clothing she had into the small overnight bag she'd brought with her when she'd left Denver. Of all the men in the diner she could have flirted with, she had to pick a U.S. Marshal!

Tall and broad-shouldered, not to mention ruggedly handsome, she had noticed the Marshal the moment he'd walked into the diner, and had been disappointed when he had chosen a booth instead of taking a seat at the counter. So when Madge, the other waitress she worked with, had suggested she serve lunch to him, she had not only jumped at the chance, but had openly flirted with him. She'd figured that he was probably only passing through town, but had toyed with the idea of trying to convince him to hang around for awhile. Little did she know that he was there to arrest her, she thought bitterly. And if Madge hadn't learned that he was a U.S. Marshal from her conversation with him earlier, then Shayna would still be at the diner obliviously going on about her business.

God, she had been so stupid! Stupid to stay in Flint Rock for so long instead of going to Canada like she had planned. Stupid to think that a pair of ugly, non-prescription, black-framed glasses would be enough of a disguise to alter her appearance. Stupid not to dye her hair like her sister had suggested.

Still silently berating herself for her stupidity, Shayna grabbed her coat from the bed and put it on. If she hurried, maybe she could catch one of the truckers down at the gas station near the freeway and bum a ride with him. Anyone heading north would be fine with her.

She picked up her suitcase from the bed, and was just about to cross the small room she rented at the boarding house when there came a loud banging on the door.

"Federal Marshal!" a man's voice called. "Open up!"

Shayna froze, her hand tightening reflexively on the handle of her overnight bag as she stared at the door. Oh God, he'd found her, she thought. She couldn't go back to jail! She had to get out of there!

The Marshal banged on the door, louder this time. Heart pounding, Shayna looked around wildly for some other escape route. Her gaze immediately locked on the window on the other side of the small room. Not having to think twice, she dashed over to it. Instead of opening easily like it should have, however, the window didn't budge. Dammit, the darn thing was stuck!

Tears of frustration welling in her eyes, Shayna dropped her bag on the floor and tried to force the window open, but it did no good. The stupid thing probably hadn't been opened in ten years! Spotting a heavy bookend sitting on the low shelf beside the window, she grabbed it and was just about to use it to break the glass when the door burst open.

Still holding onto the bookend, Shayna whirled around with a startled gasp to see the handsome Marshal from the diner standing in the doorway, his weapon drawn and pointed at her.

"Shayna Matthews, you're under arrest," he told her. "Drop that and put your hands up."

Shayna knew she should obey, especially since the Marshal had a gun pointed at her, but she couldn't make herself do it. "You've got the wrong person. My name is Jane," she said, her voice trembling. "Jane Cooper."

His golden-brown eyes went to the bag sitting on the floor beside her. "Nice try," he said sarcastically. "Now, drop what you're holding and put your hands up."

She swallowed hard, but still didn't do as he told her. "You've got the wrong person," she insisted.

The Marshal clenched his jaw. "I'm not going to tell you again," he warned her. "Drop what you're holding and get your hands in the air."

Shayna didn't move. She couldn't let him arrest her. Running had only made her look more guilty, and if she went back to jail, they weren't likely to let her out on bail this time. The thought alone was enough to make her stomach churn.

Her gaze darted to the door and she wondered if she could somehow get past the Marshal. Apparently, he must have read her mind because he started toward her even as she tensed to make a run for it. Shayna's hand tightened on the bookend and before she even realized what she was doing, she drew back her arm and threw it at him.

Shayna just had enough time to see the Marshal's eyes go wide before he ducked. Knowing she would only get one chance at escape, she immediately ran for the door. But she didn't get more than a few feet before a strong hand closed over her arm and spun her around. With a cry that was half frustration, half rage, Shayna balled her hand into a fist and took a swing at the Marshal.

"What the...?!" he began, catching her arm before her fist could connect. "Dammit, take it easy!"

But Shayna wasn't about to take it easy. If she didn't get away from him, she was going to be spending a very long time in prison, maybe even the rest of her life. With that horrific thought motivating her, Shayna savagely tried to jerk free of the Marshal's hold.

"Stop it!" he ordered her, his grip tightening on her arms. "Dammit, I don't want to hurt you!"

"Then let me go!" she shot back, still struggling against him.

But it was obvious that the Marshal wasn't going to let her go, and Shayna fought him wildly. Once she even managed to get her arm free long enough to try to scratch his face, but he quickly captured her wrist in his hand again.

Frustrated, Shayna tried to shove him away from her. To her surprise, she actually managed to catch the Marshal off balance long enough to knock him back onto the bed. She didn't catch him that unaware, however, because instead of releasing her like she hoped he would do, he tightened his grip on her wrists and pulled her down with him.

Ending up sprawled across his lap, Shayna was so stunned for a moment that she didn't even realize the Marshal had let go of her arms sometime during their fall onto the bed. As soon as she did, though, she immediately tried to push herself upright, but a strong hand on her back pushed her down again. She started struggling as hard as she could, anything to keep him from grabbing her arms again. She knew the moment he did, she would end up in handcuffs.

But Shayna was surprised when the Marshal didn't even try to jerk her arms behind her back so that he could handcuff her. She thought for a moment that she might actually have a chance to get away, only to gasp in surprise when she felt his free hand come down hard on her jean-clad bottom. She stilled, her eyes going wide. Had he actually just spanked her? What the hell did he think he was doing?

Before she could say anything though, he brought his hand down again on her other cheek, harder this time, and she yelped.

Her face flaming from embarrassment and anger, Shayna tried to push herself off his lap again, to no avail. "Let me up, you jerk!" she demanded.

The Marshal gave her ass another hard smack. "Not until you agree to behave yourself," he growled.

Shayna cried out as his hand connected with her bottom yet again. "Owwwww! You have no right to spank me!" she told him.

"If you had just come quietly like I told you to, then I wouldn't be forced to do this," he retorted, punctuating each word with a sharp slap to her derriere. "But you leave me no choice. Trust me; spanking you into submission is a lot better than the alternative."

Shayna didn't know what the alternative might be, but she had certainly never been spanked in her life, and she couldn't believe how much it stung! But every time his hand came down on her ass, it felt like her cheeks were going to catch on fire.

"Now, if I let you up, are you going to behave yourself?" he asked, pausing momentarily.

Shayna gritted her teeth. Damn the man! "Yes!" she hissed. "Just let me up already!"

Taking Shayna's arm, he set her back on her feet. Though she really wanted to slap his handsome face, she settled for rubbing her sore bottom instead, only to stop when she realized that the Marshal was reaching for his handcuffs. She couldn't let him take her in, she thought. She had to do something!

## Chapter 2

Shayna knew if she were going to make a run for it that she was going to have to distract the Marshal somehow. He was standing right in front of her, and she'd never get past him if she didn't come up with something good. But she had to try. She wasn't letting him take her in without a fight.

Her gaze darted to the open door and the empty hallway beyond, an idea springing into her head. This had better work, she thought.

"Help me!" she cried. "He's..."

Her shout had the desired effect. At her words, the Marshal half turned toward the door, clearly looking to see who she was talking to. Shayna immediately grabbed the clock from the bedside table and tried to hit him with it. Of course, it probably would have worked better if the clock hadn't still been plugged into the wall at the time. Unfortunately, it didn't quite reach, and instead of knocking the Marshal over the head like she meant to, all she did was knock everything off the night table and turn his attention back to her.

Clearly angry at her attempt to attack him again, the Marshal immediately snatched the clock from her hand and flung it to the floor. "You don't give up, do you?" he growled.

Shayna opened her mouth to retort, but before she could get the words out, the Marshal grabbed her arm and bent her over the bed. The next thing she knew, his hand was coming down on her ass again! What the heck was with this guy? she thought.

"I guess you didn't learn anything from that spanking I just gave you," he said.

He moved back and forth, administering a hard smack on first one cheek and then the other, and she bit back a cry as she glared at him over her shoulder. She refused to give him the satisfaction of letting him know how much the



spans really stung.

“I learned that you’re a brute!” she snapped.

His jaw tightened at that. “Still feisty, I see,” he said. “Well, then I guess I’m going to have to make sure I don’t let you up this time until I spank all the fight out of you!”

Obviously intent on keeping his word, the Marshal proceeded to do just that. Much to Shayna’s dismay, he smacked her bottom over and over, and while she thought he had spanked her hard the first time, it had been nothing compared to how hard he was spanking her now. It felt like her bottom was on fire! Thank God, she was wearing jeans, she thought. She couldn’t imagine what the spanking would feel like on her bare bottom!

But if he thought that a simple spanking would take the fight out of her, he was wrong! It might have stung like crazy, but Shayna still fought him wildly. She squirmed and wiggled as hard as she could, but it did no good. The Marshal had wrapped his arm around her waist and held her down more easily than she would have thought possible. She didn’t think she’d ever seen a man so strong!

“Okay, Okay!” she cried. “I get it! I’ll stop fighting you and go along peacefully!”

At her words, the Marshal stopped spanking her, much to her relief. “Really?” he said sarcastically. “It seems like you’re giving in a little fast to me. For all I know, you’re trying to trick me again. Well, I’m not falling for it this time!”

Her eyes widened in shock at that. He couldn’t mean to spank her more; her bottom couldn’t take it! But before she could cajole him anymore, his hand was coming down on her tender asscheeks again.

Shayna squealed as the Marshal continued to spank her. Right then her ass stung so much she thought she probably would have promised him anything, but all he wanted was her assurance that she would behave herself and go with him quietly. And if it would make him stop spanking her, then she would give it to him. But the moment his back was turned, she would be gone, she promised herself.

“Stop, please!” she begged. “I promise I won’t try to run! Please just stop spanking me! Pleeeeee!”

This time, the miserable whine in her voice must have swayed him, because he stopped, and Shayna let out a sigh of relief. She would have immediately reached back to rub her throbbing ass, but the Marshal grabbed her arms and held them captive behind her back. So that he could handcuff her, she supposed. Every instinct told her to struggle, but she forced herself to remain still while he snapped the cold steel tightly around her wrists.

Taking her arm, the Marshal pulled Shayna to her feet and led her to the door. Once again, she had to fight the urge to try and run as he escorted her down the stairs and outside. She had to be smart about this and bide her time, and wait until the opportunity to escape presented itself. She wasn’t going to get far with handcuffs on, and told herself that she would just have to wait until he took them off during a bathroom break or something.

But to her surprise, and utter dismay, the Marshal didn’t lead her to his vehicle like she had expected, but toward the sheriff’s station down the street. Her steps faltered as panic set in. She had naturally assumed that the Marshal would take her back to Denver. There was no way she would be able to escape locked up in jail.

Swallowing hard, Shayna allowed him to lead her down the street through the snow. As they passed the diner, she kept her face averted, not wanting to look over and see all the people she knew staring and whispering about her. It was going to be humiliating enough to be dragged before the sheriff; the man came into the diner every day for lunch.

The sheriff was talking to one of his deputies in the outer office, and both men looked up when they entered. Upon realizing that the Marshal had her in handcuffs, the sheriff’s gray eyes narrowed. Before he could say

anything, however, the Marshal showed the other man his badge and explained that Shayna was wanted back in Denver for embezzlement and suspicion of murder.

“He’s confused me with someone else,” Shayna told the sheriff after the Marshal had finished.

The Marshal tightened his grip on her arm and held her back when she tried to take a step forward. “Save it,” he growled.

Turning to the sheriff, the Marshal produced a folded piece of paper from his pocket. At first, Shayna thought it was a copy of the warrant for her arrest, but as he handed it over to the other man, she saw that it was a wanted poster with her picture on it. She felt her heart sink as the sheriff read it over.

Madoc was watching the sheriff, too. At first, the other man had looked like he wasn’t going to take Madoc’s word that Shayna Matthews was a fugitive. He never liked dealing with these small-town sheriffs; sometimes, they got really prickly about someone poaching on their jurisdiction. But it should be obvious from looking at the wanted poster that Madoc had made no mistake.

“Looks like you’re right,” the sheriff said as he folded the paper and handed it back to Madoc. “What do you want me to do about it?”

Madoc was stunned by the man’s words. “I want you to hold her, of course,” he said. “I’ll talk to the district attorney when I get back to Denver, and he can arrange to have her transferred. It should only be a week or two.”

“Fraid not, Marshal,” the sheriff said. “You’re not gonna be able to leave her here.”

Madoc frowned. “Why not?”

“Son, have you looked outside?” the older man said, gesturing toward the window. “There’s a big snow storm coming. Me and my deputies will be pulling cars out of ditches and saving livestock for the next couple of days. Ain’t gonna be no one around to watch your prisoner. I was just getting ready to close down the jail when you came in.”

Madoc’s frown deepened. How the hell could the sheriff just shut down the jail? “You’re kidding me, right?”

The other man shrugged. “No, son. I can’t have her here if there’s no one to watch her.”

Madoc shook his head in disbelief. That had to be one of the most stupid things he’d ever heard. “That’s why they put locks on the cell doors,” he pointed out dryly. “So you don’t have to watch the prisoners all the time.”

The sheriff drew himself up to look Madoc squarely in the eye. “I’m not locking no one up without someone here to watch them, especially someone like this poor, little lady here,” he said. “With the snow they’re predicting, it could be days before one of my deputies or I can get back here to check on her.”

Madoc wanted to point out to the man that Shayna Matthews wasn’t a “poor, little lady,” but a wanted fugitive, and then figured it would only be a waste of time. “If you won’t lock her up, then what the hell am I supposed to do with her?” he said instead.

The sheriff shrugged. “Well, you can get a room at the motel, I suppose,” he said. “Or you could just take her back to the boarding house. It’s not like she’s going anywhere in this snow.”

Madoc stared at the other man, dumbfounded. What the hell kind of Podunk town was Flint Creek anyway? He shook his head. “Well, if you won’t hold her, then I’ll take her to the U.S. Marshals office in Billings.”

The sheriff’s eyes went wide. “Billings is almost two hundred miles from here,” he said. “There’s no way you’ll make it that far in this snow. You’d be better off staying here.”

Right, Madoc thought in disgust. "I'll take my chances with the snow," he told the other man. Tightening his grip on Shayna Matthews' arm, he turned toward the door. "Come on," he growled.

Outside, the snow had started to come down heavier, and Madoc swore under his breath as he led his prisoner to his SUV. Damn, he wished he'd never stopped at that diner!

"The sheriff's right," Shayna grumbled beside him. "It's crazy to try and drive all the way to Billings in this weather. We'll never make it."

Madoc gave her a hard look as they came to a halt beside his SUV. "I don't remember asking for your opinion," he said coldly as he brushed snow from the door handle.

"Well, I'm giving it to you anyway!" she shot back. "You might be willing to risk your life, but I don't want you risking mine!"

Madoc glared at her. "Like I said, you don't get a vote." He yanked open the passenger door. "Get in."

Shayna hesitated for so long that Madoc thought he would have to forcibly put her in the vehicle, but with a baleful look, she climbed into the SUV. With her hands cuffed behind her back, the whole thing was a little awkward, but she managed, and once she was inside, Madoc slammed the door, and then walked around to the other side and got in.

"You're making a huge mistake," Shayna said as he started the engine and put the truck in gear. "I'm innocent of those crimes."

He snorted. "That's what they all say."

"If I had done it, don't you think I would have run?" she asked.

Madoc gave her a sidelong glance. "You did run," he reminded her as he merged onto the snowy highway.

Shayna sighed in exasperation. "I meant before I got arrested," she said. "If I had really stolen all that money, do you think I would have run off to Flint Rock, Montana?"

He shrugged. "Maybe you figured that no one would look for you there."

She shook her head. "That doesn't even make sense! If I had embezzled half-a-million dollars, I sure as heck wouldn't be working as a waitress in a diner."

Madoc didn't answer. Though he had to admit that waitressing at a diner in some Podunk town after stealing half-a-million dollars didn't make a whole hell of a lot of sense, he couldn't deny that it had actually been rather smart on her part. If he hadn't decided to stop at that diner to get something to eat, Shayna Matthews would still be back there working and no one would have been the wiser.

"Dammit, why won't you at least listen to my side of the story?" she snapped. "I was framed, I'm telling you!"

His hand tightened on wheel as the tires hit a slippery patch of road. "Enough already!" he told her harshly. "Save your conspiracy theories for the courtroom, Ms. Matthews, because I don't care. As far as I'm concerned, you're a fugitive, and it's my job to bring you in. Now, shut up and let me drive."

Madoc waited for Shayna to argue her case further, but to his surprise, she fell silent. A moment later, he heard the soft sound of crying. He swore silently. What did she think, that he would be moved by her tears and agree to let her go? Yeah, right. He didn't buy her innocent act, or her fake tears. She could cry all the way to Billings, for all he cared.

But a few moments later, Madoc was already trying to figure out what he could say to get her to stop crying. He tried to convince himself that it was just because he didn't like the sounds of her sniffing, but in reality, Madoc admitted that he just didn't like seeing a pretty woman so upset.

So, what was he going to do? Take the cuffs off and let her go? Cursing himself for being so stupid, Madoc turned his attention back to the snow-covered stretch of highway before him and tried to ignore her crying. It stopped soon enough, but then a few minutes later, Shayna spoke, interrupting his concentration.

"Billings is a long drive," she said in a tearful voice. "Couldn't you at least take off these handcuffs until we get there? My hands are getting numb."

He slanted her a hard look. "No."

"I promise I won't try to escape," she added.

Madoc let out a harsh laugh. "I've heard that before."

"That was when we were back in Flint Rock and there were lots of places to go," she pointed out. "It's not like I can jump out of the truck. Besides, where would I go out here in this snow? Even if I managed to get away from you, I'd probably end up freezing to death." A pause, then, softly, "Please."

Madoc clenched his jaw. He had no doubt that she was playing him. But he also knew that he had a real weakness for beautiful women. And Shayna Matthews was definitely beautiful. He tried to be reasonable. If his prisoner hadn't been so dang sexy, would he even be considering taking the cuffs off? he asked himself. Probably not, he decided. But thirty seconds later, Madoc found himself slowing to a stop in the middle of the deserted highway, and putting the truck in park. Shutting off the engine, he pulled out the keys.

"Turn around," he ordered Shayna.

She blinked, clearly surprised that he had agreed, but then scooted around on the seat so that her back was to him. Inserting the key into the lock, he undid it, and then took off the cuffs. Rubbing her wrists, Shayna shifted around in her seat again to look at him.

"Thank you," she said softly.

Madoc scowled at her, hoping he wasn't going to regret this. If she thought that doe-eyed Bambi look of hers was going to have some sort of an effect on him, then she was wrong. It didn't matter how damn sexy she looked in those black-rimmed glasses of hers. "Just don't get it into your head to try escaping again," he said gruffly. "Because those spankings I gave you back at the boarding house won't seem like anything compared to the one you'd get for making me chase you through this storm."

At the mention of the spankings he'd given her, Shayna's face colored and she quickly turned away. Thinking that the threat of another spanking should be enough to keep her from doing anything foolish, Madoc started the engine and slowly eased his SUV back up to speed on the snow-covered highway.

But even though he tried to focus on driving, he couldn't get the image out of his mind of having Shayna over his knee. Even though he had been busy trying to subdue her at the time, he couldn't help but notice how great her ass had looked in those tight jeans she was wearing. Just the thought was enough to make him hard.

Madoc caught himself before his thoughts could go any further. What the hell was he doing? Shayna Matthews might be hot, but she was still a fugitive, dammit! He had no business fantasizing about her. And he sure as hell had no business putting her over his knee for a spanking again!

He wasn't even sure what had made him spank her in the first place. It certainly wasn't the way he usually dealt

with fugitives, that was for damn sure. But when she'd ended up over his knee during their tussle, giving her tight little ass a smack had seemed like the most natural thing in the world. And he had to admit that it had gotten her attention.

Madoc supposed he could just blame the whole thing on one of his former girlfriends. He had heard of other couples spanking, of course, but he hadn't ever considered doing it until a girlfriend had told him that she liked it when a guy smacked her on the ass. He had been happy to oblige, and they had ended up doing it all the time. Maybe that was why he had spanked Shayna Matthews, he thought. Because even though that other relationship had ended years ago, it just seemed natural to spank a sexy girl when she misbehaved.

Madoc had to force thoughts of spanking from his mind, as he realized how heavy the snow had started coming down. There were already six or eight inches on the highway, and with no other cars out, it was getting hard to see exactly where the road was. Maybe that old sheriff had been right, he thought. Maybe he should have stayed in town. Madoc had to admit that driving to Billings in this weather hadn't been the brightest decision he'd ever made. Well, it was too late to change his mind now. But at least he could put chains on the tires. That would definitely help.

Guiding the SUV onto the shoulder, he turned off the engine.

"Why are we stopping?" Shayna asked.

"I have to put on tire chains. Stay put," he told her, and then added, "And don't try anything."

Taking the keys out of the ignition, he grabbed his gloves from the back seat and got out of the truck. Going around to the back of the SUV, he opened the lift gate and took out the tire chains before closing it again. Going back around to the front, he gave Shayna a glance to find her huddled in the front seat watching him. He knew that the truck would get cold quickly without the heater going, but there was no way he was going to leave it running while he put on the tire chains.

It took him at least a half hour to untangle all four sets of chains and get them positioned on the ground in front of the tires. It wasn't that difficult, but by the time Madoc had finished, he was not only freezing, but also covered in snow. And he still to drive the truck forward onto the chains, and then tighten everything up, which was going to take at least another fifteen minutes. Deciding to drive to Billings definitely had to be on his top-ten list of stupid decisions, he thought to himself. They'd be lucky if they didn't end up in a ditch!

Swearing under his breath, Madoc brushed the snow from his jacket with his gloved hands as he walked back around to the driver's side. The windows were so frosted up and covered with snow that he couldn't even see inside. He had to brush quite a bit of snow off before he could even open the door. He yanked it open and was just climbing inside when he noticed that the passenger seat was empty. Shit, he thought.

### Chapter 3

Though Shayna had been planning to escape all along, she was surprised when the opportunity had presented itself so soon after the Marshal had arrested her. But knowing that she might not get another chance, she'd taken it. The Marshal had been so focused on the tire chains that he hadn't even noticed when she'd slipped out of the truck, quietly closed the door, and disappeared into the wooded area along the highway. Of course, he would discover that she had run soon enough, and when he did, he would immediately come after her. That thought made her quicken her step.

Once she had gotten away, her strategy had become simple. She would go back the way they had come, staying to the wooded area, but still traveling parallel to the highway until she got back to Flint Rock. It might take awhile, but once there, she would implement her original getaway plan and hitch a ride with a trucker. But in her hurry to get away from the Marshal, Shayna had gone deeper into the forest than she'd intended and before she knew it,

she was lost. Too afraid to retrace her steps for fear of running into the Marshal, she pushed ahead. The highway had to be somewhere close, she told herself.

It was snowing even harder than it had been when they had left Flint Rock, the wind blowing the snow sideways even in the depths of the forest. Wishing she had gloves, Shayna stuck her hands in pockets in an effort to warm them up, but it didn't help. Having grown up in Colorado, she should be used to this type of weather, but she was frozen to the core. It didn't help that she had tripped over a fallen tree and landed face first in a pile of deep snow in her haste to get away, or that she'd slipped a little while after that and fallen on her butt. Now, her clothes were full of snow and soaking wet.

Sure that she had been walking for hours, she took her hands out of her pockets just long enough to push up the sleeve of her coat so that she could see her watch. She was surprised to discover that it had barely been thirty minutes since she'd slipped out of the Marshal's SUV. How could she have gotten herself so lost in that amount of time? At this rate, she'd freeze to death before she ever got back to Flint Rock.

Shayna stood where she was for a moment, wondering if she should continue in the same direction she'd been heading for the past half hour in the hopes that she would eventually get to Flint Rock, or if she should retrace her steps back to the Marshal's SUV. As much as she didn't want to go back the way she'd come, she liked the idea of dying of hypothermia even less, which could happen if she didn't get someplace warm, and soon.

Her mind made up, Shayna started back the way she had come, but within a dozen feet, she realized that her tracks had been completely covered by the falling snow. Tears welled in her eyes and she resolutely blinked them back. What was she going to do now?

Telling herself she couldn't just stand there, or she really would die of hypothermia, Shayna began to trudge through the snow in the direction she hoped led to the Marshal's SUV. After another thirty minutes of walking, however, she was just about to give up and head in another direction when she stumbled out of the trees and into a clearing.

Shayna blinked, wondering if the small cabin in front of her were a hallucination. What would a cabin be doing out there in the middle of nowhere? Did people hallucinate when they went into hypothermia? she wondered. She didn't know, and right then, she was too cold to really care. If she were just imagining the cabin, maybe she could pretend to get warm if she went inside. Shivering, she eagerly hurried through the snow to the cabin.

Not bothering to consider whether it was occupied or not, Shayna automatically grabbed the doorknob and gave it a turn, only to frown when she realized the door was locked. That was actually good, she thought. If the door was locked, then that probably meant the cabin was real and not a hallucination. Balling her other hand into a fist, she banged loudly on the door.

"Hello?" she called. "Is anyone in there?"

When she didn't get an answer, Shayna leaned forward to look through the window in the door. Though she couldn't see much inside the darkened cabin, she could see enough to know that it was empty. She chewed on her lower lip, wondering if she should break into the cabin or not, but then told herself that she had no choice. It was either that or freeze to death.

Taking a step back, she looked around for something she could use to break the window. Spotting the stack of logs on the porch beside the door, she quickly picked one up and, gripping it as tightly as she could in her numb fingers, she smashed it against the glass. Dropping the log back onto the porch, she carefully reached her arm through the opening and unlocked the door. Pushing it open, she went inside, and then closed it behind her.

She felt warmer already, Shayna thought. Grateful that she had finally found shelter from the storm, she leaned back against the door for a moment and took in her surroundings. It was sparsely furnished, with a small bed

against one wall, a table and chairs, and a row of tiny cabinets with a countertop beneath them. But it was the pot-belly stove on the opposite side of the room that caught her attention. Thank God, she thought. A fire was exactly what she needed. She was so cold that she could barely keep her teeth from chattering.

Eager to get a fire going, Shayna stumbled over to the stove. She almost cried with happiness when she spied the big box of matches on the shelf behind the stove. Though there were no logs, there was a box with smaller pieces of wood, as well as stacks of old newspapers she could use to get the fire going. Once she did, she would go back out to the porch for some logs. The thought of going back out into the snow again made her shiver even more and she had to fight to control the shaking that threatened to overwhelm her. Telling herself that she would be warm soon enough, she bent over to open the door of the stove. There was a pile of old ash right in the middle that would have to be moved before she could start a fire. Picking up the small fire poker from where it rested against the wall, she was just about to use it to scrape out the charred bits of wood when the door to the cabin burst open.

Startled by both the noise and the gust of freezing cold wind that swept into the cabin, Shayna whirled around to find the Marshal standing in the doorway. He was covered in snow and looked even madder than when she had tried to hit him with the bookend back at the boarding house. She took a step back, her hand tightening reflexively on the poker.

He advanced on her, his eyes narrowing. "Put down the poker," he ordered.

He probably didn't realize her hand was so numb that she was lucky she could hold onto the poker at all, Shayna thought. Gripping it with both hands, she shook her head. "Can't you just go back to Denver and forget you ever saw me?" she pleaded.

The Marshal took another step toward her. "You know I can't do that," he said.

"Can't?" she demanded. "Or won't?"

"Same thing. Either way, you're going back to jail," he reasoned, taking another step toward her. "Now, put down the poker. You're already in enough trouble as it is. Do you really want to add assaulting a Federal Marshal to your list of crimes?"

As he spoke, the Marshal took another step toward her. But though Shayna gripped the poker even more tightly, she knew deep down that she would never be able to hit him with it, even if she weren't almost frozen in place. Which was why it was almost ridiculously easy for him to take it away from her a moment later. Though she tried desperately to hold onto it, he wrestled the poker from her grasp within seconds and tossed it onto the floor. The next thing she knew, she was face-down over the small table. Damn him, he was going to spank her again! Then again, as frozen as her butt was, she probably wouldn't even feel it, she thought.

"You were already in for one hell of a spanking for making me chase you through the snow," he growled. "But after that little episode with the poker, you'll be lucky if you can sit down by the time I'm done."

Shayna glared at him over her shoulder. "I should have hit you with the damn thing, you bastard!"

Behind her, Madoc ground his jaw. If there was ever a woman that needed a good, hard spanking, it was Shayna Matthews, he thought. And this time, he wasn't stopping until he was sure that all the fight was out of her. Running off into the snow had to be the dumbest thing anyone had even done.

Lifting his hand, he brought it down on her shapely, jean-clad ass in a series of quick, sharp smacks, only to abruptly stop after a dozen or so spans.

"My God, you're soaking wet!" he exclaimed. "What the hell did you do, go for a swim somewhere?"

The look she gave him this time wasn't nearly as defiant as before. "I t-tripped and f-fell," she stammered, and he

realized that her teeth chattering.

Madoc stared at her in disbelief. Tripped and fell? It looked like she had been rolling around in the snow for an hour! He'd been so angry before that he hadn't noticed, but her lips were blue and she was shivering uncontrollably, he realized. Why the hell hadn't she said something to him before? Because she had been more interested in whacking him with the fire poker, he reminded himself wryly.

Even though Shayna really did deserve a spanking, Madoc wasn't about to give her one while she was on the verge of hypothermia. As furious as he was with her for trying to escape, he definitely didn't want her to freeze to death, especially now that he had her back in custody again. He would have to get her warmed up, and fast!

The spanking forgotten for the moment, Madoc took Shayna's arm and gently pulled her to her feet. "We need to get you out of these wet clothes before you freeze to death," he told her.

Without waiting for a reply, Madoc unzipped Shayna's coat and tugged it off her shoulders. She was so cold and exhausted that she didn't even bother to resist, but simply stood there. That only made him more worried. All the fire that had shone in her eyes as she'd tried to hold him at bay with the poker was gone now. Tossing the wet coat onto a chair, he turned back and slid his hands beneath the hem of her shirt.

Shayna's head jerked up in surprise. "What are you doing!" she said, trying to push his hands away.

Madoc paused, but didn't take his hands away. "I'm trying to get you out of these wet clothes and into bed before you freeze to death," he explained. "Now stop being such a pain and let me help you."

She looked at him in confusion, but after a moment, she slowly nodded her head.

Madoc wasted no more time getting the rest of Shayna's wet clothes off. Lifting her shirt over her head, he tossed it on top of her coat, and then quickly went to work on her jeans. As he unbuttoned them, however, he couldn't help but notice how round and perfect her breasts were beneath the sexy lace bra she wore, or the way his body responded to the sight. Stop it! he chided himself. Now was not the time to be ogling his prisoner. She was standing there freezing to death, for heaven's sake! But even as he told himself that, he knew he would have to be a monk not to see how hot she was, especially when those long, shapely legs of hers came into view as he pulled off her sodden jeans. Even flushed pink and covered in gooseflesh, they looked great.

Trying hard not to look at his half-naked prisoner, Madoc led her over to the bed, sat her down, and wrapped the blanket around her shivering form.

"I'm going to make a fire," he said.

Going over to the pot-belly stove, Madoc grabbed several pieces of newspaper from the stack and, crumpling them up, shoved them inside along with some kindling. Reaching for the box of long-handled matches on the shelf above the stove, he lit one and held the flame to the newspaper. Needing to go outside for some logs now that he'd gotten the fire going, he closed the door to the stove and turned to head for the door, only to pause in mid-step when he caught sight of Shayna.

She was huddled beneath the blanket, shivering and watching him with a glazed expression. Fool woman, he thought. She was lucky she hadn't ended up dead running out in the middle of a snowstorm like that. Shaking his head, Madoc opened the door and stepped out onto the porch.

Outside, the snow was coming down even harder and didn't look like it was going to let up any time soon. Which meant that he and Shayna were probably going to be stuck in the cabin until it stopped. Great, he thought.

Of course, he wouldn't be in this position right now if he had just left Shayna Matthews cuffed, Madoc told himself angrily as he stacked logs into his arms. He'd gone after her as soon as he realized she was missing, but



when he hadn't caught up with her right away, it quickly became apparent that she had more of a head start than he'd first thought. Furious with himself for letting a prisoner in his custody escape, he'd spent the next half hour trying to find her. But the snow had been falling hard and fast, and it was just by luck that he'd come across Shayna's trail at all. Even then, it had taken awhile to find her. If she hadn't stumbled across the cabin, they might both be in trouble by now.

His arms full, Madoc turned and went back inside the cabin with the logs. Though Shayna was still wrapped up in the blanket, she didn't look like she was shivering anymore, he noticed. Setting the logs down beside the stove, he added a couple to the fire, and then turned his attention to the cabinets. While he wasn't all that hungry after the big meal he'd had at the diner, he had no doubt that Shayna could do with something warm. He just hoped there was something in the cabin to eat.

Though the first two cabinets were empty, he was relieved to find that the third held a jar of instant coffee as well as half a dozen cans of soup and several cans of fruit. It wasn't much, but it would do, he thought. The cans were covered in dust, but seemed to be in good condition. Grabbing one of the cans of soup, he opened it and poured the contents into a pot. He gave it a sniff test, decide it was still good, and then set it on the stove to heat.

While he waited for the soup to warm up, Madoc took Shayna's wet shirt and jeans, and draped them over the backs of the chairs closest to the stove so that they would be able to dry. When that was done, he checked the soup and found that it was already bubbling. Taking two mugs from the shelf, he wiped them out with his shirt and poured a generous amount of soup into both of them.

Mugs in hand, he walked over to where Shayna was sitting on the bed and held one out to her. "Drink this," he said.

As Shayna reached out to take the mug, the blanket slipped from one shoulder, and Madoc caught a glimpse of the tops of her breasts before she pulled it back up. "Thank you," she said softly.

Madoc said nothing in reply, only watched while she drank the soup. When she had finished, he took the mug from her and set it down on the table alongside his own.

"Are you feeling warmer now?" he asked, turning back to her.

She nodded. "A little," she said quietly, but he could see that she was getting back to her normal self. "You still look like you're cold, though," she added after a moment.

Madoc frowned at her observation. The cabin was taking a long time to heat up, he supposed. He hadn't realized it, but now that Shayna had mentioned it, he had to admit that he was a little cold. But he wasn't about to let her know that. He knew it was silly, but he just couldn't let on that he was cold. Men didn't do that, not where he came from. And definitely not in front of a woman, especially one that was a prisoner. "I'm fine," he said.

She lifted a brow, clearly not believing him. "You were outside just as long as I was, which means you're probably just as cold as I am," she pointed out. "Why don't you get into bed and we can share the blanket?"

Madoc lifted a brow at her words. Though the invitation to crawl into a warm bed with a half-naked woman was tempting, he had no doubt Shayna Matthews was trying to play him again. Just like she had when she'd convinced him to take off the cuffs. Well, not this time. "I said, I'm fine," he told her gruffly.

She shrugged. "If you say so," she said. "But you're obviously freezing."

Madoc made no reply, hoping she would let the matter drop, but to his annoyance, she continued.

"What is it with you men, anyway?" she said. "You think that if you admit you're cold, we'll think less of you or something. Well, you don't have to worry about that with me. I couldn't possibly think any less of you than I

already do. So, stand over there and freeze if you'd rather."

He ground his jaw, refusing to rise to the bait. "I will," he said.

When Shayna made no comment, he thought she had finally given up on trying to cajole him, but then she spoke again.

"You're starting to shiver," she said. "Not only is it really blowing your whole tough-guy image, but it's making me cold again."

Madoc scowled at that. He knew she was trying to embarrass him into admitting that he really was cold. Then, once she got him into bed, she would try to use her feminine charms on him. But unfortunately, though he didn't want to fall for her scheme, she was right about him being cold.

He thought about it for a moment. Aw, the hell with it, he thought. He wasn't going to fall prey to her charms, so why did he care what she was up to? And since that was true, there was no reason to stand there freezing. Shaking his head, he motioned for her to move over.

"All right," he said. "But only because you're being such a pain about the whole thing."

As he sat on the edge of the bed to take off his boots, Shayna scooted over to make room for him, but the bed was small, so it did little good. There was no way he was going to fit his large frame on there with her comfortably unless they cuddled up close together. As he moved closer to her sexy, curvy body, Madoc told himself once again that he wasn't going to allow her feminine charms have any effect on him.

#### Chapter 4

Shayna tried to give the Marshal as much room as she could on the bed while still trying to find a comfortable position. This had to be the smallest bed she'd ever seen, she thought to herself. Or maybe it just seemed smaller because the man in it with her was so big. Then again, maybe it was because it had been a long time since she'd been in bed with a man at all. It hadn't exactly been at the top of her list of things to do since going on the run. And she had to admit that the Marshal was gorgeous.

Stealing a glance at him from beneath her lashes, however, Shayna almost laughed at the effort he was making to keep his distance. It was obvious that he hadn't wanted to get into bed with her. It had probably been a blow to his manly ego to admit that he was freezing, she thought. But she really had hated to see him standing there shivering. Of course, just because she hadn't wanted him to freeze didn't mean that she was completely comfortable with the idea of being in bed half naked with him, either. But sharing body heat made sense. Moreover, it had gotten him to stop hovering over her like a guard dog. She might be his prisoner, but it didn't mean she wanted to be reminded of it.

Shayna studied the Marshal in silence. He was lying on his back, his arm pillowed behind his head, his expression unreadable as he stared up at the ceiling. She was going to stuck in this cabin with him for at least a day or two, she thought, which made him a captive audience of sorts. Perhaps she could find a way to turn that to her advantage. But as much as wanted to jump right in with both feet and plead her case with him, she knew he wouldn't be very receptive if she did. Which meant that she would have take it slowly.

"What's your name?" she asked after a moment.

He gave her a sidelong glance, his golden-brown eyes narrowing suspiciously. "My name?"

She shrugged. "Call me old fashioned, but I like to know a guy's name when I climb into bed with him," she said dryly.

Though his mouth quirked slightly at her lame attempt at humor, he made no reply, and she was about to think he wasn't going to answer her question at all when he finally spoke.

"It's Madoc," he said. "Madoc Cutler."

Madoc. It was an unusual name, but strong sounding, like a hero in a romance book might have, she thought. Somehow, it fit a guy that hunted down fugitives for a living.

Deciding that talking about the weather would be non-productive, Shayna fell silent again. Despite the fact that she knew she had to take her time with him and get him to slowly let down his guard, she couldn't think of a single thing to talk about that wasn't related to her being a fugitive.

"So," she said, trying to sound nonchalant. "How did you find me?"

His jaw tightened at her question. "It wasn't that difficult once I picked up your trail in the snow," he said.

Her brow furrowed when she realized he thought she meant how he'd found her at the cabin. "No, I meant how did you find me in Flint Rock?" she clarified.

"Oh," he said. "I remembered seeing you on a wanted poster, and recognized you."

Shayna's frown deepened at his words. "So, you really were just passing through town and decided to stop for something to eat at the diner?" she asked incredulously. "I thought you had come there specifically to arrest me."

The Marshal turned his head to look at her. "I'm actually supposed to be on vacation. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time," he said, and then when she scowled, added, "Or not, I guess, depending on your point of view. You know, you really should have dyed your hair or something. The glasses aren't much of a disguise."

"I'll remember that the next time," she said sarcastically, only to realize that there wasn't going to be a next time. Not unless she could manage to escape from Madoc Cutler.

She rested her head on her hand and gazed down at the handsome Marshal. "I didn't steal that money, you know," she said softly. "And I certainly didn't murder anyone."

"The police back in Denver think you did," he said.

"Well, they're wrong," she insisted. "I'm innocent. I was framed."

Shayna held her breath, waiting for him to tell her once again that he wasn't interested and that he didn't want to hear her going on and on about how innocent she was. But to her surprise, the Marshal simply said, "Then why did you run?"

"Because even my lawyer thought I was guilty. He told me that we would never win with the evidence they had against me, and that I was going to go to prison for a very long time," she said. "He advised me to take the deal the district attorney offered, but I couldn't. Not only would I have gone to jail for ten years for something I didn't do, but part of the plea bargain was that I would have to return the money. I didn't have it, so I couldn't very well accept the plea bargain."

Shayna waited for Madoc to say something, but when he didn't, she knew she was going to have to make herself more sympathetic in his eyes. "Even my family told me that I should run," she said. "They knew I hadn't done what the police said, and that the way things were going, I could end up in jail for the rest of my life."

Again, she waited for the Marshal to say something, but instead, he just stared up at the ceiling.

“Even with my family urging me to go, it wasn’t an easy decision to go on the run,” she continued. “I’ve always been really close with my family, both my parents and my younger sister. I was afraid of what becoming a fugitive would do to them. I didn’t want them hounded by the cops or the media. But what could I do? I didn’t want to go to jail for something I didn’t do. I know I probably shouldn’t be telling you this, but my sister helped me get away. I’ve been on the run ever since.”

Beside her, Madoc seemed to be considering her words. “The warrant said you were wanted for suspected murder, which means that no body was found,” he said. “What’s that about?”

Shayna was a little surprised that the Marshal didn’t already know the story, especially since it had been all over the news. But she imagined that after awhile, all the crimes he read about just blurred together. She was just happy that he was actually finally willing to listen to her side of it.

“It’ll probably be easier if I start at the beginning,” she said. “I worked at a big manufacturing company back in Denver. For the past several years, I worked directly for the Chief Financial Officer, Evan Mercer. My job was to oversee the employee retirement funds,” she explained. “We have a lot of employees and the funds are worth a lot of money. A couple of weeks before everything happened, some computer programs I had running brought up some red flags indicating some irregularities in the funds. It was nothing drastic, but more money than usual was going out, and though I checked and double-checked, I couldn’t figure out where it was going.”

She reached up to tuck her hair behind her ear. “I started to get a really funny feeling and decided I’d better mention it to Evan,” she continued. “But that night, he called me at home and asked me to meet him at the office. He said he needed to talk to me about something important, and that it couldn’t wait until morning. When I asked what he wanted to talk to me about, he said he didn’t want to discuss it over the phone.”

“So, what did he want to talk to you about?” the Marshal prompted.

“I don’t know,” Shayna replied. “When I got to the office, he wasn’t there. I thought that maybe he was just late, so I waited for awhile, but he never showed, so I finally left and went home. I figured I’d talk to him the next morning, but he didn’t come in to work.” She paused. “Later that day, the police came by with a warrant to seize all of our records. Apparently, they’d received an anonymous tip that half-a-million dollars had been stolen from the retirement fund. Before I even knew what was going on, they came back to arrest me for embezzlement.”

Shayna swallowed hard at the memory of how humiliating it had been to be handcuffed and led out of her office while her co-workers had watched. “I thought it was all just a big mistake, but then the police started showing me all the evidence they had against me,” she said. “They had numbers for Cayman bank accounts that I never opened, reservations for a plane flight out of the country that I never made, and emails to my boss that I never sent discussing the best way to go about moving the money I had supposedly stolen.”

She sighed. “I thought that Evan would show up and straighten everything out, but then the nightmare got even worse. My lawyer told me that with the amount of evidence the cops had against me, they would have no problem making the embezzlement charges stick. But the cops wanted me for more than that. They started trying to get me to confess to killing Evan. It was their theory that we had embezzled the money together, but that I had gotten greedy and decided to kill him so I could have it all for myself.”

“And they were sure he’d been murdered?” Madoc asked when she finished.

She shrugged. “They seemed convinced of it,” she said. “They found blood at his house, as well as my fingerprints were all over the place. I tried to tell them that I didn’t know anything about the blood, and that my fingerprints were there because I’d been to his house dozens of times. But they weren’t really interested in hearing my explanations.”

“Didn’t your lawyer ever suggest that maybe this Evan Mercer had actually stolen the money and set you up?”

Madoc said.

“He brought it up,” Shayna admitted. “But with all the physical evidence against me, the cops weren’t going to even look into the possibility that I’d been framed. It would just make their case weaker.”

Madoc was silent a moment. “So, what do you think?” he finally asked. “Could Evan Mercer have set you up?”

Shayna thought a moment. “I don’t know, but I hope not,” she said honestly. Of course, if her boss wasn’t behind it, then that probably meant he actually had been murdered, she thought grimly. “Evan and I have been friends since I started working at the company. He’d always been like a father-figure to me. I can’t imagine him framing me for embezzlement and murder.”

Beside her, Madoc shrugged his broad shoulders. “If not him, then who?”

Shayna didn’t answer because she really didn’t have an answer to give him. In her heart, she really didn’t think that her boss was the one behind this, but she had no other suspect to offer. She wished she could think of something else to say, something that might sway the Marshal into believing her, but unfortunately, she had already told him the whole story.

Shayna chewed on her lower lip. At least the Marshal had been willing to listen to her this time, which had surprised her. Not that it meant much, she supposed. But it was the best she could hope for at this point. Maybe if she had a chance to keep working him, he might actually start to believe her.

She would have to take it slowly, though. If she pushed too hard, he might get suspicious and realize that she was trying to play him. That would only get her turned over to the cops that much faster. Or get her put over his knee again. She blushed at the thought.

She had been lucky that the Marshal had taken pity on her when he had found her at the cabin. As furious as he had been, her bottom might not have been able to take it. What was it with him and spanking, anyway? she thought. Didn’t he know he was in the twenty-first century? She didn’t even think people still did that.

The first time he’d spanked her she had been so shocked by it that she hadn’t really realized what was going on. But that second time - when she had tried to hit him with the clock - she had definitely felt every smack. Even now, she could almost feel the sting of his hand coming down on her bottom. Oh God, was her bottom actually tingling? she wondered.

She shook her head, trying to clear it. Get those thought out of your head right now, she told herself. Focus on the important stuff, like figuring out what you’re going to say to the Marshal tomorrow. She needed to continue to try to get him on her side. But she would have to be subtle, she warned herself.

At the sound of his deep breathing, she realized the Marshal had fallen asleep. Turning her head, she studied him again. Wow, he was really gorgeous, she thought. And not nearly as tough-looking when he was asleep.

Shayna rolled over and tried to fall asleep, too, but she found herself looking back over her shoulder at Madoc again and again. It was just her luck, she thought. Here she was in bed with probably the best looking guy she’d ever seen and he was bound and determined to put her in prison. How unfair was that?

Madoc slowly awoke the next morning to the sleepy realization that the stove had apparently gone out sometime in the night. Not in any rush to face the cold of the cabin, he instinctively burrowed closer to the warm woman next to him. As he did so, he couldn’t help but notice how perfectly they fit together as they lay spoon-like in the small bed. Or how wonderful her hair smelled as he buried his face in it. Or that apparently his little soldier was standing at attention and quite content to nestle against her very soft and well-shaped bottom. Without even realizing what he was doing, he found his arm sliding around her waist to gently pull her even more tightly against

the hard wall of his chest.

As his cock awoke more fully, however, so did he. Madoc stifled a groan as he slowly took his arm from around Shayna's slender waist and shifted to put some distance between his morning hard-on and her. He knew it had been a mistake to get in bed with her last night! What the hell had he been thinking?

Moving carefully so as not to disturb her, Madoc slipped out of bed and, grabbing his boots, sat down on one of the chairs to put them on. He had just finished lacing them up when the rustle of the blankets caught his attention, and he looked up to find his prisoner pushing herself into a sitting position on the bed. His first thought was, damn, she looked good. His second was to wonder if she had been awake enough to feel his arousal pressing up against her bottom. But as she pushed her long hair back from her face and blinked at him sleepily, he decided that she hadn't.

Madoc got to his feet. "Your clothes are dry if you want to get dressed," he told her. "I'm going to go see what it's doing outside."

All he had to do was look out the window to know that it was still snowing, but the truth was that he wanted to put some distance between himself and his prisoner. Grabbing his coat from the back of the chair, he shrugged into it as he strode to the door.

Once outside, Madoc stood on the porch, staring out at the falling snow and trying not to think about the fact that Shayna Matthews was half naked on the other side of the door. His cock went hard again at the image, and he swore under his breath. What was it about Shayna Matthews that had him responding like this? Coming on to her back at the diner had been permissible when he thought she was just a waitress. But she was a wanted fugitive. More than that, she was his prisoner, dammit!

Reaching into the pocket of his jeans, he pulled out his cell phone. He should call his boss, Madoc thought, and let the man know that he'd run into some bad weather and wouldn't be able to get back to Denver until the roads were passable. He flipped open his phone, only to scowl.

"No signal," Madoc muttered. "That's just great."

Snapping the phone closed, he shoved it back into his pocket and turned to go back inside. Shayna was just getting dressed when he walked into the cabin, and he came to an abrupt halt at the sight of her wiggling into her tight jeans. Damn, she had a great ass, he thought. The image of Shayna Matthews draped over his knee while he spanked her tight, little derriere immediately came to mind, and he had to stifle a groan.

As if just realizing that he had come back in, Shayna whirled around to face him. Her face coloring, she hastily did up the buttons on her jeans.

Closing the door, he took off his coat and put it on the back of a chair. "It's still snowing just as hard as it was yesterday, so we're stuck here," he told her.

Shayna made no reply, but he saw the relief on her face. And why wouldn't she be relieved? Madoc thought. It meant another day of freedom for her.

Abruptly the conversation he'd had with Shayna the night before came back to him, and he frowned. If she was to be believed, then it sounded like she had gotten a raw deal. If her attorney was worth the money he'd been getting paid, then the man would have looked into her story and mounted a defense instead of advising her to take a deal. But that wasn't his problem, Madoc told himself. Regardless of whether she was innocent or not, she had jumped bond, and it was his job was to bring her in.

Aware of Shayna's gaze on him, Madoc crossed the room to the stove and began to make a fire. Once that was

done, he opened a can of soup and poured it into a pot, then set it on the stove to heat. As he stood there waiting, he spotted movement from the corner of his eye and turned his head to see Shayna standing beside him. She didn't say anything, but merely held out her hands to warm them by the stove.

Though Madoc did his best to ignore her, it was difficult, and he was glad when the soup started to bubble. Grabbing two mugs off the shelf, he poured soup into each and carried them over to the table. Though she looked reluctant to do so, Shayna left her post by the stove and sat down opposite him.

They ate in silence, which suited Madoc just fine. The less interaction he had with his prisoner, the better. Shayna, however, didn't seem to feel the same way, because after a few moments, she spoke.

"So," she said. "Where did you go on vacation?"

Madoc frowned, caught off guard by the question. "What?" he said.

"Last night, you said that you had been on vacation," she reminded him. "I just wondered where you went."

Madoc said nothing for a moment. He didn't usually discuss his personal life with prisoners when he was transporting them. Then again, he'd never gotten snowbound with one before. "I went out to Seattle for my brother's wedding," he said finally.

Across from him, Shayna smiled. "That must have been nice."

From the expectant look on her face, Madoc knew she was waiting for him to say something in reply to her comment, and when he didn't, she prompted him with another question.

"Are you originally from the Seattle area?" she said.

He shook his head. "Texas."

She nodded. "Have you lived in Denver long?"

"Awhile," he said, and he saw her frown at his noncommittal answer.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes."

It was obvious from her expression that Shayna expected him to elaborate, but again, he didn't, and Madoc hoped that would put an end to the conversation. But to his annoyance, she took his reluctance to talk about himself as her cue to tell him about herself.

At first, Madoc didn't pay much attention to what Shayna was saying, but as the morning wore on, he found himself not only starting to listen to her, but actually joining in the conversation. To his surprise, he and Shayna had a lot more in common than he would have thought, including their love of cheesy horror flicks. Madoc almost fell off the chair when she admitted that she loved zombie movies.

"And I have the DVD collection to prove it," she added with a grin.

That prompted a lively debate about the best zombie movie ever made, which had Madoc wondering where a woman like Shayna Matthews had been all his life. When he had suggested to any of the other women he'd gone out with that they spend the night in front of the television watching *Night of the Living Dead*, they had looked at him like he'd lost his mind.

From there, the conversation turned to Madoc and his life growing up in Texas. To his surprise, he found himself

telling her not only about the close relationship he had with his family, but also about his job as a U.S. Marshal.

Sitting back in his chair, Madoc glanced out the cabin's one small window and was stunned to see that it was getting dark outside. He couldn't believe that he and Shayna had spent the whole day sitting and talking, but obviously, they had.

"I should go get some more wood before it gets dark," he said, pushing his chair back and getting to his feet.

Shayna pushed her chair back from the table as well. "I'll go with you," she said. "We need more snow to melt so that we have some water."

It wasn't snowing nearly as hard outside as it had been earlier, Madoc noticed as they stepped onto the porch. Pulling on his gloves, he walked over to the stack of logs while Shayna went to fill the pot with fresh snow.

Madoc was just leaning down to pick up the first log when a huge pile of snow slid off the roof of the cabin and fell directly on top of him. Swearing under his breath as freezing-cold snow went down the collar of his coat, he reached up to brush it off when he heard the sound of feminine laughter coming from behind him.

Still brushing the snow from his coat, he turned to give Shayna a scowl. "You thought that was funny, did you?"

She was trying hard not to laugh as she shook her head. "No," she said, and then giggled. "Well, maybe just a little."

"Really?" Madoc drawled, scooping up a handful of snow and forming it into a ball. "Let's see how funny you think it is now."

Shayna's dark eyes went wide as she realized exactly what he intended to do with the handful of snow. With a squeal, she sidestepped wildly to avoid the snowball he threw her way, laughing when it missed her and fell harmlessly to the ground.

With a grin, Madoc immediately bent down to scoop up another handful of snow, only to get smacked squarely in the chest with one himself when he straightened.

"That's a point for me!" Shayna shouted triumphantly even as she tried to sidestep the second snowball he threw at her. She wasn't fast enough to avoid the projectile this time, however, and she squealed as it made a splat on her coat.

Madoc chuckled. "Guess that means we're tied!"

Apparently taking that as a challenge, Shayna quickly bent to make another snowball. Madoc did the same, and they spent the next ten minutes laughing and hurling snowballs at each other like two kids. Having grown up in Texas, Madoc had never taken part in a snowball fight before, and he had to admit that it was fun. Or maybe it was just Shayna that made it fun, he thought.

Which was why he agreed rather reluctantly to a truce when she called for one. Once back inside the warmth of the cabin, she turned to him with a laugh.

"I haven't had a snowball fight in years," she said. "I forgot how much fun they are."

Shayna's face was aglow and flushed from being outside, and almost against his will, Madoc found his gaze drawn to her mouth. Her lips were full and pink and slightly parted, as if they were waiting to be kissed. And God help him, for some reason he couldn't explain, he wanted to kiss her. Hell, he'd wanted to taste her lips since he'd first seen her behind the counter at that diner.

Don't do it, he warned himself. But it was too late; he had already bent his head to kiss her.



## Chapter 5

He really, really shouldn't be doing this, Madoc thought. But while his head was telling him to do one thing, his body was telling him to do another, and as Shayna's soft, luscious lips parted beneath his, he felt himself listening less and less to what his head was telling him to do, and more and more to what his body was saying.

With a low groan, he slid his hand into her long, dark hair and pulled her closer, deepening the kiss. God, her mouth tasted so sweet. Like fresh peaches, he thought. He told himself that it was probably because they had eaten some fruit earlier, but he knew that almost all of that sweetness was Shayna herself.

She melted against him with a sigh, her hands sliding up his chest to grip the edges of his coat so that she could pull him even closer, and in that moment, he knew he was lost. Even so, a very small voice in the back of his head whispered again that he should stop before things went too far, but Madoc thrust the thought aside. After being trapped in a cabin with a woman as sexy as Shayna, he knew there was no way he was going to listen to reason. He wanted Shayna Matthews, and he wanted her now!

Still kissing her, Madoc pushed Shayna's coat off her shoulders and down her arms. Tossing it aside, he found the hem of her shirt and began to push it up, taking his mouth from hers only long enough so that he could lift it over her head. He went to work on her jeans next, hastily undoing the buttons so that he could push them down her long, shapely legs.

Despite his eagerness to see Shayna completely naked, however, Madoc couldn't resist pausing for a moment to gaze down at her. Though he had seen her in a bra and panties the night before, he'd been too focused on getting her warmed up to allow himself more than a quick look, but now, he stood there breathing hard as he drank in the sight of her.

He would have loved to have taken his time removing her bra and teasing the nipples that were already hardening beneath his gaze, but he was too excited for that. He moved to take off her lacy bra, but she was already pushing his coat from his shoulders and down his arms. There was something very sexy about Shayna undressing him, he decided, especially when she pushed his hands away as he tried to help. She was so eager that she almost ripped the buttons from his shirt taking it off him. Man, was that hot!

Tossing the garment aside, Shayna let her gaze run over his bare chest admiringly for a long moment before reaching for his belt. Pulling him closer, she used one hand to tug him down for a kiss while she undid his belt with the other. He decided she was quite talented to still keep kissing him while being able to get his jeans down at the same time. As he stepped out of them, he felt her close her hand around his hard cock and caress him firmly as she moved her mouth passionately over his.

Eager for Shayna to be as naked as he now was, Madoc stripped off her bra and panties with the same urgency as he had the rest of her clothing. Pulling her into his arms, he trailed hot kisses over her jaw and down her neck until he came to her breasts. Cupping the sweetly curved mounds in his hands, he took one turgid nipple into his mouth to suckle on it before going to her other breast and lavishing the same attention on the hardened peak he found there. Still cupping her creamy breasts in his hands, he slowly kissed his way back up to her ear.

Shayna's head fell back, giving him easy access to her neck, and Madoc took that as an invitation to kiss and nibble at the sensitive spot just below her ear. She moaned softly, only to gasp out loud a moment later as he took the pale pink buds of her nipples between his fingers and firmly squeezed them.

Madoc was about to bend his head to take one of those hard, little peaks into his mouth again when he felt Shayna's hands on his arms, tugging him toward the bed. He went willingly, letting his gaze run over her naked form appreciatively as she lay back on the bed. He took in her perfectly-formed breasts, slender waist, and long, shapely legs. She was perfect, he thought.

“God, you’re absolutely gorgeous,” he breathed.

Shayna blushed at his words, but before she could say anything in reply, Madoc leaned down and slowly began kissing his way from one slender ankle all the way up her leg to her inner thigh. As he neared her pussy, he heard her moan, and he couldn’t help but grin at the urgency in the sound. She was just as excited as he was. He lifted his head to meet her gaze as he reached the downy hair at the juncture of her thighs. Holding Shayna’s gaze with his own, he ran his tongue teasingly over her plump, little clit. She threw her head back with a moan and lifted her hips, begging him for more, and he gave her more, licking her clit in a way he knew would drive her wild.

But as he ran his tongue up and down the slick folds of her pussy, she grew more and more excited, and the urge to be inside her became uncontrollable. With a low growl, he climbed onto the bed and, settling himself between her legs, he entered her fully in one deep thrust.

Shayna wrapped her long legs around him, taking him even deeper, and Madoc groaned at how incredibly hot and tight she felt around him. It was like their bodies had been made to fit together, he thought.

Lowering himself onto his forearms, Madoc covered Shayna’s mouth with his own, his tongue finding hers as he slowly began to move inside her. Beneath him, Shayna lifted her hips to meet his thrusts, and together, they found the perfect rhythm.

A part of him wanted to go slowly, but he was so turned on that he knew that wouldn’t be possible. And from the way Shayna was digging her nails into his shoulders, it was likely that she was already close to the pinnacle as well. With a groan, he began to thrust even harder, driving into her more deeply each time. She met him thrust for thrust, her legs squeezing even more tightly around him.

Madoc had never felt so out of control with a woman in his life, but Shayna made him feel as if he were about to explode at any moment. Somehow, he managed to keep his orgasm at bay until Shayna threw back her head and screamed out with her own pleasure. Only then, did he let go, exploding inside of her in a soul-shattering release.

Afterward, as they lay together gently kissing and caressing each other, Madoc was surprised to feel himself begin to harden again. He would have thought that it would take hours to recover from such an intense orgasm, but apparently, Shayna had that kind of effect on him. He couldn’t seem to get enough of her. But as he began to trail kisses down her neck to her breasts again, he decided that this time, they would go slower.

Much later, as he lay in bed with Shayna curled up asleep in his arms, Madoc tried to tell himself that it had been a mistake to sleep with her, but he couldn’t, not when it had felt so incredibly right.

Shayna awoke the next morning to find herself alone in the small bed. Sleepily brushing her hair back from her face, she pushed herself up on her elbow and looked around for Madoc, but the cabin was empty. He had probably just gone outside for more wood, she thought. Then again, she thought wryly, maybe the sex with her had been so good that the Marshal had changed his mind about bringing her in and decided to let her go. No, she couldn’t be that lucky, she thought as she lay back down. Besides, he wouldn’t have just left her stranded in the middle of nowhere.

Thinking of the sex they had had brought all the memories of last night rushing back to her. Amazing was the only word she could think of to describe it. Then again, the word, unexpected, came to mind as well.

To say she had been surprised when Madoc had kissed her was an understatement. Shayna had been just as surprised to find herself kissing him back. But at the first touch of his mouth on hers, all reason and doubt had fled her mind. She had never lost herself to passion like that before.

But now, in the light of day, a small part of her wondered if she had slept with him in the hopes that he would let her go. Just as quickly, however, she realized that though it would be nice if he did let her go because of it, that

hadn't been the reason at all. The passion that had erupted between them had been real. And it had been magical as well. Madoc had awakened something in her that she hadn't known existed.

But what about Madoc? What was his reason for making love to her? Back at the diner, he had made it no secret that he was attracted to her. Had he finally just acted on that attraction, or was there more to it than that? Part of her wanted to believe that it had been more. She couldn't deny she and Madoc definitely had chemistry together. God, why couldn't she have met him before this whole mess?

Shayna was just daydreaming about how things might have been between her and the Marshal had they met under different circumstances when the door to the cabin opened. Holding the blanket to her breasts, she pushed herself up on her elbow as Madoc came in. Not sure exactly what to say to him after their romp in bed last night, she nervously chewed on her lower lip and waited for him to take the lead.

To her dismay, Madoc didn't say anything right away, however, but just stood there, his expression unreadable, and as the silence between them lengthened, Shayna grew more and more uncomfortable. Maybe last night had been a mistake, she thought. She was just about speak when Madoc cleared his throat.

"It's stopped snowing and I can hear snow plows off in the distance. We're not that far from the highway," he told her stiffly. "We can leave as soon as you get dressed."

Shayna told herself that she shouldn't be surprised by Madoc's words. She hadn't honestly expected him to let her go simply because they had slept together. And if she hadn't been so caught up her own thoughts when he'd walked in, then she would have realized that the man she had made love with last night was gone, and in his place was the no-nonsense U.S. Marshal that had taken her into custody. But she had at least expected him to acknowledge that they had slept together. Then again, maybe he was already regretting it.

Swallowing hard, Shayna started to push back the blanket, only to pause when she noticed Madoc turn away so that his back was to her. Considering that she and the Marshal had just spent the night together, what he probably perceived as a gentlemanly gesture actually hurt her for some reason, and she found herself blinking back tears as she reached for her clothes.

It didn't take Shayna very long to get dressed, and it wasn't like they had any bags to pack, so they were ready to leave within minutes. Madoc left some money on the table to pay for the damage to the window as well as the food they had eaten. And then, without a backward glance, they left the small cabin.

They made the walk back to Madoc's truck in silence. Shayna had been surprised that he hadn't handcuffed her before they'd left the cabin. Maybe he figured that after she'd nearly frozen to death the last time she'd tried to escape, she wouldn't be foolish enough to do it again, she thought. That didn't stop him from taking her arm once they got back to his truck, she noticed. What did he think, that she was going to try to flag down a passing trucker? she wondered. But then she saw the Montana State Trooper's car parked behind Madoc's SUV, and her stomach knotted.

"You folks need some help?" the officer asked as they trudged through the snow to the SUV.

Shayna held her breath as she waited for Madoc to identify himself and explain to the other man that she was a wanted fugitive he had captured. Since Madoc had wanted to dump her off with the locals in the first place, he was probably going to ask the state trooper to escort her the rest of the way to Billings, she thought.

Madoc gave her a sidelong glance before turning his attention back to the trooper. "My wife and I were caught in the snow," he told the other man. "We had to hole up in a cabin about a mile in."

Shayna stared at Madoc in disbelief. What was he saying?

The state trooper nodded. "You two were lucky you found a cabin," he said. "You would have frozen to death if you'd been out here in your truck. You need any help getting back out on the road?"

Madoc shook his head. "I don't think so, but if you wouldn't mind waiting for just a few until we get started, I'd appreciate it."

Shayna's head was spinning as Madoc helped her into the passenger seat. She sat there trying to understand what had just happened while he cleaned the rest of the truck off. Was he going to let her go after all? she wondered. Or did he just want to turn her in himself? If that were the case, then why had he told the state trooper she was his wife?

Desperately wanting to know the answer to that, but afraid to come right out and ask for fear of what Madoc would say, Shayna was silent as he got into the truck and they pulled onto the highway. With a wave of thanks to the trooper, they were on their way with Shayna feeling more confused than ever. She didn't want to get her hopes up, but as they were driving down the highway toward Billings, however, her curiosity finally got the better of her.

"Why didn't you turn me over to that state trooper back there?" she asked quietly. It was the first time either of them had spoken since they'd left the cabin.

The muscle in Madoc's jaw flexed, but he didn't look at her. "Because it's just as easy for me to take you back to Denver," he said.

Shayna felt her heart sink at his words, the small hope she had been holding onto collapsing. Blinking back tears, she turned to stare blindly out the side window. After last night, and then with what he had said to the trooper, she had truly begun to think Madoc might actually let her go. But apparently the fact that they'd slept together didn't mean anything to him. He probably thought it was a mistake. She didn't know what hurt more. That he didn't believe she was innocent, or that he could still turn her in after they had had such amazing sex. Maybe it hadn't been as good for him as it had for her, she thought bitterly.

They made the rest of the drive in silence, and Shayna found herself wishing that Madoc would turn on the radio or something. Anything to distract her from thoughts of what awaited her back in Denver. In a couple of hours, she would be back in jail. The one night she'd spent there after she had been arrested had been awful enough, and the thought of going back made fresh tears well in her eyes. Because this time, she didn't think she would be getting back out.

As they reached the outskirts of Denver, Shayna glanced at the handsome man beside her, wondering if she should try to plead her case with him again, but then decided against it. She had spent the past two days working on him. If she hadn't swayed him during that time, there was really nothing left to say. Besides, she didn't want to spend the remaining freedom she had left arguing with Madoc. With a sigh, she tore her gaze away from the Marshal to gaze out the window again.

Shayna was so lost in her own thoughts that she didn't realize Madoc had turned into a parking garage until he pulled the SUV into a space. Her brow furrowing, she gave him a curious look.

"Where are we?" she asked.

He turned to look at her with those incredible golden eyes of his. "My apartment," he said. "I've decided not to turn you in. At least not until I can check out your story."

Shayna blinked in surprise, unable to believe what she'd just heard. "What made you change your mind?" she said softly.

Madoc said nothing for a moment, and Shayna held her breath as she waited for him to answer.

“I didn’t say I changed my mind. I just said that I was going to check into it before I turn you in, that’s all,” he said gruffly.

Shayna made no reply, but she knew from the way he said the words that it was more than that. If he were just interested in checking into her story, he could have done it while she was in jail. He must really think she was innocent for him to put himself at risk like this. Of course, some part of her was also hoping that his reasons might be a little more personal than that. That maybe last night had meant something to him after all. She tried to control it, but her heart began to beat wildly at the thought that not only might she finally have found a way to get out of this mess, but that Madoc might actually care for her.

## Chapter 6

What the hell was he doing? Madoc asked himself as he let Shayna into his apartment. He was risking his career, his reputation, even his freedom, all for a woman he had just met! And for what? Maybe going to his brother’s wedding had infected him with some kind of mental disorder or something, he thought. What else could explain such a serious lack in judgment?

But no matter how much he tried to tell himself that he was being crazy, and that he should just drop Shayna off at the Denver PD, he couldn’t. She was innocent; he knew that deep down in his gut. And while he hadn’t said anything to Shayna until they had gotten back to Denver, he had actually made the decision not to turn her in while they had been in bed that morning. She had looked so vulnerable lying there sleeping that he couldn’t bear the thought of her spending even one night in a jail cell much less going to prison for the rest of her life. Especially for something she didn’t do.

And if he hadn’t slept with her, would he still be so willing to help her clear her name? he wondered. Of course he would be, he told himself. The fact that he had just spent the night having the most incredible sex of his life with her hadn’t factored into his decision at all.

Madoc ground his jaw. Who the hell was he kidding? He had criticized his brother for getting involved with a protectee in the Witness Protection Program, and here he was falling for a fugitive! That thought stopped him cold. He was definitely not falling for Shayna Matthews! He was helping her in the interest of justice, that was all.

His hand tightening on the handle of the overnight bag he held, Madoc cleared his throat. “I’m going to grab a quick shower and a change of clothes, then head over to the office and see what I can dig up,” he announced. “Make yourself at home.”

Before Shayna could reply, Madoc walked down the hallway and into his bedroom. Stripping off his clothes, he took a shower, and then pulled on a fresh pair of jeans and a clean shirt. When he went back into the living room, it was to find Shayna standing at the window, gazing out at the snow-covered mountains in the distance.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can,” he said, pulling on his coat. “Don’t answer the phone or open the door to anyone. And whatever you do, don’t go anywhere.”

A small smile curved her lips. “I won’t,” she said.

Digging into his pocket for his keys, Madoc started for the door.

“Madoc?”

His hand on the doorknob, Madoc turned to see Shayna chewing on her lower lip and looking at him gratefully.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

Madoc wanted to tell Shayna that she shouldn't be thanking him yet. That if he didn't succeed in finding something to clear her name soon, then she'd very likely end up going to prison anyway. But she looked so worried standing there that it was all he could do not to stride across the room and take her in his arms. Not trusting himself to speak, he merely gave her a nod and walked out.

The building that housed the U.S. Marshals offices was across town from his apartment, but the traffic was surprisingly light, so it took less than a half hour to get there. Once inside, Madoc went directly to his boss' office. Since he knew he wouldn't get much investigating done with the workload that was sure to be waiting for him, Madoc had decided to take a couple more days off. Though Deputy Chief Evans wasn't thrilled with the idea of Madoc taking more time off, the other man agreed. Of course, it helped that Madoc went into great detail about the two "miserable" days he'd had to spend holed up in the cabin.

Deciding that the best way to check out Shayna's story was to find what the Denver police had on the case, Madoc went over to the precinct where she had been arrested. Fortunately, he had a friend that worked as a detective there, so getting a look at the file wasn't as difficult as it might have been if he'd had to go through normal channels. That didn't mean his friend didn't wonder why Madoc was interested in a case that had already been solved.

"It might be connected to another case I'm working on," Madoc told the other man with a shrug.

Opening the folder, Madoc read through the file. Though everything had been done by the book, it was clear that the police hadn't wanted to investigate anyone else after finding the evidence on Shayna. Though Madoc supposed he couldn't really blame the cops. The evidence against Shayna was solid, and if he had been working the case, he probably would have come to the same conclusion.

With a sigh, he began to read through the file again, more slowly this time. Things had unfolded just like Shayna had told him. According to the lead detective that had investigated the case, the police had received an anonymous tip from someone saying that Shayna had embezzled the money. Of course, the call had come from a pay phone so there was no way of knowing who had actually made it, but the caller had to be the person who had framed Shayna. As for the emails she had supposedly sent to her boss, Evan Mercer, they had all come from her work email address. While that wasn't as bad as being sent from her personal computer, it would be almost impossible to prove she hadn't been the one who wrote them. Which left the bank account in the Caymans, but since there was no way to find out who actually opened it, that was another dead end.

Madoc picked up the crime-scene photos from Evan Mercer's house. When Shayna had told him the police said they had found some blood, Madoc had assumed there would have been more than the half dozen droplets on the carpet in the picture. After seeing that, Madoc was even more inclined to think that Shayna's boss had set her up. Now, they just needed to prove it. But how?

Madoc thought a moment. The next logical step was to search Mercer's place. While the police had probably already done that, there might be something they overlooked, especially if they were only looking for evidence against Shayna, he told himself. At least, he hoped they had.

Wondering whether to go straight there or back to his apartment first, Madoc opted for the latter. Since he was going to have to break into Mercer's place, it made more sense to do it after dark. Besides, he hadn't eaten anything since that morning and he was starving. Figuring that Shayna was probably just as hungry, especially since there wasn't much in the way of food back at his apartment, he decided to pick up some Chinese food on the way home.

As he left the police station, Madoc realized that he was looking forward to seeing Shayna. Hopefully, she hadn't done anything foolish while he'd been out, like call her family to tell them she was back in Denver, he thought. He could just imagine her telling them the whole story.

Shayna stared at the door in disbelief. She couldn't believe Madoc had gone out and left her alone in his apartment. If she wanted to, she could make a run for it, she told herself. But she wasn't going to. Outside of her family, Madoc was the only other person that believed she was innocent, and that meant a lot to her. She trusted him to help her, and she wasn't going to let him down.

With a sigh, Shayna put her hands on her hips and surveyed the apartment. It was nice, she thought, taking in the roomy living area and modern kitchen. Very masculine, but then had she really expected any less from a man like the Marshal. Her lips curving into a smile, she decided she liked it. Then again, she had been living in the boarding house for so long that she probably would have liked his apartment if he'd had shag carpeting on the floor, a lava lamp on the coffee table, and a disco ball hanging from the ceiling. Well, maybe not, she conceded.

Abruptly, she remembered Madoc's invitation to make herself at home. While raiding his refrigerator was tempting, Shayna decided she needed a shower first. After being in the same clothes for the past two days, she felt totally grimy. Making her way through the living room, she walked down the hall toward the room the Marshal had disappeared into earlier.

Madoc's bedroom was as masculine-looking as the rest of his apartment, and there was something equally inviting about it, Shayna thought. As she took in the huge four-poster bed with its navy blue comforter, she blushed hotly as she pictured Madoc making love to her there. An image of her beneath him, her legs wrapped tightly around his waist while he plunged deeply into her, played over and over in her mind. That thought, as well as all of the other ways the gorgeous Marshal would pleasure her with his body had her pussy practically purring, and she let out a little moan as she walked into the adjoining bathroom.

Thirty minutes later, Shayna had showered and dried her hair, and was standing in front of the mirror, wearing only her bra and panties. The thought of putting on her jeans and long-sleeved shirt again after she'd just gotten all nice and clean wasn't very appealing, but neither could she walk around Madoc's apartment in her underwear.

She chewed on her lower lip, wondering whether Madoc would mind if she borrowed a shirt to wear. While he had told her to make herself at home, she wasn't sure that extended to borrowing his clothes. But it was either that, or put hers back on, she told herself. With a shrug, she padded back into the bedroom and over to the closet.

Madoc had a variety of shirts to pick from, including several white dress-shirts. Choosing one of those, Shayna slipped her arms into the sleeves and buttoned it up. It was big on her, coming to mid-thigh, and it reminded her of wearing her boyfriend's shirt, something she'd always kind of liked. She knew it was improbable since the shirt was obviously clean, but she could have sworn she still smelled Madoc's masculine scent on it. Regardless, it made wearing the Marshal's shirt extremely comforting.

Going back out into the living room, Shayna started to make her way to the kitchen, but then stopped at the sound of a knock on the door. Remembering Madoc's warning not to open the door to anyone, she ignored whoever it was and continued on her way to the kitchen, only to stop when the knock came again.

"It's Mrs. McMurray from across the hall, dear," a woman's voice called. "Are you in there?"

Her brow furrowing, Shayna walked over to the door and looked out the peephole to see an elderly woman standing there. As if somehow sensing that Shayna had looked out to verify the identity of her visitor, the woman smiled and lifted the plate of cookies she was holding in offering. Shayna knew she should probably ignore the older woman, but she couldn't. When Madoc had warned her not to open the door to anyone, he obviously hadn't meant his sweet, elderly neighbor. Besides, with her gray hair back in a bun and that warm smile, she reminded Shayna of her grandmother.

Running her hands over her long, dark hair, Shayna fixed a smile on her face and pulled open the door. "Can I help you?" she asked.

The elderly woman's smile broadened. "I'm Mrs. Murray from across the hall," she explained again. "I heard you and Madoc coming in earlier, and I thought I'd bring over some chocolate chip cookies. They're homemade," she added, holding out the plate.

Automatically taken in by the other woman's sweet manner, Shayna couldn't help but reach out to take the plate of cookies from her. It would have been rude not to, Shayna told herself. Besides, they smelled so delicious. It was all she could do not to grab one off the plate and bite into it right then. "Thank you," she said. "That was very sweet of you, Mrs. Murray."

Mrs. Murray waved her hand. "'Twas no trouble at all, my dear," she said, and then glanced over Shayna's shoulder. "I couldn't help but notice Madoc leave earlier, so I thought you might like to sit down and have a little girl talk."

Shayna didn't know what to say at first. Madoc had told her not to let anyone into the apartment, but the sweet woman had gone to all the trouble of making cookies for her. Shayna didn't know how well Madoc knew the older woman, so she wasn't even sure if he would want her in his apartment. But what was Shayna going to do, slam the door in Mrs. Murray's face?

"Actually, Madoc just went into work for a little while," Shayna said. "He'll probably be back any minute."

Mrs. Murray made a tscking noise. "I've lived next door to that boy for years, now, and one thing I know. When he goes into work, he's never right back," she said. "So, since he's probably going to be awhile, what do you say we girls get some coffee to go with these cookies, dear? You can tell me all about the wedding."

If the woman knew about the wedding, then she must know the Marshal fairly well, Shayna thought. She supposed it wouldn't hurt to let the woman in for a little while. Besides, it had been a long time since Shayna had been able to sit down and just chat with someone about everyday things. Smiling again, she took a step back to let the other woman into the apartment. With her sweet, take-charge demeanor, Mrs. Murray was beginning to remind Shayna more and more of her grandmother.

"Why don't you sit down and I'll make some coffee," Shayna suggested as she set the plate of cookies down on the coffee table.

"I don't think you told me your name, dear," the older woman said as she took a seat on the couch.

"It's Shayna," she said, giving the woman her real name without thinking.

Shayna cringed inwardly. Oh God, what if Mrs. Murray remembered hearing her name on the news? It wasn't a common name, after all.

But Mrs. Murray merely smiled. "What a lovely name," she said. "Is it Irish?"

Shayna breathed a sigh of relief. "You know, I'm not really sure," she said, and then quickly added, "Why don't I go make that coffee?"

Still chiding herself for tripping up like that, Shayna hurried into the kitchen before the other woman could stop her. However, since Madoc's apartment had an open floor-plan, Mrs. Murray was able to continue their conversation while Shayna made coffee. To her relief, the older woman had let the subject of Shayna's name drop and had moved onto Madoc's brother's wedding, wanting to know how it was. Though that wasn't necessarily any better, Shayna thought as she got the coffee going. While Madoc had opened up quite a bit to her at the cabin the day before – something which still surprised her – he hadn't really said all that much about his brother's wedding. She needn't have worried, though, because the sweet, elderly Mrs. Murray didn't let her get a word in edgewise. All Shayna had to do was smile and nod her head in agreement at the appropriate times.



Walking back into the living room, Shayna set the mugs she'd been carrying down on the table and joined Mrs. Murray on the couch.

"Thank you, dear," the older woman said. Picking up her mug, she sipped her coffee. "You're so much nicer than the other girls that Madoc has brought home. And much prettier, too, I don't mind telling you."

While Shayna blushed at the compliment, she also felt a ridiculous little stab of jealousy at the other woman's words. Just because she had let Mrs. Murray think she was Madoc's girlfriend didn't mean she had any right to be jealous of how many other girls the Marshal had brought back to his apartment. He was an attractive man, after all. Certainly, he had lots of girlfriends. Besides, she had no claim to him. Still, that didn't mean she couldn't ask Mrs. Murray about them.

Shayna reached for a cookie. "Really?" she said, trying to make her voice sound casual.

Mrs. Murray waved her hand dismissively. "Not that I would ever say that to Madoc, of course, but none of those other women were right for him."

As she ate her cookie, Shayna felt an inexplicable surge of joy at hearing that none of Madoc's previous girlfriends had been right for him. Which was just silly, of course, she told herself.

"So, how long have you and Madoc been seeing each other, dear?" the older woman asked.

Shayna sipped her coffee again. "Not long," she said. Wow, was that an understatement! she thought.

Mrs. Murray smiled. "Well, you're just what he needs in his life, dear," she said. "Someone to make an honest man of him."

Shayna almost laughed at that. She wasn't exactly making an honest man out of Madoc. If anything, she was turning him into a criminal. She probably didn't want to mention that to the older woman, though. Before she could say anything, however, the apartment door opened. At the sound, both Shayna and the other woman looked toward the entryway to see Madoc standing there, a grocery bag in the crook of one arm. For a moment, he just stood where he was, staring at the two of them, but then his eyes narrowed.

Having come to recognize that look on the Marshal's face, Shayna shifted uncomfortably in her seat. Mrs. Murray, however, gave him a warm smile as she got to her feet. Shayna set her mug down on the table and stood as well.

"Madoc, dear boy," his elderly neighbor said. "I was just having the most pleasant conversation with your lovely girlfriend."

Shayna saw Madoc's mouth tighten at the words. "Really?" he drawled, his gaze going from the older woman to her.

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Murray told him. "Shayna was telling me all about how beautiful your brother's wedding was, weren't you, dear?"

Mrs. Murray turned to give Shayna a smile, which she somehow managed to return, despite the fact that Madoc was still glowering at her.

"Well, I'm going to go back to my own apartment and leave you two lovebirds alone," the older woman announced. Reaching out, she took Shayna's hand in both of hers. "Shayna, dear, it was so lovely meeting you. Do come by sometime, won't you? I'm sure you'll be spending lots of time over here."

Ignoring the glare Madoc was sending her way, Shayna nodded and told the woman that she would indeed stop by

to see her.

Still smiling, Mrs. Murray carefully made her way around the coffee table and walked over to where Madoc stood. Giving Shayna another smile over her shoulder, the tiny woman turned back to the Marshal and put a hand on his arm.

“Don’t let her get away, dear boy,” she said, her voice a loud whisper. “This one is a keeper, I tell you.”

Madoc glanced at Shayna, his expression unreadable. “I’d have to agree with that,” he said. “Someone definitely needs to lock her up.”

As Madoc showed the older woman out, Shayna took the opportunity to make her escape. Picking up the mugs in one hand and the plate of cookies in the other, she carried them into the kitchen. Maybe if she acted like nothing had happened, then Madoc would do the same. Yeah, right, she thought.

“What the hell didn’t you understand about don’t let anyone into the apartment?” the Marshal demanded as he followed her into the kitchen.

Shayna let out a sigh as she turned away from the sink. Madoc had set the grocery bag down on the table and was now standing there with his arms folded across his broad chest while he glowered at her.

Telling herself that engaging the Marshal in a shouting match would probably only get her into more trouble, she gave him a shrug. “Mrs. Murray knocked on the door and said she was your neighbor,” Shayna said as she walked past him into the living room. “She saw us come in together, so I couldn’t very well ignore her. It would have been rude.”

Shayna heard Madoc swear under his breath as he followed her into the living room. “What if she had recognized you?” he said.

She waved her hand dismissively. “I seriously doubt that sweet, old woman spends her days staring at wanted posters,” she said sarcastically, and then added, “In fact, I’m pretty sure no one does that, but you.”

The muscle in the side of Madoc’s jaw flexed. “This isn’t a game, dammit! I’m putting my life on the line for you, Shayna,” he ground out. “If you don’t start using your head, you’re going to get us both thrown in jail.”

Shayna didn’t need to be reminded how important it was for her to keep a low profile; she’d been doing it for months without Madoc’s help. “Lighten up, already, will you?” she snapped. “Mrs. Murray didn’t recognize me, so there’s no harm done. Sheesh!”

Madoc’s golden-brown eyes narrowed warningly. “Maybe another trip over my knee would make you start to take this more seriously,” he said softly.

She automatically took a step back, her eyes going wide at the mention of another spanking. “There’s no way I’m letting you spank me again!”

His mouth quirked. “I wasn’t giving you a choice.”

Madoc was starting toward her even as he spoke, and Shayna quickly darted to the side, putting the low-slung coffee table between her and the Marshal. They stood like that for a moment, each eyeing the other warily. Knowing the only way she was probably going to avoid the spanking would be if she locked herself in the bedroom for the rest of the night, Shayna made a run for it.

But Madoc was faster. Cutting Shayna off, he grabbed her arm and, in one swift motion, sat down on the couch and threw her over his knee. Outraged, Shayna immediately tried to push herself off his lap, but Madoc merely

shoved her back down with a hand. A moment later, he wrapped an arm around her waist and began to pepper her upturned bottom with hard, stinging smacks.

“Owww!” she cried. “Let me up, damn you!”

But like he’d done the other two times he had spanked her, Madoc ignored her protests and continued to bring his hand down over and over on her bottom.

“Not until you learn to start listening to me,” he growled.

Shayna struggled against his hold, squirming this way and that, but much to her horror, all her wiggling and kicking did was cause the shirt she was wearing to ride up and expose her skimpy, bikini panties.

Red-faced, Shayna immediately stopped squirming, hoping that if she lay there submissively, Madoc would think she had been spanked enough, and stop. But to her dismay, he continued to spank her, delivering a sharp smack to first one half-naked asscheek, and then the other. If anything, he seemed to be spanking her harder now. Or maybe it only felt that way because her cheeks were exposed.

Shayna was too mortified to care about how much the spansks were stinging now, though. It didn’t matter that Madoc had seen her naked the night before. This was completely different. Being draped over his lap with her panty-covered ass exposed for his viewing pleasure while he spanked her was too embarrassing for words.

Her face colored even more as she thought of Madoc looking at her rapidly reddening bottom. Though she hadn’t gotten a look at her derriere after the other times he’d spanked her, she was sure that after this spanking, it was going to be positively glowing! The idea of the handsome Marshal’s gaze fixed on her ass had her squirming all over again, but for a completely different reason. This time, it wasn’t to protest the spanking he was giving her, but because the thought of him gazing at her bottom was making her pussy start to tingle.

Shayna’s eyes flew wide. Oh, God! She could not be getting turned on! Not while he was spanking her! But there was no mistaking her arousal. And the more she focused on the tingling between her legs, the more excited she became. To her shock, she realized that her pussy was actually getting wet! This could not be happening!

A thought even more horrifying came to her then. What if she got so wet that it soaked through her panties? Then Madoc would be able to tell that she was excited. She couldn’t let that happen!

Blushing hotly, Shayna renewed her struggles to free herself. “Madoc, please...” she begged. “That really...owwww!...stings!”

Shayna wasn’t sure whether her words would have any effect on the Marshal this time, especially since they hadn’t the other times she’d tried it, but much to her relief, after giving her one more hard smack to each cheek, Madoc stood her back on her feet.

Automatically, Shayna reached back to cup her freshly-spanked asscheeks with both hands, only to gasp at how hot they felt. If anything, her bottom seemed to be throbbing even more now that the spanking was over. She had to bite her lip to keep from crying out when she squeezed her cheeks with her hands. He had really done a number on her this time.

She gave Madoc a sullen look. “That spanking really stung, you know.”

He shrugged. “Well, I only did it in the hopes that you might actually be a little bit more careful. It was for your own good, you know,” he said, and then added more softly, “Come here.”

Taking her hand, he pulled her closer so that she was standing between his legs. Reaching around, he cupped her tender asscheeks in both of his strong hands and began to gently massage them. Shayna instinctively opened her

mouth to protest, but found herself sighing with pleasure instead. Wow, she hadn't expected that! Just a moment ago, she was kicking and squealing at the feel of his hand on her bottom, and now she couldn't get enough of his touch. She didn't know how that could be possible after the spanking he'd just given her, but right then, she wasn't interested in giving it much thought. Instead, she closed her eyes and let herself enjoy the sensation.

Madoc must have noticed her reaction to what he was doing because he chuckled. "Did I tell you that I couldn't help but notice how great you look in that shirt," he said. "In fact, I wouldn't mind seeing you in it all the time."

Shayna felt her heart leap with joy at his off-handed comment. Careful, she warned herself. Don't read more into it than you should.

Taking her hand again, Madoc suddenly pulled her down to sit on his lap. The rough material of his jeans against her tender bottom made her gasp, but the sound was swiftly muffled as he captured her mouth in a long, drugging kiss. And while the feel of his lips on hers didn't make her completely forget about how sore her poor bottom still was, it did make her think a whole heck of a lot less about it. God, the man was a good kisser!

He deepened the kiss, his tongue making slow, swirling motions inside her mouth, and she melted against him with a small sigh of pleasure, her arms automatically going around his neck. His kiss alone was enough to almost make her go dizzy, but then he started to lightly trail the fingers of one hand up her bare leg, and she knew right then that it was only going to get better.

Madoc broke the kiss to give her a long, soulful look as his hand slowly continued up her leg and toward her inner thigh. Shayna felt her pulse quicken as his hand slipped beneath the tail of the dress shirt and found its way to the edge of her bikini panties. She waited breathlessly for him to slide his fingers underneath her panties and touch her, but instead, he dipped his hand between her legs and caressed her tingling pussy through her panties. Even with the material in the way, his touch was enough to make her moan and she clutched his shoulders for support. The way he slid his fingers up and down her wet groove made her think he truly intended to tease her to orgasm before he ever got her panties off.

Just when it seemed like she might actually come, he paused long enough to slide his fingers into the waistband of her panties and yank them effortlessly down her legs. She wondered how he could possibly have gotten them off so easily given their positions, but then she forgot about the logistics of the maneuver as his fingers delved into the wetness waiting between her legs. It seemed to Shayna that Madoc knew her body better than she did, and she began to moan softly as he found her clit, and caressed it gently.

Sliding his other hand loosely into her hair, Madoc gently tilted her head to the side as he nibbled his way along her jaw line and over to her ear. Shayna shivered, gooseflesh pebbling her skin as he trailed hot kisses down her neck. That part of her body had always been an erogenous zone for her, and the Marshal seemed to know exactly how she liked to be touched there.

Between her legs, he had begun making slow circles round and around her clit, and the two sensations had her crying out as spasms of pleasure rippled through her body. Madoc moved his fingers in time with her undulating hips, stretching her pleasure out longer and longer until she thought she couldn't take any more. Only as her orgasm gradually began to subside, did his fingers on her clit begin to slow.

Letting out a soft, little sigh of pleasure, Shayna tipped her head forward and opened her eyes to find a grin tugging at the corner of Madoc's mouth.

"It seemed like you enjoyed that," he observed teasingly.

She smiled. "Actually, I did," she said, and then as a naughty idea popped into her head, she added in a huskier voice, "In fact, I think I should show you exactly how much."

Giving him a sexy look, Shayna slid off his lap and dropped to her knees in front of him. Leaning forward, she kissed him lingeringly on the mouth before tracing a path along his hair-roughened jaw and down his neck as she began to unbutton his shirt. She ran her hands over the hard wall of his muscled chest and down to his taut, flat abs, marveling to herself as how well-built he was. Sliding her hands back up his chest to his broad shoulders, she pushed his shirt off. Then, with his help, she made quick work of his jeans, taking them off as well.

Sitting back on her heels, Shayna let her gaze run over Madoc's naked body. Damn, he was hot! In fact, she could just sit there and look at him all night, she decided. When they had made love at the cabin, it had been so frenzied that she hadn't had a chance to really appreciate how truly gorgeous he was, but now she wanted to take him all in. Wow, she thought, there wasn't a part of his magnificent body that wasn't perfect!

But no matter how good the rest of him looked, her attention kept coming back to his extremely hard cock, standing proud and erect between his muscular legs. Unable to resist temptation any longer, she decided to give in to it. Leaning forward, she wrapped her hand around his throbbing erection, and then, giving him a naughty look, she took him in her mouth. She wasn't sure which of them groaned more loudly - Madoc because it felt so good, or her, because he tasted so wonderful.

Shayna took her time with him, slowing running her tongue first over the head of his cock, and then up and down the length of him. As she lowered her head to do it all over again, she gently cupped his balls with her other hand, lovingly caressing them. She ran her tongue up his cock as if he were a delicious treat. Which he was, she decided as she swiped her tongue over the glistening bead of precome she found on the head of his cock. Mmmm, she thought. He tasted so good!

She continued to tease him like that for awhile longer, slowly running her tongue all over him before she changed tactics and took his entire cock deep in mouth. As she felt him slide all the way to the back of her throat, she couldn't help but let out a little moan. Madoc was obviously enjoying it, too, because he groaned as well.

Shayna could tell that he was getting close to coming, and she had to argue with herself about what she should do next. A part of her wanted to feel his come shooting into her mouth, but the other part of her decided that would have to wait. Right now, she wanted to feel that glorious cock of his inside her!

As she got to her feet a moment later, she couldn't help but smile at the disappointed look on Madoc's face. But just as quickly, his expression changed to one of eagerness as she climbed onto his lap and slowly eased herself down onto him.

He was so big that it was a wonder she could take him all, but take him all she did, and Shayna caught her breath as she felt him fill her completely. For a moment, she sat there unmoving, just enjoying the feel of him deep inside of her. But then she began to rotate her hips in slow, insistent circles. Madoc reached out to grasp her hips, clearly wanting her to move faster, but she playfully smacked his hands away.

"Hands off," she ordered. "I'm in charge of this ride."

Madoc held up his hands in a placating gesture. "Whatever you say," he agreed, a grin tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Despite his words, however, it clearly wasn't in Madoc's nature to sit back and do nothing, because soon after, he reached out and began to undo the buttons on her shirt. A moment later, he pushed it off her shoulders and tossed it onto the cushion beside them. Her bra quickly followed, and then he was cupping a breast in each hand. Capturing each of her nipples between a thumb and forefinger, he began to roll them gently back and forth with his fingers.

As much as Shayna wanted to take things slowly, she couldn't. Within moments, she found it impossible to sit still and began to move up and down in time with his caresses. But just because he had gotten her moving didn't

mean she couldn't be the one to set the pace, she told herself with a little smile. With that in mind, she rode him slowly, grinding herself hard against him each time she came down.

But Madoc only let her torture him like that for so long before he took charge. Giving her nipples a firm squeeze, he slid his hands down her waist and over her hips to cup her cheeks. Her breath caught in her throat as he began to massage her bottom. While her ass didn't sting as much as it had right after the spanking, it still tingled just enough to make what he was doing with his hands feel even more incredible than if she hadn't gotten spanked at all. Who knew that a good spanking could make sex so good?

Without realizing it, Shayna discovered that she had started to ride him faster and faster, and before she knew it, she was already approaching orgasm. For one, wild moment, she wondered if she should try to hold off or not, but that decision was made for her as Madoc gripped her hips tightly and began to pull her down even harder and faster against him.

Shayna closed her eyes and threw her head back as the first ripples of ecstasy coursed through her. They started somewhere deep inside of her, and then began to spiral outward, and by the time the pulsating waves of pleasure crested over her, she realized she was already screaming in ecstasy. And yet, despite how loudly she was crying out, she still managed to hear Madoc's groans of satisfaction, and knowing that he was coming with her only made her own orgasm that much more intense.

Much later, as she lay draped against his shoulder, she heard Madoc whisper in her ear.

"You know," he said softly. "I could really get used to this."

Shayna smiled against his neck. "Me, too."

As she cuddled up against him, Shayna couldn't help but wonder what Madoc had meant by that comment. Had he just been referring to the sex? While it was amazing, Shayna realized that she was starting to hope for something more between them. And yet, at the same time, she was amazed she could even be thinking such a thing. She had just met Madoc days ago. Was she really falling for him, or was she just confusing gratitude for love?

Deciding that she didn't have an answer to that question right then, Shayna closed her eyes and snuggled closer to the wonderful man beside her.

## Chapter 7

By the time he and Shayna roused themselves from the couch, the food Madoc had picked up from the Chinese restaurant earlier was cold, so they had to reheat it in the microwave. Rather than sit at the kitchen table to eat, though, they carried their plates into the living room and settled back down on the couch. Despite how hungry he was, however, it was difficult to focus on eating with Shayna sitting so close to him. She had pulled her knees up, which made the shirt slip down and expose the tantalizing skin of her thigh and hip. It also didn't help that she kept letting out these sexy, little sighs of pleasure as she ate, either. They reminded him of the passionate noises she had made while they had been making love earlier. And all that did was make him want her again.

"I feel like I haven't eaten in days," Shayna said as she used her chopsticks to pick up another piece of chicken. "You don't know how tempted I was to eat every one of those cookies Mrs. Murray brought over."

Madoc scowled. He still couldn't believe that his sweet, nosy neighbor had been sitting there on the couch drinking coffee with Shayna when he'd come in. "You shouldn't have let her in," he said. "And you definitely shouldn't have given her your real name."

Shayna gave him an embarrassed look. "It just kind of came out. Mrs. Murray is so friendly that I just didn't

think, I guess,” she said, and then added, “You don’t think she’ll remember seeing me in the newspapers or anything, do you?”

From everything he knew about his elderly neighbor, the woman was probably more inclined to watch Dr. Phil than America’s Most Wanted, and even if by chance she had seen Shayna’s picture on the local news all those months ago, she probably wouldn’t remember. At least Madoc hoped she wouldn’t.

Realizing that Shayna was looking at him expectantly, he shook his head. “I doubt it,” he said, and then gave her a stern look. “But that doesn’t mean you don’t have to be more careful.”

Beside him, Shayna nodded. “I will. I promise,” she told him, and then as if she were afraid he would scold her some more, she hurried on. “So, were you able to find out anything that might help me?”

Madoc helped himself to more rice before answering. “I read through the police reports, but there wasn’t much to go on,” he said. “I’m thinking our best bet is going to be to take a look around your boss’ apartment.”

Her brow furrowed at that. “But if he had left anything incriminating around, wouldn’t the police have found it when they searched his place?”

Madoc shrugged. “Not necessarily,” he said. “When the cops were at his place, they were looking for evidence against you, not him, which means they could have missed something that would incriminate him.”

Though Shayna said nothing, Madoc could see the flicker of hope in her eyes. While he knew finding evidence linking Evan Mercer to the embezzlement was probably going to be a long shot, especially since the man had been so careful about covering his tracks up to that point, Madoc didn’t say that to Shayna. Instead, he told her that they could go check it out as soon as they were finished eating.

“You want me to go with you?” Shayna asked, looking at him in surprise.

Madoc nodded. “You’d be more likely to recognize something of a financial nature faster than I would,” he said. “Besides, if I leave you here alone, you’ll probably just invite the rest of my neighbors over.”

Shayna made a face at him, but said nothing. In all honesty, she was thrilled that Madoc wanted her to go with him to check out Evan’s apartment. It was difficult to believe that two days ago he had been determined to toss her back in jail, she thought. Now, he wanted her to help him prove her innocence.

Finishing up with dinner, Shayna went into the bedroom to get dressed while Madoc took their plates into the kitchen. Ten minutes later, they were on their way to Evan Mercer’s apartment.

Shayna hadn’t given much thought to how they would get into the man’s apartment once they got there, and she was surprised when Madoc knelt down to pick the lock. Oh God, she thought, she really had turned the upstanding Marshal into a criminal. That made her frown. While she knew she would be too selfish to turn down his help now that he had agreed to give it, she would feel absolutely awful if Madoc got into trouble because of her.

She was still worrying about that when Madoc opened the door and ushered her inside the apartment. Closing the door behind them, he turned on the light.

Shayna whirled around to look at him. “Shouldn’t we be doing this with flashlights?” she whispered.

Madoc looked at her in confusion. “Why would we use flashlights?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know,” she said. “They always do that in the movies.”

His mouth quirked. “Yeah, well, a flashlight flickering around in a dark room looks way more suspicious than

turning on the light,” he told her. “Now, you said he has a home office, right?”

She nodded.

“Then let’s start in there,” he said.

Having been to her boss’s apartment several times, Shayna knew exactly where Evan Mercer’s home office was, so she led Madoc directly down the hall and into a small room off to the right. Unfortunately, her boss wasn’t the most organized person on the planet, so searching through the stacks of books and papers on his desk took awhile. It didn’t help that Shayna had no idea what she was even supposed to be looking for. But when she asked Madoc, all he said was, “something incriminating.”

“That’s a big help,” she muttered as she pulled open another one of the desk drawers.

Like the others, this drawer was stuffed with stacks of old paperwork, both personal and business related. Letting out a sigh, Shayna took out a handful of papers and began to skim through them. She was just nearing the bottom of the stack when she saw something that caught her attention.

“I think I may have found something!” she said excitedly.

Across the room, Madoc looked up from the folders he’d been rifling through. “What is it?”

“Account numbers for an offshore bank,” she said.

Pushing the drawer of the file cabinet closed, Madoc came over to stand beside her chair. Resting one hand on the back of it, he leaned over to read the paper on the desk in front of her.

“Lawrence Mulrooney is the CEO of the company where I worked,” she explained, pointing to the man’s name at the top of the paper. “And these,” she added, pointing to the column of seemingly-meaningless numbers, “are overseas bank accounts.”

Madoc’s brow furrowed. “And what does that mean?”

Shayna tilted her head to the side to look at him. “It means that Evan Mercer wasn’t the one who framed me,” she said. “Mulrooney wouldn’t need to have all of these offshore accounts if he weren’t trying to hide something. He must have been the one moving money out of the retirement funds and Evan must have found out about it. Isn’t this what we were looking for? A list of overseas bank accounts is suspicious enough to get the cops to take a look at Mulrooney, right?”

Madoc shook his head. “Unfortunately, no. Not by itself,” he said. “The DA wouldn’t want to muddy up his case by looking at someone like Mulrooney. Not based on something like this. Especially when they already have the case wrapped up against you.”

Shayna felt her heart sink. What good was having proof if they couldn’t use it to get her out of this mess?

Beside her, Madoc was frowning thoughtfully. “Can you type up an official looking bank document showing money being transferred into these accounts from the retirement funds?” he asked after a moment.

She looked at him in confusion. “I suppose so,” she said. “But they wouldn’t stand up to any scrutiny. I don’t have any of the dates or routing numbers for the transactions. So, what good would it do?”

The Marshal shrugged. “I’m not trying to use it as evidence for the DA,” he said. “But if I can convince this Mulrooney guy that I have more evidence than I do, I might be able to get him to incriminate himself.”

Shayna’s brow furrowed. “But why would he admit anything to a U.S. Marshal?”



Madoc flashed her a grin. "Because he's not going to know I'm a U.S. Marshal."

Some of Shayna's excitement at the prospect of finding out who had framed her waned once she had heard the rest of Madoc's plan, however. When he'd first outlined his plan on the way back to his apartment the night before, it had seemed so simple. Madoc would get Mulrooney to admit on tape that he had embezzled the money and framed her. But as she listened to him set up a meeting with the CEO on the phone the next morning, she realized how much risk Madoc was taking to help clear her name. Madoc couldn't tell any of his coworkers what he was doing, which meant that he was going to be completely on his own. That worried her. If they assumed Mulrooney had embezzled the money and framed her, then he had most likely murdered her boss as well. That meant he was dangerous, and she wasn't quite sure she liked the idea of Madoc confronting him alone. While she was incredibly grateful to him for helping her, she was also getting more and more worried about something happening to him because of it.

She had spent the whole morning trying to figure out how to tell him about her fears, but for some ridiculous reason, she couldn't seem to get the words out. And then after lunch, Madoc had announced he was going out to pick up some surveillance equipment for his meeting with Mulrooney that night.

While he was out, Shayna chided herself for not saying something to him. She would bring it up the moment he got back, she told herself. Of course, she didn't really expect him to pay too much attention to her concerns. He had way too much testosterone to let his girlfriend's worries get in the way.

That thought made her stop in her tracks. Girlfriend? Had their relationship already gotten to the point where she thought of herself as his girlfriend? Apparently, it had. She couldn't help but wonder if Madoc thought of her the same way. Obviously, he was attracted to her, but would he want to pursue anything long-term with her after they had cleared her name? She hoped so, but she had no way to know for sure.

Shayna was still mulling that over when Madoc returned with a bag full of surveillance gear. Remembering her earlier promise to talk to him about her fears, she brought up the subject while he unloaded the bag.

"I don't know if this whole thing is such a good idea, Madoc," she said as she watched him pull a small cylinder-shaped item out of the bag and begin to pin it inside his coat.

He glanced at her. "Sure it is. We need evidence, and this is the best way to get it."

She hugged her arms around her middle and chewed on her lower lip. "I know, and I really appreciate it, but shouldn't you have back-up with you for this kind of stuff?"

Madoc's mouth quirked as he shrugged into his coat and checked the position of the item he had pinned inside it. It must have been some kind of microphone or something, she thought. "Mulrooney is a petty, white-collar criminal," he told her. "I think I can handle him."

Shayna sighed inwardly. What was it with guys and their egos? she wondered. "You're forgetting that Mulrooney probably murdered Evan Mercer."

"Based on what we know, I'd say that Mulrooney went over to talk to Mercer and panicked when he found out Mercer was on to him," Madoc said. "It wasn't like he planned to murder Mercer, so I don't see him as the cold-blooded killer. Besides, I don't plan on confronting him by myself. Once I get the evidence I need, I'll call in the local PD and let them take care of him."

Madoc made it sound so simple, she thought. "Well, I'd still feel better if you had back-up with you," Shayna insisted, and then added, "In case things don't go as planned."

Madoc reached out to gently brush her hair back from her face. "I can't bring anyone else in on this, Shayna," he

said. "Not without them finding out about you. Besides, everything will go just fine."

She chewed on her lower lip again. "Maybe it would be a good idea if I went with you."

"Absolutely not," he said firmly. "It's too dangerous."

She frowned up at him. "You just said that is wasn't dangerous."

His mouth tightened. "I didn't say that at all," he corrected. "What I said was that I could handle him. But if you come with me, I'll be worrying about you when I should be focusing on Mulrooney, and that would definitely make things dangerous."

"But what if something goes wrong, and you need back-up?" she persisted.

Madoc sighed. "I'll be fine. If I need help, I have my cell. I'll call for backup."

"But..."

He gently cupped her cheek with his hand. "I'll be fine, Shayna. Really," he told her. "I'm trained for this kind of thing, remember?"

She swallowed hard. "You'll be careful, right?"

The corner of his mouth edged up. "Always," he said. Lowering his head, he kissed her gently. "I'll be back soon. And if everything goes as planned, we'll have all the evidence we need to clear you by morning."

As the door closed behind Madoc, everything suddenly became perfectly clear to her. There was no denying it anymore. This was more than just wanting to be Madoc's girlfriend. She was completely head-over-heels in love with the man. How else could she explain the fact that she suddenly couldn't care less about him proving her innocence? She'd gladly go on the run for the rest of her life if it meant he would be safe. She wouldn't be willing to do that for him if she weren't in love, she told herself.

And now that she had finally recognized her feelings for what they were, she wasn't going to just sit back and do nothing while he risked his life for her. Regardless of how glib he was being about the whole thing, Madoc was putting himself into serious danger. And she wasn't going to let him do that on his own! Grabbing her coat, she headed for the door. Madoc needed her help, whether he wanted to admit it or not. And she wasn't going to let him down!

The park had already emptied out by this time of day, and in the gathering dusk, Madoc glanced at his watch. Damn, Mulrooney was late. Madoc hoped that didn't mean the other man had decided not to show. This was their only chance to get the evidence necessary to clear Shayna's name. If the CEO didn't bite, then they were screwed.

And if their plan didn't work? How far was he prepared to go for Shayna? Madoc wondered. He had already decided on the way back from Denver that turning Shayna in was out of the question. Was it really that much more of a stretch to assume he would help her flee the country if they couldn't clear her name? But how could he just let her go off without him? After everything he had done for her - deciding not to turn her in, hiding her in his own apartment, and now, conducting an undercover sting operation all by himself - it was obvious that he had completely lost his mind over this woman. So, why not just run off to Mexico with her?

Madoc couldn't even believe he was thinking of doing that, but he was. Now he could see how his brother, Cade, had fallen in love so quickly. When you met the right woman, it was like a big, ol' truck had just run you over all at once, he thought. There was nothing he could do now, but go along for the ride. His mouth quirked. After the way he'd berated his brother for getting married, Cade was really going to enjoy rubbing this in.

The headlights of an approaching car interrupted his musings, and Madoc sat up straighter as the vehicle slowed to a stop. Finally, he thought. Reaching inside his coat, Madoc checked the positioning of the wireless mic again before doing the same to the receiver. Designed to look like a wallet, the receiver was shoved in his back pocket, so it was doubtful that Mulrooney would even notice it. Opening the door, Madoc stepped out of the SUV. Showtime, he told himself.

A tall man in a suit and tie got out of the car and slowly walked toward him. Even if he hadn't already seen a picture of Lawrence Mulrooney on the company website, Madoc would have known he was the guy he'd been waiting for. He might look like a businessman with the glasses and the graying hair, but he moved like a criminal.

Mulrooney stopped several feet from where Madoc stood. "You Cutler?" he asked.

Madoc inclined his head. "Is that the money?" he asked, gesturing to the briefcase in the man's hand.

Mulrooney nodded. "How do I know this isn't some kind of trap? You could be wearing a wire or something."

Madoc shrugged, trying to appear nonchalant. "Go ahead and frisk me if you want. I don't have anything to hide."

Putting on a bored expression, Madoc held his arms out to the side while Mulrooney patted him down. He had anticipated the man searching him, which was why he had chosen to wear a small back-up pistol stuffed inside his boot. He doubted Mulrooney was experienced enough to look for it. And since the wireless mic was just as well hidden, he wasn't too concerned about the other man finding that, either. Even so, he was relieved when Mulrooney finally finished his search and stepped back.

"So, let's see this evidence you have," the CEO said.

Madoc jerked his chin toward the briefcase. If he didn't do this right, Mulrooney was sure to suspect something. "Let me see the color of your money first."

Mulrooney's mouth tightened, but he opened the case and held it up to show the money. Only when Madoc nodded did he snap the briefcase shut again.

Madoc reached into the inside pocket of his coat and took out the envelope with the fake bank paperwork. He pulled the papers out and held them up in front of Mulrooney. When the man reached for them, Madoc pulled them out of his reach.

"No, no," he said. "You can look, but you can't touch. Not until I get the money."

Mulrooney swore under his breath. "You don't expect me to pay for something that I haven't seen?"

Madoc's mouth quirked. "You see with your eyes, not with your hands," he said. "Feel free to take a look, but I'll hold onto it."

Swearing under his breath again, the other man leaned closer to get a better look. "Turn it to the light," he grumbled impatiently. "I can't see it."

After Madoc had adjusted his position so that the light from the streetlamp shone on the paper, the CEO leaned forward again to study it intently.

"Damn," Mulrooney muttered. "These are bank transaction codes to my private accounts." He slanted Madoc an accusing look. "Where the hell did you get these?"

"The DA had me go through Mercer's files from his home, just to make sure we had everything against the Matthews woman," Madoc replied. "I came across these and realized they might be of some value to you. I

figured you'd be willing to pay a lot of money to keep them out of the wrong hands, and I'm always looking to pad my retirement account."

Mulrooney gave him a contemptuous look. "Greedy bastard," he sneered. "It's people like you that give cops a bad name."

"If I'm greedy, then what does that make you?" Madoc shot back. "You're the one stealing from your own company's retirement funds."

"So what if I am?" Mulrooney said as he held out the briefcase. "Like you said, I'm always looking to pad my retirement account."

Madoc shook his head. "Looks like you had a sweet deal going, too," he said as he handed Mulrooney the papers in exchange for the briefcase. "So, what went wrong?"

The other man leafed furiously through the pieces of paper, reading them over again. "That idiot, Mercer, started putting his nose in where it didn't belong. Everything was fine until he called and told me that he knew what I was up to. That's when everything started going to crap."

I got you now, you bastard, Madoc thought. He already had enough on Mulrooney to provide reasonable doubt to Shayna's attorney. Now it was time to go in for the kill and get the CEO to admit that he had framed her for everything.

Damn! Shayna couldn't hear a thing from her hiding place behind one of the trees on the edge of the clearing. She thought about moving closer, but didn't want to be seen. Madoc would be furious if he knew she had come to the park. Besides, she was only there in case something went wrong. And she could see well enough for that. Not that she had any clue what she would do if Mulrooney tried anything. Heck, she didn't even have a cell phone! She was starting to think that Madoc had been right. It was foolish for her to be there.

In the clearing, Madoc had just handed the papers to Mulrooney in exchange for a briefcase, and she started to let out a sigh of relief. But then immediately tensed again as the two men continued to talk. What the heck could they have to chat about for so long? she wondered. It wasn't like they were old friends or anything. Madoc was just supposed to get the information he needed, and then leave. This was taking way too long, she thought. Maybe something had gone wrong.

As she watched, Mulrooney reached behind him to adjust his trousers. The move pushed aside his suit jacket, and in the half-light, Shayna could see a dark glint right above his belt. Oh God, Shayna thought. He had a gun!

Without thought to her own safety, Shayna burst out from behind the tree. "Madoc, he's got a gun!" she screamed. "Watch out!"

Madoc stared in disbelief. Shayna? What the hell was that dang woman doing there?

Mulrooney jerked his head around at the shout. "What the hell's going on?" he demanded, swinging back around to face Madoc. "This was a trap!"

Reaching behind him, Mulrooney pulled out the gun Shayna had mentioned and began to level it at Madoc.

Madoc swore under his breath. Not having time to go for the gun he had stashed in his boot, he took a quick step forward and grabbed Mulrooney's arm before the man could get the gun pointed in his direction. Balling his free hand into a fist, Madoc threw a series of punches at the other man's face. Of course, Mulrooney was doing his best to block them, and Madoc was so focused on the pistol in the man's hand that he couldn't get in a well-aimed blow. But at least it kept Mulrooney from taking a shot at him.

He and Mulrooney were still locked like that when Shayna ran up to them. To his consternation, she took up a position behind the CEO and began to pound the man on the back with her fists. The blows weren't very effective, but they distracted Mulrooney enough so that Madoc could finally get in a solid punch to the man's jaw.

Mulrooney went down like a sack of potatoes, releasing his hold on the pistol, and Madoc ripped it out of his hand. Automatically, Madoc reached for his cell phone so that he could call the police, but stopped when he realized that Shayna was standing there shaking and looking altogether terrified. Madoc glanced down at Mulrooney. The guy was out cold and wouldn't be a threat. Calling the police could wait, he decided. Reaching out, he pulled Shayna into his arms.

"Shhh," he said softly. "It's okay, sweetheart. We got him."

Shayna held him tightly. "He had a gun, Madoc. I had to warn you," she said, her voice muffled against his coat.

"I know," Madoc said. "It's okay now."

She lifted her head to look up at him. "Did we get what we needed?" she asked.

Madoc nodded. "Yeah, we did," he said. "Mulrooney confessed to everything."

Still holding onto her with one arm, Madoc pulled out his cell phone and called the police. When he was done, he put the phone away and gave Shayna a tender kiss on the lips.

"Shayna, we're going to have to talk about what you were doing here, but right now, you need to go back to my apartment," he said when he lifted his head. "The cops will be here any minute, and they can't find you here. Can you get home okay?"

She nodded. "I'm okay," she said, and then gave him a tremulous smile. "Now that I know you're safe."

Reaching on tiptoe, she kissed him again, and then turned to leave. But he stopped her. "Wait a minute," he said. "How did you get here?"

She gave him a sheepish look. "I borrowed Mrs. Murray's car," she said. "I told her it was important."

Madoc shook his head. "We really do have to talk," he muttered. "I'll be home in a couple of hours. Now, go before the cops get here. And drive safe."

He shook his head again as he watched her go. Shayna was completely unbelievable. The woman had no fear. She had seen the gun and come running over to whack on the guy anyway. On one hand, he couldn't help but admire her spunk. But on the other, he couldn't help but be furious that she had once again refused to listen to him. If anything had happened to her...

When he got home, he was definitely going to have that talk with her, Madoc promised himself. Actually, there wasn't going to be a whole lot of talking going on, unless he counted the communicating his hand was going to be doing with her bottom!

It was well after midnight when Madoc finally got home. Though the Denver police had taken Mulrooney off his hands quickly enough, Madoc had spent the better part of the night talking with the district attorney about the case. The DA had found it difficult to believe that Madoc had just stumbled onto the information that blew the case wide open. That had led to Madoc's boss being called in. But Madoc had played it cool and stuck to a simple story about being given some information from an anonymous source. Madoc claimed he hadn't wanted to bother anyone with it until he had checked it out himself since it seemed like such a long shot. Though his boss had looked skeptical too, there wasn't much either man could say, not when Madoc had Mulrooney confessing everything on tape.

Letting himself into his apartment, he closed the door, and looked around for Shayna. Though the lights were on, both the living room and kitchen were empty, but the feminine coat thrown carelessly over the arm of the couch told him that she was there. Thinking that she had probably gone to bed, he shut off the lights and headed for his bedroom.

The sight of Shayna asleep in his bed made him catch his breath. She was curled up into a ball, the blanket tucked under her chin. She looked so cute and innocent laying there that he could have stood there all night just watching her. But then he reminded himself that they did have to have that talk.

Sitting down on the edge bed, Madoc reached out and gently brushed Shayna's hair back from her face. She immediately stirred at his touch, her eyes fluttering open. She blinked at him sleepily for a moment, but then as if suddenly remembering the night's events, she came more fully awake. Pushing her hair back from her face, she pushed herself up into a sitting position. The blanket slipped down, and he saw that she was once again wearing his white dress shirt.

"Did you just come in?" she asked, her voice husky with sleep.

He nodded. "A couple of minutes ago."

"Did everything go okay?" she said.

Again, he nodded. "The DA has the tape of Mulrooney confessing to everything. He'll be formally dropping all the charges against you in the morning," he told her. "You're a free woman."

For a moment, Shayna just stared at him, but then she smiled brightly. With a laugh, she threw her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. "Oh God, Madoc! I don't know how to thank you!"

Chuckling, Madoc wrapped his arms around her. "I'm sure I'll think of something," he said, and then pulled away to look at her. "But first, we need to talk about what you did tonight."

Shayna blinked up at him. "What I did?" she asked innocently.

He frowned. "I told you to stay here and wait for me, but instead, you decided to follow me to the park."

"Oh, that," she said softly, only to lift her chin a moment later. "It was a good thing I did, otherwise you wouldn't have known that Mulrooney had a gun."

Madoc's jaw tightened. "Shayna, he would never have pulled his gun if you hadn't jumped out from behind that tree shouting like that."

"You don't know that," she said. "He could have planned on shooting you all along."

"I doubt it," Madoc said. "Besides, I had everything I needed at that point and was about to take the money and leave. You could have gotten both of us killed tonight."

She flushed. "I'm sorry. I saw the gun and I got worried. I just didn't want you to get hurt," she said, and then added, "I was only trying to help. I won't do anything like that again."

Madoc's mouth quirked at that. "Somehow, I doubt that, sweetheart," he said. "I think it's in your nature to act before you think."

Shayna gasped. "That's not true!" she protested.

"Yes, it is," he said. "But it doesn't mean I have to put up with it. After the spanking I have in mind for you, I think you'll be a lot less likely to do anything so foolish for quite awhile."

Her eyes went wide at the mention of a spanking. "You're not serious!"

But Shayna could see from the expression on his face that Madoc was definitely serious. She would have put up more of a fuss, but she was still sort of fuzzy from sleep and before she could even attempt to put up a serious protest, she found herself being pulled over his knee. Even though past experience told her that struggling against him wouldn't do any good, she found herself fighting to push herself off his lap anyway. But his firm hand on her lower back held her easily in place as he pushed up the dress shirt she had worn to bed.

"Ah, no panties," he observed. "Good. That'll make it easier."

Shayna groaned. She really loved Madoc, but these spankings of his were a real pain in the butt. Literally.

"Owwwww!" she yelped as the first smack came down on her bare bottom. "Do you have to start out so hard?"

"If I don't spank you hard, you won't think I'm serious," Madoc said, giving her another sharp smack on the ass. "And I wouldn't want you to think that."

Oh, yeah, he was serious, all right, Shayna thought as he began to methodically apply his strong hand to first one cheek, and then the other. Without the benefit of panties, the spans had her ass blazing right from the very start, and even though she told herself it would do no good, she still struggled all the same, wiggling and squirming around on his lap.

All that did was cause Madoc to wrap his arm tightly around her waist and spank her even harder.

"What you did tonight was beyond foolish, Shayna," Madoc said, punctuating each word with a stinging slap. "When you ran into the clearing, Mulrooney could easily have tried to shoot you instead of me."

"But he...owwww!...didn't!" she pointed out.

"And then, as if that weren't enough," he continued, "you decide to join the fight."

"I had to!" she told him in between yelps. "You needed help!"

"I needed you to be safe!" Madoc told her.

"But..."

"Oh, and let's not forget about borrowing Mrs. Murray's car," he added, giving her a hard spank to each of her sit-spots.

"Owwwww!" she cried. "Okay, okay, I get it! You've made your point! I promise to not do anything that foolish ever again!"

At her words, Madoc paused for a moment to rest his hand on her tender bottom, and she let out a sigh of relief. "Once again, I really doubt that," he said.

She craned her neck to look at him over her shoulder. "But I promise I really will try to be better," she said softly, and then added, "Besides, it's not like I'm going to get involved with a murderer again any time soon, right?"

From the scowl Madoc gave her, Shayna immediately realized she had said the wrong thing, but before she could explain, he had lifted his hand and was bringing it down on her ass again. The smacks seemed even harder than they had before, and all she could do was press her face into the covers and kick her legs. To her relief, however, he didn't give her much more than another dozen or so before he flipped her over and cuddled her on his lap.

"You really scared me out there tonight, Shayna," he told her, his voice rough with emotion. "I know that you

were only trying to help, but you could have gotten yourself killed. I don't ever want you doing anything like that again." He drew in a ragged breath. "I couldn't stand it if anything happened to you."

Shayna felt herself melt at his words. If she had any doubt as to what his feelings were for her, they disappeared in that moment. Ignoring the way the rough material of his jeans rubbed against her freshly-spanked bottom, she leaned forward and kissed him hard on the mouth. He returned her kiss just as passionately, his mouth moving over hers with an eagerness that left her breathless.

When Madoc lifted his head several long minutes later, it was to set her gently on the bed so that he could take off his clothes. Once he was naked, he stood beside the bed and gazed down at her. "I love you, Shayna Matthews," he told her hoarsely.

Even though she knew how he felt about her, hearing him say the words out loud made her heart leap for joy. Tears of happiness welling in her eyes, she smiled up at him. "I love you, too," she said, and then added, "Now, get that gorgeous body of yours into this bed and make love to me."

Madoc promptly obeyed, his mouth finding hers in a kiss as he settled himself between her legs.

Afterward, as they lay together in the huge bed, a thought occurred to Shayna and she smiled. "You know," she said softly as she idly trailed her fingers up and down his muscular chest. "If you hadn't come into that diner in Flint Rock, I'd still be living my life on the run and we never would have found each other."

Madoc chuckled, the sound a deep rumble beneath her ear. "If I hadn't gone in there," he told her. "I would never have met the woman I want to spend the rest of my life with."

Her pulse fluttering, Shayna pushed herself up on her elbow to look down at him. "Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

Madoc grinned. "Yup," he drawled, and then added, "You know, since that diner holds such special meaning for both of us, maybe we should have our reception there."

Laughing, Shayna snuggled up beside him. Now, that was a romantic thought, especially since that diner would always be special to them. Even so, she couldn't really see them having their wedding reception there. Thank God, Madoc wasn't serious, she thought. Then she frowned. He had been joking, hadn't he?

The End