

The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Branded by Love Copyright © 2009 Destiny Blaine ISBN: 978-1-55487-300-5 Cover art by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

> Published by eXtasy Books Look for us online at: www.extasybooks.com

## Branded by Love

By

# DESTINY BLAINE

#### DEDICATION

To my husband who always shares the laughs and the heartaches, and we've had plenty of both

### Chapter One

"Good God that was sweet," Luke rolled over and stared up at the ceiling, his ragged breath caught somewhere deep in his lungs. He slapped Carly's hip when she moved away from the bed. "This is

why I ride out to see you a few times a week. I

swear I can't get enough of you."

Carly Corbaine was a whore and she became one by choice and because revenge had a way of setting a woman right. One thing about it, she sure fucked out a lot of animosity and she liked the men who stopped by to help her out of her troubles.

Since she didn't work in the town saloon, those in Stockton didn't see her waltzing on the porch of a whorehouse covered in frills and lace. She lived smack dab in the middle of the prairie. Her cozy cabin was inviting, and thanks to the men who visited her, she enjoyed a few updates. She screwed plenty of hours to earn them.

"You hungry?" Most of the time, she offered her customers something hot to eat before she sent them back toward town. She did it for two reasons. One, she didn't want the men who paid her sticking around for very long after completed business so she offered them some supper and then showed them the door. If they smelled a good meal, they didn't fall asleep in her bed and she never liked the idea of overnight guests.

Luke Daniels rubbed his hand over his soft cock. "I'm starving for a little more pussy." He stared at her breasts and winked. "What do ya say?"

Luke was a good-looking man, one of the handsomest men around Stockton. He was a widower. He lost his wife in a gun battle and folks around town used to say Luke fired the shot that killed his beloved wife, but Carly never asked questions. She didn't want to know and she rarely invited a more personal and intimate relationship with anyone who paid her. Outside of the screwing and the business dealings behind it, she wasn't much for pillow talk.

"Luke, we've fucked the morning away and now, I'm offering you a little something to eat so you don't leave hungry." Carly didn't care to put things out there the way a woman should. She was blunt, but so was Luke.

He reached for her, successfully grabbed her and pulled her back on the bed. "What if I ain't ready to go so fast today?" Carly sometimes wished she hadn't fallen so hard for Preston Evans. The man everyone in town still called out as her husband, disappeared over a year ago. Carly hadn't even received a telegraph, not one word. Luke started coming around her place whenever he was passing through and he worked out a little arrangement soon after he started dropping by. He knew a few cowboys and they possessed several unusual hang-ups so Carly never thought they'd remain bed buddies for long.

"You expecting some company out here, Luke?"

"You never know," he drawled. "We like visitors though. Don't we?"

"Yeah, Luke. I like the company we keep." She enjoyed it when she knew to expect it. When Luke's friends showed up, she seldom accomplished much. They would stay and ride her, ride each other and then when they couldn't get it up again, they'd leave a bunch of gold on her table and ride on out.

"Wish you'd told me before we spent half the morning in bed," she said. "I had a lot of work to do around here." She slid down his stomach and eyed his hard-on. Sure enough, Luke was as stout as a few hours earlier and there was only one reason for it. Luke Davis had a man coming for them, one he'd enjoy as much or more than he liked bedding down Carly.

She kissed the tip of his dick and slid off the bed again. "Now I reckon after you've gone and had your way with me, I better scoot on down to the creek and take a bath. I don't want those cowboys thinking I didn't prepare myself for the lot of 'em."

Luke chuckled. "The fellas have been ridin' all the way from Dodge City and I don't think they'll care either way. They picked up some cattle down on the river in one of those mining towns of Colorado. They've had their hands full with the herd. None of them have seen a woman, much less held one. You'll do with or without a good bathing."

"They deserve to get what they pay for," she said, snatching her clothes from the floor. "I'm going to be as fresh as a newly sprouted flower by the time I get back and might even put on one of Rose's dresses."

"I reckon it don't matter what you wear. We never really notice. We're all the same, just anxious for those pretty little titties and that warm, sweet pussy."

Luke pushed his long hair over his shoulders and propped up against the headboard. His expression changed all of a sudden and he added another word or two, this time without the humor lacing through his voice, "I uh, meant to tell ya, one of the boys said he saw Preston while he was in Dodge."

Carly gasped. She clung to her clothes and closed her eyes. Realizing she couldn't hide her face since she stood directly in front of the mirror, she wondered if Luke detected how bad his statement stung her. She took another deep breath, let it out and then stared back at the man behind her.

"Is he well? I mean...he's doing all right for himself, I reckon." Carly's heart ran away so fast, she felt sick at her stomach. She quickly stuffed her head into a blouse, the same one Luke hadn't bothered to unbutton when he first undressed her.

Luke's cheek twitched. She always knew Luke cared about her, but because of his certain sexual preferences, she'd deliberately guarded her heart whenever she'd been with him. She reminded herself all the time. Luke Daniels was a man who paid for her services and he'd never want her love, even if she had it to give. Truth be told, she always knew that she wasn't going to love him and he never made himself available for loving. Outside of the deep connection he had with John Wilcox, Luke didn't form lasting relationships.

He studied her and his eyes dropped to her legs when she stepped into her skirt, something she seldom wore because she preferred breeches, especially when she worked outside. Since her work for the day confined her to the bedroom, she'd put on the skirt for show.

"They said he had a woman," Luke drawled, his voice raspy, curt with a truth meant for slicing at a woman in love, even the kind, like herself, who decided to whore herself out by the hour.

Carly swallowed hard. Of course, he'd have a woman. She'd taken a few men to bed and knew if he ever came back to Stockton, he'd hear all about it. She'd dreaded and looked forward to the day.

She worried about the future. Preston might come back for her and if he showed up on a night when she had a little personal business, he'd kill or set out to kill—the man in her bed. She also anxiously awaited his return because she still loved Preston and, in the back of her mind, she craved the day he'd come home and claim her again for his own.

Carly walked to the bedside table and pulled open the drawer. She retrieved a bar of soap and then headed for the front door. "There's some coffee, so help yourself," she said.

"Carly?" Luke stopped her before she made it out of the bedroom.

She glanced in the looking glass and noted the peculiar expression washing across Luke's face. "The woman he's with uh, some say he's gonna bring her back here."

Carly nodded. "Why wouldn't he?"

"Well, seeing as he had a wife here and all..." He let his voice trail off and then he said, "Don't make a difference to me or anyone else around here now after the way he done you, but I wanted you to hear it from me. He's got a woman, a right nice one they say and..."

"And I reckon she don't know the first thing about me, does she?"

He shook his head. "The boys can tell you more when they get here, but from what I understand, she ain't been told about you, Preston's wife."

She cleared her throat. "Then why is he gonna bring her back here?"

"He's got that place on the other side of town, you know."

"Uh-huh," she drawled. "Is he coming back here to sell it?"

"Rumors and all." Luke bowed his head and reached for the sheet. "Carly, he's bringing her back here after he marries her."

Carly turned around, the anger boiling her blood so hot that her temper was uncontrollable. She balled her fist and then stormed across the room. Glaring at the messenger, the man she counted as a friend five minutes before he touched on the sensitive subject, looked at her like he was too sorry to express his apologies.

"How the hell does a man with a wife marry another one?"

"Preston is as arrogant as the rest of his nocount family was, Carly. You never saw it. That brother of his, the one you killed? Why Slim had nothing over on old Preston. The man is ten feet tall and ready to take on the worst of outlaws. He's practically one himself."

"Preston and Slim weren't nothing alike," she drawled. "Nothin'. You hear me?"

Luke reached for her and she stormed away.

Luke continued, "Don't matter to me either way. I still ain't changing my mind. I say he's Slim made over, best I can tell. He only cares about himself and maybe a little revenge every now and then. Speaking of which, I think that's what he's doing in the first place.

"Carly, now I told you. He's bringing a woman here. He told the boys as much. The telegraph office leaked it when they sent along the message. Hell, I'm surprised you ain't already heard about it from those whores you call out as your friends. They know all about it. Rose has been as mad as a wet hen and if that banker from Colorado hadn't been in town—you know the one she's half in love with—then I imagine she might have rode on out here to tell you herself."

Carly gulped. Years ago, Carly and Rose formed an unlikely friendship, it was one they never really wanted, but Carly decided some folks were destined for friendship, even when they didn't like the other person especially. With Carly and Rose, they had a bond or two that most considered unbreakable. For starters, Rose saved Carly's life. When Preston's brother almost raped and killed her, Rose fired the shot that stopped him. Later though, it was Carly who delivered the death bullet, the one that killed him and forever changed the relationship she had with Preston Evans, the man she called her husband.

"Well let him bring her here. He'll later wish he hadn't bothered," Carly snapped. "I ain't been pining for him, as you can tell, and he might as well take up with a woman he can make his wife. I can't have children, did you know?"

He shook his head.

"Doc says it was just one of those things and since I sleep with so many different men now, I reckon it's for the best."

"I suppose so," he said. Slowly, his lips formed a smile and he added, "You know I was always sort of worried about Preston showing back up around these parts anyway. It ain't a secret around here, Preston used to be awful jealous. Some said me and a few others would have to run for the hills if he ever came back around. You know, his notorious temper and all."

Carly cleared her throat. "You mean his murderous reputation, don't you?"

Luke frowned. "Reckon so," he said. "Although

I gotta tell you, I ain't watched Preston do much killin', have you?"

"No," she admitted.

"Carly, because you're a friend, I need to tell you something. Some folks just ain't meant to be together. You two tried awful hard to work against fate, but after he had to kill his daddy in order to save your life, well the man just couldn't live with what he'd done. I reckon you gotta understand where he had to leave and why, when he comes back, he's gonna have to move his life in another direction."

Carly studied Luke and started to tell him the truth. She wanted to confide in someone. She realized if she ever decided to tell her story, that harrowing tale of what went on the night Preston's father lost his life, some might look at her a little differently. After all, she'd killed Slim, Preston's brother, too. Someday, she might let Rose know her secret. Rose, after all, had already long suspected it.

When Carly killed Slim, Preston told her to never come back. They were already living at Preston's place, enjoying their new love and looking forward to their bright future. In a blink of an eye, Preston's brother took away everything and, for a long time, she hated Preston for allowing him to strip them of the future they both wanted. When Preston's father came back looking for revenge, they'd fought a hard battle, one they were forced to win because the losers that cold winter's night, died. At some point during the gun battle, she passed out cold, but when she woke up, she remembered everything.

She recalled the blood spilled and who took the shots that drained it. But Preston took the blame and he carried it until he realized she remembered everything. Then he couldn't stand to look at her.

Sometimes Carly believed Preston convinced himself that he killed his father and as long as he was allowed to believe his own lie, he lived with it. When she didn't let him carry it on his own, he turned his self-hatred on her. That's when he rode out and never came back.

Now, he was coming back to Stockton. He might as well bring a woman because he didn't have anything to come home to if he hoped to find the Carly he once knew. She'd made sure of it.

Carly started for the front porch and she thought of something. "Rose once told me that she'd rather be any man's whore than a woman trying to get one man back into her bed."

Luke narrowed his gaze. "You believe everything that whore says?"

"She was talking about Preston when she sat at my table and told me. She rode out here one cold winter's day. The woman tried to convince me that Preston wanted me, only me, and she came here to let me know that eventually Preston would take another woman if he couldn't have me."

"Well, I reckon he did," Luke said.

"He might as well have, Luke. See, Preston wanted a woman all pure and innocent. He wanted the mother of his children and a woman he could be proud to put in a carriage and ride side by side to a Sunday morning church service. Preston wouldn't want a woman ruined by another man's seed. He wanted the pure for himself. Something happened the night Slim died and it changed us for a bit. Then something happened again with Robert Barkley and our actions forever changed us."

"Robert Barkley?" he asked arching a brow.

"I slept with him," she admitted.

"The Barkley kid that disappeared over a year ago?"

"He was a young man and not a kid," she said. "And I had him in my bed. Preston watched."

Luke's eyes darkened and he rubbed his chin. "When was this?"

"Over a year ago, before he disappeared."

"And Preston watched you fuck him?"

"Yes," she said.

"So young Robert disappeared right after that?" "Yes, but Preston didn't kill him."

"His momma and daddy think somebody did."

"I thought they assumed he took up with some whore and left Stockton."

Luke took a deep breath and then said, "I think he took up with some whore and was blown away for sticking his pecker where it didn't belong."

She cleared her throat. "You're entitled to your opinions."

Luke stood, shook his breeches out and stepped into them. "You know a man is a funny kind of character. He can treat a woman anyway he wants when that woman promises to love him as his wife. I reckon if Robert was in your bed and Preston knew all about it, then he met his demise the way I might soon meet mine."

She winced when Luke took a few steps and grabbed her around the waist. "Evans killed Barkley, didn't he?"

"No," she stated flatly. "But I reckon, in a way, I did."

"How do you figure?"

"He was curled up here on the floor with Preston and me when Slim and Preston's father showed up. That's the last time I saw him."

"But he is dead?" Luke pushed, drawing her closer. "Carly, the Barkleys are good people. If their son is dead and gone, they deserve to know it."

"And I'll tell 'em when the time is right," she said.

"There's never a right time for telling someone they've lost a family member," he reminded her.

"You're right. There's never a perfect time for dying either," she said. "But we're all gonna die someday. We live just so we can one day die and it doesn't really matter how those we leave behind find out about our deaths, does it? I mean they can't do anything to bring back their loved ones. Once a person stops breathing, it's over. I thought maybe if I didn't tell the Barkleys, they could at least cling to the hope of seeing Robert again. I looked at it like I was giving them a gift, in a way."

"You're doing them harm, Carly. They want to know what happened to their son. It's eating his momma's heart out." Luke kissed her on the cheek and headed toward the coffee. "I imagine you'll die a hundred deaths once Preston gets home. Anyone can look at you and see you're still in love with him."

Yes, she still loved him, but if he'd found what he wanted in another woman and he loved her enough to bring her back to Stockton, then she was a little bit like Rose now. She loved him enough to let him go. She let him go years ago, and while he came back, he never stayed.

Preston would never stay long. Some people couldn't move beyond the past, especially when lives were lost and future histories destroyed because of it.

Preston and Carly had full lives they couldn't live together. Carly glanced back at the cabin as she walked toward the creek. She might as well get on with living hers, and when her guests arrived later, she might invite them to stay the night. Preston wasn't coming home and she needed to find her comfort somewhere.

### Chapter Two

Preston watched Laura sleep in the bed he once shared with Carly. She had beautiful chestnut hair. The natural curls and the way they tangled around her face framed her high cheekbones and, for the first time, he noticed her physical beauty. She was a pretty woman, especially now with her rosy cheeks and round belly.

He pulled the sheet back and placed his palm against her stomach. Laura was carrying his child. It was the only reason he'd brought her back to Stockton. He had a home there and he could offer Laura and their little baby some security.

Preston ran his hand through his hair and he stared at the stained rug in the center of the room. It was still there as a reminder. He never wanted to forget the way his brother died, the blood he shed on his floor. If he forgot, he couldn't feel the anger and, without the fury, he couldn't feel at all. He had to have some kind of emotions, even the more painful ones. Otherwise, he felt dead on the inside.

At one time, he wanted to share his home and his life with Carly. He took her as a wife and she betrayed him. She killed his brother and then fell for another man that was marked for dead the minute he fucked her.

Preston didn't have to kill Robert Barkley. His father took care of Barkley, even though he willingly allowed Carly and Robert to consummate their feelings for one another and even joined in on their maddening lust. The next morning, if his father hadn't killed Robert, he would have. It would have been necessary because something changed in Carly after she had a threesome. He watched the transformation in her eyes. She wanted men to share her. She liked the sex act as much as she loved him.

Pulling back the old burgundy curtains, he looked out the window and sighed. He escaped a lot of bad memories when he left California. He ran hard and rode for days until he reached Dodge City. Once he arrived there, he'd fucked anything with tits. He made his way through every whore's room living above the saloon and never once enjoyed it as much as he did when he made love to Carly.

It didn't matter. He knew in his heart of hearts he couldn't get past the betrayal. He attempted it and failed. He even tried to let her believe he killed his own father in order to save her and damn it all, she let him carry the guilt. He'd lied so often about it that he almost believed it himself and then he discovered, in a night of all nights, she remembered killing his father and even gloated about it. An eye for an eye, she'd said.

He had no other choice but to leave. Afterward, the only thing he had on his mind was fucking away her memory and, when it didn't work, he found a nice girl to help him pass the time. Barely twenty, Laura was looking for a husband and wanted children. She was a nice Christian girl, a real pleasure to talk to and understanding. He'd told her about Carly and she'd listened, offered her advice, even took up for Carly now that he had time to think about it.

Something outside startled him and his head jerked toward the bedroom door. He hurried downstairs. He wasn't expecting company, given the hour and besides, no one should've known he was back in Stockton. He shouldn't have to worry about uninvited guests. He strode across the room and made his way to the grand foyer, lit a candle and held it up before unlatching the door.

There, on the front porch, stood a sight for sore eyes.

"Well I want you to look at this man," Rose drawled, spreading her arms wide, anticipating a hug. Preston held back the flame and hugged her with one arm. "Rose," he drawled, glancing nervously toward the steps. "What brings you out here?" Preston glanced over her shoulder and then his own again before motioning toward the swing. "Want to sit for a bit?"

"I don't get an invitation inside?" The beautiful redhead batted her eyelashes and her green eyes flashed a hint of mischief. "Are you hiding something, Preston? Is it a little woman?"

Preston set his jaw and blew out the candle, taking a seat on the swing and patting the empty spot beside him. "You don't age. Carly always said, you'd never change and I reckon she was right."

Rose took a seat, making a dramatic show of gathering her dress and petticoats before she did. "I've been watching these dusty roads for you. Word arrived from Dodge City. All the girls and me, we've been anxiously waiting. A good hard man like yourself kind of leaves a few women to wonder when you're gonna be back, you know."

"You knew I was in Dodge City?"

Rose tugged off her riding gloves. "I knew you and Slim had family back there. Kind of figured that's where you went, but I have to confess, one of your favorite whores is working here now. You must've told her about the business we have in Stockton. She came to work for us on your recommendation."

Preston glanced toward the door. "Care to keep your voice down?"

"Don't you want to know who it is?"

"Doesn't make a damn to me."

"I reckon not. Word is that you have a baby on the way. Congratulations," she purred. "Have you told Carly yet?"

"No," Preston said. "And you aren't going to tell her."

"Have you seen her?" Rose asked.

"We just rode in tonight, like you don't know." Preston said, smiling. "You watch pretty much everything that goes on to the north, south, east and west of the saloon, don't you?"

"I know about the stuff that matters. Like Carly, for instance. I understand her better than most. Shame she's gonna have to see her husband bed and bred with another woman."

"Carly ain't my wife, Rose. She never was, not in the way most men need it to matter."

Rose took a deep breath. "She was more of a wife to you, Preston Evans, than you ever deserved. You took away her pride and left her when the going got tough. I reckon you deserve what you get now, don't you?"

Preston stood up and glared straight ahead. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, I guess you might as well hear it from

me. After all, it don't matter none to you."

"What doesn't matter? Carly? She'll always mean something to me and you know it."

Rose shook her gloves out and then slowly pushed her long, slender fingers inside the leather. "Well, at least she isn't your business anymore. I have to say, I always looked forward to and dreaded the day you'd come back."

Preston arched a brow. "Why? Something you need to tell me?" He gritted his teeth and balled his fist. Damn it, he had no business, but he had to ask. "Carly...did she do all right for herself after I left?"

Rose smiled sweetly. "Some say she's done better than all right. By the way," she said, making a deliberate change away from the Carly-subject. "Ain't you gonna ask me which whore we inherited from Dodge City?"

"I don't care," he said. "I don't roll around on the bed with whores now with a baby on the way and a woman counting on me to make a good life for her."

Rose stood. "That's a shame, really. You had a good woman who depended on you to make a good start for the both of ya. As for whores, you know the kind you buy and pay for, well, the one from Dodge is actually named Rosalie. She looks a lot like me, Preston."

"She acted like you, too," he said staring at her

lips.

"You're telling me. She likes sucking a man's dick better than any other woman I know, outside of well, you know who."

Preston swallowed hard. "So Carly's okay and life's being kinder to her, I take it."

"Carly's not hurting for much, Preston. Folks around here, men folks that is, are taking care to make sure she has everything she needs."

"I worried about her back in the winter. She's as stubborn as..."

"You?" Rose asked.

"I reckon."

"Well, I just wanted to come on back and welcome you home." She placed her hand on his forearm and leaned into him, kissing his cheek. "I'm sure the little woman inside is a real nice lady, the kind you can surely be proud of." She swayed toward the edge of the porch and then stopped.

Preston held his breath. Something was on the older whore's mind. She didn't come to his house in the middle of the night just to say hello and inform him of the whore roster at the nearby saloon. "Got something else to say, Rose?"

She smiled. "No, Preston. I just wanted to take a good look at cha. You know, take a right smart look at the man standing there."

"You still like what you see, Rose?"

"No," she said softly. "And when I look at Carly, I see the same thing. Two people so damn miserable, they'll look for what they want in all the wrong places and then stubbornly convince themselves they like what they snuggle up to in the middle of the night." Rose walked toward her horse. "I always heard misery loved company. I guess it's true. Carly must be miserable enough for the both of you."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Rose smiled. "Help me to my horse and I'll tell you."

Preston glanced inside the house when he passed by the window. He jumped off the porch and cupped his hands, offering Rose a leg-up. Once she had her reins in hand, she touched his cheek.

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"You got your wish, Preston Evans. You wanted to make Carly into the kind of woman you'd never want again. She mourned you for a few months after you left and then she got on with making a living the best way a woman knows how."

"Carly's making a way for herself running cattle then?"

"Hardly," Rose grunted. "Carly's making a life running men, and half the wives in this town are scared to death their husbands will find themselves out there on that prairie. Carly Corbaine is the most sought after whore in these parts. And you can thank yourself for helping her reach the decision. Her career of choice was because you stripped her of all practical options in the first place, not to mention her self-respect."

Preston stared at Rose. "What are you talking about?"

"Carly is whoring now, Preston. I didn't stutter. She's not working out of the saloon because she's a whore of a different sort. She sees a select group of men and, from what I understand, they all treat her well enough. You waited too late to come back. If you wandered back here so you could hide away your little woman upstairs, pregnant with your baby, in hopes of finding a way back to Carly, then you're in for a few surprises."

"I'm happy with Laura."

"I hope so," Rose replied. "For your sake, I really do." She tugged her reins and clucked to the coal black horse underneath her.

After she rode out of sight, Preston doubled over in sheer pain. He'd never known anything quite like it. His belly swelled in an agony so fierce, he could hardly swallow and he took off for the barn as quickly as he could.

Once there, he stripped off his shirt and stuffed it in between his lips and wailed like a newborn baby. He didn't want Laura to hear him and he didn't want Rose to ride back to town with the satisfaction. She carried the news she meant to pass along and she brought it with a spiteful blow.

It might have taken years, but now he understood what Rose had felt when he left her behind for Carly. Only, this was different. He loved Carly more than he loved himself and he'd pushed her away because he hated her as much as he loved her. She stripped him of his family and now, she'd even taken away the one thing he'd held onto because of her promise...her unconditional love.

Preston dragged his body up the staircase a short time later. He took one step at a time, the dread consuming him. Laura was asleep in his bed when he wanted Carly there. He stumbled into the bedroom, tripping over the soiled rug, the tainted reminder of why he'd never find Carly lying in his bed again.

Laura sat upright. "Is everything all right, Preston?"

He sank to the mattress and tugged at his boots. After he tossed them to the floor, he stood, released his breeches and allowed them to fall, too, before stripping his damp shirt over his head. His teeth marks were probably in the middle of the material because he felt the wet spot where his mouth had been. It served the purpose of gagging him, but it didn't heal his broken heart when he cried out for her.

"Preston?"

"Laura, I want to sleep," he said stretching out beside her.

She curled her arm behind her head and watched him. He felt her heated gaze and finally turned his head and looked into her soft, gentle eyes.

"I love you, Preston," she said. "I know you don't love me yet, but once the baby comes, you will. I swear it. You'll love me, you'll see."

Preston swallowed hard and pressed his palm to her cheek. She was such a sweet woman. Laura possessed a kinder spirit than Carly, but Preston never wanted a gentle woman.

He longed for the spunk and fire he found in his equal, someone he once thought he'd die to have, crumble to hold. He discovered he was right. His life was over now. The love he once held for a woman he wanted for his own completely died when he discovered his wife had whored herself out to other men. Surely to hell and back, the love was gone. Over and over again, he tried to convince himself.

"Preston, what is it?" Laura asked.

Before he thought, he said, "My wife is a whore."

Laura blinked and her eyes started to swell

with tears. "What?"

Preston shook his head and then cleared his throat. Laura was so sensitive and she'd never understand. He made excuses and faced her. Then he kissed her hard on the lips. "That's right, when you're in my bed, you're my little whore, aren't cha?"

\* \* \* \*

Laura kissed him back and tried to smile her way through his peculiar way of suggesting sex. She pulled up her gown and he cupped her neck. Pressing her lips to his, she mumbled. "If you want me to be your whore, I can be. I swear, Preston. I'll be everything you ever want me to be."

"Except her," he muttered.

She drew back and looked at him. "What?"

"Come here, Laura," he said softly. "I need to love you hard and wild. Can you let me take you hard and wild, sweetheart?"

She watched his green eyes flicker with lust and she wondered what the woman on their front porch had said that made him so crazy. She'd peered out when she first heard her ride up and then watched them sit on the porch, swinging back and forth, talking about something private, apparently something he didn't want to discuss. She understood. Some men were better off keeping their secrets to themselves.

"Are you gonna let me take you?" he asked, kissing her neck, his hands fondling her breasts, then her thighs.

"Yes, Preston," she whispered. "I'm your wife now and you can take me anyway you want me."

Before she realized what she'd offered, he flipped her over on her stomach and raised her hips. He pressed his cock to her ass and then gripped her hair. "Don't let me hurt you, Laura." He said one thing, but roughly pushed her gown high above her head and held her in a tight clutch, a grip she'd never escape, even if she wanted to.

Nervous, because he'd never impaled her ass before, she gasped as he fingered her pussy and continued to use her own juices to moisten her other hole. He planned to fuck her ass? She froze as he pressed his penis against her bottom.

"Preston, I don't like this," she said.

"Please, Laura, for me. You said you'd do anything and I need to take you here." He dipped his fingers inside her bottom and groaned. "I need to be the first one inside your ass, claiming a part of you no other man has ever claimed."

Shivering, she said, "Okay Preston, okay. Be gentle though." She dreaded the first penetration, but trusted him not to hurt her.

"Oh yeah, I can take you easy. Just be my

whore for the night. Can you be my whore, Laura?"

"If that's what you want," she said quietly. "I'll try," she assured him.

"Good girl," he choked out, spreading her cheeks with his thumbs. Then he sank his cock inside her walls, tearing across one ring and then another as the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Ah yeah," he said, pushing down on her hips. "That's it. Let me come. That's it. Uh-huh. I need to come, ah yeah, this is what I need." He plunged inside her, thrusting harder and harder as he pounded into her ass with more aggression than he'd ever shown before.

"Preston, please, slow down. Let me..."

He slapped her hip and hammered inside her. "Shhh...that's good. A man's whore looks after his needs first." A jet of his cum sprayed into her walls. She felt the lukewarm sensation as his cream spilled into her body and leaked onto her legs the second he withdrew.

"Preston?" she asked, falling to the bed and rolling over to face him.

He stared at the ceiling and reached for her. Tucking her into the hook of his arm, he pressed his lips to her forehead. "I can't make love to you tonight. I just wanted to fuck you like that for now."

She nodded. "I understand." But she didn't. She

didn't know what the redheaded woman had said to her husband that had him treating her like he didn't care for her at all. This wasn't the Preston she met in Dodge City and this wasn't the man who had only been gentle with her in the past.

"Goodnight, Carly," he said, rolling over to his side.

"Goodnight," Laura whispered, gaining the most difficult answer to the question she didn't dare ask. The reason Preston changed was because he was home and Carly, the woman he truly loved, was apparently still there with them somewhere, if only in his memories.

#### CHAPTER THREE

Luke sat on the porch whittling away at a stick. Carly stepped outside and spotted the riders before he looked up.

"They're here," she said, smiling.

"I can see for myself," he said. "And they're later than I expected." He started for one corral and she headed for the other. Both hurried to push open the gates so the riders could drive the cattle into a secure place for the night.

Carly loosened the rope around one gate and watched it swing out of the way before heading inside to prepare for her cowboys. After her earlier romp with Luke, she'd made him stay out of her way so she could get some work done, but he hadn't stopped teasing her. Every chance he got to rub his cock against her ass or talk all sweet and dirty to her, he took it. He'd even told her how he planned to take John and she almost came as he talked to her. They'd teased one another and had a good time doing it. Now, she wanted to enjoy a few good men.

She was ready for the finale and had looked toward the hills for a long time before she finally broke out the whiskey and set up the glasses. She'd offered Luke a stout drink and he declined, but actually encouraged her to go ahead and have a few.

She poured the dark liquor in the glasses and set them up in a neat row. Filling hers, she took another swig and popped her lips. One of the cowboys riding with Luke's friends was Billy Jackson, quite possibly the best-looking cowboy to ever ride through Stockton and another man she could've easily loved.

Billy, still considered a boy by the other cowboys, was about twenty years old. He possessed natural sex appeal and Carly liked finding him in her bed. She considered him a pretty boy, but his wild brown hair and dark eyes assured of one thing. He was a danger to himself and others, if properly provoked.

Luke's best friend, John Wilcox and an Apache Indian called Spotted Cloud, walked inside first. Spotted Cloud looked at the glasses, snarled his nose and then walked past her. He peeked inside the bedroom and then walked over to the ladder and climbed it. He released an agitated sigh after he studied the loft area and then jumped down and landed in front of her. Carly had fucked Spotted Cloud several times before. The last time he was drunk when it happened. Luke had already told her that Cloud didn't drink alcohol now and she imagined it was because of the way he acted when he drank. He howled when he'd fucked her, and while it was the most amazing experience, it also frightened her a little bit. He kept running his fingertips over her hairline and she was terrified that he might later come back for her scalp.

Luke told her he often sat next to the campfire, smiling wide and patting his cock whenever her name was mentioned. Spotted Cloud apparently enjoyed her and today, he didn't want to waste any time. He pulled out a small bag of gold and dumped it on the table before she had time to greet her other guests.

"Cloud," Carly began. "Give me a minute, okay?"

He smiled, taking her hand. "Spotted Cloud no wait for woman." He pulled her into the bedroom and kicked the door shut behind them.

"Cloud, you speak English now?"

Billy Jackson rushed in, tackling her in the process. The old door to her bedroom crashed against the wall. "How's my favorite woman?" he asked, pushing her legs up so he could fit right in between them. He pushed her skirt high above her waist. Groping her, he fumbled with his breeches and Spotted Cloud undressed in the far corner. She had to admit life didn't hold a lot of promises for a whore, but the right whore, like herself, indulged in a lot of promised entertainment.

Billy worked at undressing her and his hands propelled up and down her sides. At some point, John and Luke joined them. Luke's mouth covered hers, his kiss knocking the breath out of her because it was intoxicating with both lust and whiskey. She imagined John had probably already locked his mouth over Luke's and it accounted for the stout erection Luke sported in his pants.

Luke kept kissing her while Billy slid his hands up her thighs. Someone lifted her up and, by the time she realized it was John and Billy, she was back on the bed, the bed she once shared with Preston. The bed she'd once refused to sleep in unless Preston slept beside her. They'd stripped the sheets, but she didn't ask why. When the five of them were together, they were a dirty bunch and the raw sex acts surrounding them were numerous.

Spotted Cloud towered over her, stroking himself. He possessed a high sex drive and an incredible size. Cloud didn't like foreplay unless it involved oral sex performed on him.

He studied her like he'd never experienced another woman, sometimes she wondered if he had, but she wouldn't likely get an answer if she asked. He really didn't understand English and, until today, she'd never heard him attempt it because when he did, he typically grunted out a response. His sound effects enticed the hairs to stand up on the back of her neck.

John was a gruff man, a little older than she preferred her men, but thanks to the way he participated and the way he used Luke to turn her on, she made an exception. The whores in town, called him Big Dick because of his size. Carly considered it an acceptable weapon for her bedroom.

Luke liked John for a variety of reasons and Carly loved to watch the two of them make love. Luke and John would've been hanged for their actions and everyone in Carly's cabin knew it, but no one there ever judged them. Sometimes Carly thought she wasn't the only one they turned on because Billy and Spotted Cloud often sat back and watched them with as much interest as she did.

All of the men paid up faster than ever before and they let her know it, too. Cloud most likely paid the most because he would undoubtedly, get his money's worth.

Billy winked and grabbed her ankles. "You been taking care of yourself, Carly?"

Carly swallowed. "Good enough, I reckon."

He pushed her legs open and then slowly

licked her pussy. One long, leisurely swipe across her vagina and then he blew a hot stream of air straight into her cunt. It made her back bow. "You ain't the marrying kind anymore, I hear."

"No," she whispered, biting down on her index finger. "I'm not the marrying kind."

"Good," he said with a soft twinkle in his gray eyes. "I'm not looking for a wife, but if I ever do," he drawled. "I plan to find her in you."

Billy once told her that he thought he could love her and the way he always showed his appreciation made her tempted to believe him. He sank in between her legs and that delicious tongue of his went straight to work. Not only was Billy Jackson a looker, but he was also a mighty fine kisser, regardless of the lips he chose to kiss.

His long brown hair drifted down his muscular back and, when his mouth covered her opening, he placed his elbows on her thighs and settled over her lower half. His soft strands fanned out over her legs and as she looked down the length of her body, she caught her breath. By God, he was beautiful.

Luke and John could've passed as brothers. They both had dirty blonde hair and blue eyes. John was older and outside of the large cock that he really didn't know how to use well without a little bit of help from Luke or Carly, he really didn't offer a woman the kind of entertainment expected. Carly learned to work him to her advantage. He had the kind of dick she enjoyed riding and, since his cock reached the right spots, she generally liked to take him from the top. He never rode Luke because Luke did the riding.

Cloud dropped his dick between her lips and rolled his eyes back in his head. "Spotted Cloud likes woman on dick. Suck, woman, suck."

The guttural way he made his request, shocked her. God help her, she hoped he howled like he yelped before. There was something about him that made her sopping wet and, with Billy in between her legs, she'd be ready for Cloud when Cloud was ready for her.

She tipped the top of his dick with a slow, indulgent lick and Billy glanced up and almost mimicked her action. He stuck his tongue out and, without tearing his gaze away from hers, lapped at her pussy as slowly as she licked at Cloud's dick.

John slapped Cloud on the back and asked, "Is she doing all right for you, Cloud?"

And apparently, he took it the wrong way. He grabbed the base of his dick and shoved it in between her lips. "Spotted Cloud wants woman to drink in the horizon."

Billy, John and Luke laughed. "You'll see the horizon soon enough," Billy exclaimed.

Carly winked, closed her jaws tightly around

Cloud's cock and sucked like crazy. The slurping sounds filled the room about the time John dropped to his knees and fisted Luke's dick in between his hands.

Carly's heart raced forward. There was nothing sexier than this. Her pussy tingled with excitement and every nerve ending in her body became over sensitive. She tried to see where the most erotic sounds in the room were generated because it enticed her, called to her.

Luke's muscular thighs bunched and Carly watched as John sipped at Luke's thick and meaty cock but his teasing didn't last for more than three or four seconds. John always looked like he was smiling when he sucked Luke's dick and Luke, God love him, kept a whole lot of motion in his hips. He didn't screw John's mouth nice and slow, he slammed his balls against his chin and literally pounded in between John's lips.

"Ah yeah, feels so good, John. That's right. Suck my cock. Do it."

Luke growled so loud that her heart raced faster. She saw John's long tongue escape his lips when he gave Luke's length a leisurely lick. Then he greedily stuffed John's meat in between his cheeks once more.

Soon, Luke's hips started moving and he grabbed onto the headboard. When his balls slapped against John's chin again, it was all over for Cloud. The natural noise enticed him and he gripped Carly's head and sank deep in between her open jaws.

Billy continued to eat her pussy and she started to fly so high that she almost forgot she had one heavenly cock in between her cheeks. Spotted Cloud had a nice shape to his dick, but the way he stared into her eyes captivated her. It was like he called out to some kind of inner spirit and reached it before orgasm. He always looked the same way, positively pleased and determined to adore her, if only for a little while.

Billy's fingers twirled deep inside her pussy when she started to arch and take her release. He withdrew, teasing her with his fingers and then his lips. Oh God help her, he wasn't going to let her take it.

He moved away from her about the time Spotted Cloud began to fuck her harder. He chanted something in his language, a proverb or something no one there could translate and his release jetted to the back of her throat.

She drank the salty substance and held tight to one of his tanned thighs. Grinning, he rubbed his cock over her lips when he withdrew and then he touched her cheek and yanked her forward as he walked to the edge of the bed.

After the unlikely lovers endured enough foreplay, Luke stretched out on the bed, right next

to Billy. John and Carly straddled them, their backs to their chests and Carly stretched her neck as much as possible so she could watch Luke penetrate John. Her mouth dropped when she saw his cock sink in between John's cheeks and his eyes closed. Luke must have felt like a sweet slice of heaven. She wrapped her hand around John's cock and tugged at his thick erection, and Luke started to thrust into John's ready bottom. Spotted Cloud kissed his way up her leg, quickly reminding her of the other men in her bed.

For a man who didn't know their language, Spotted Cloud never had a hard time seducing her. Billy pressed the tip of his cock into her ass and she cried out, fighting for self-control, but refusing to let herself win because she wanted the hard ride Billy always gave her.

When Cloud moved closer, he pushed her back against Billy's chest and he straddled her leg, placing the tip of his dick against her folds.

"You like that, don't you?" John asked, his smile of satisfaction enticing her to pump harder. She held him in the palm of her hand and pumped. God help her, she enjoyed holding him, it empowered her to have a man's cock pushing through her grip.

Billy broke past her first ring and went deep at the same time Cloud pushed his long penis inside her weeping vagina. Oh yes, this was how a good whore earned her keep. "Cloud!" she exclaimed. He jerked and then tossed his head back. He was already fighting against another release. Billy held onto her hips and drove his thick cock in between her ass cheeks, squeezing her bottom in tempo with each deliberate thrust. Cloud pounded his meat into her pussy and she continued to thread John, drawing him closer and closer to a satisfying end.

"Now!" Luke screamed. And the chaotic sounds of fucking filled the room until everyone reached their climax and certainly got what they paid for.

\* \* \* \*

Preston didn't have the right. He left his home and the pregnant woman who loved him. In the middle of the night, he rode out to Carly's place. He stopped short of going inside when he noticed the corrals were full of fattened cattle.

"What the fuck?" he muttered as he tied his horse up to the hitching post and headed for the barn to see how many riders he'd likely find inside. With over a hundred head of cattle in the field, he imagined there were several cowboys paying Carly a visit.

He poked his head in the barn and counted the saddles. One was Carly's and he'd know it

anywhere. He counted three others, but ironically, it looked like there were four bridles. He closed his eyes and then quickly turned around. Shit! The large spotted horse in the far stall belonged to an Apache Indian he knew well.

Spotted Cloud was inside Carly's cabin? What the hell? He stormed out of the barn and didn't bother slamming the large doors behind him. He'd been gone for a year, thereabouts, and his departure didn't give her the right to fuck a dangerous Apache Indian or the men riding with him. He strode across the porch and had just started to turn the doorknob when a knife was placed at his throat. "Cloud," he said, catching his breath. He didn't have to turn around to verify it.

"Dumb fuck with no woman. You man who lets all others fuck your woman and watch," he hissed. "Dumb white man."

He could say that again. If he left Carly in the middle of the prairie, he deserted her so other men could take full advantage. Apparently, she invited plenty of them right on in. If Cloud needed to use that cold blade to slice the life out of him, he didn't have a problem with it.

Luke Daniels opened Carly's front door. "Shit," he whispered, quickly looking over his shoulder. "Preston, uh..."

Preston pushed by him and stood in the doorway, the pitch black room offered only a little

candlelight and those on the bed were far too busy with one another to notice him. A young fellow, one with hair almost as long as Carly's, was on top, screwing her wild. He gasped because the memories came flooding back. Carly always liked reckless sex and he missed her most because of it.

John Wilcox, a man noted for a cock so large a woman could barely suck it, made a liar out of those who believed such a rumor. Carly had his cock down her throat and Old John didn't seem to mind the excessive way he filled her cheeks.

\* \* \* \*

Carly knew he was there from the moment he walked in the room. After Spotted Cloud deserted the room quickly, Luke said he heard something outside and went to check. She wasn't expecting company and the men paying for her services were going to come first regardless of who stood nearby watching.

Carly spread her legs wider to accommodate Billy and he hammered into her walls. "That's it, Carly. Let me feel you. Ah, sugar, I've been ridin' for days, just so I could feel you milk my cock."

His hips rolled forward and her mouth dropped open more. John stared at her blankly. He glanced up and looked back down with a grin. "We got an audience." She knew who had the front chair and she licked around the head of John's dick, ready to put on one hell of a good show. "Let them all watch," she drawled. "What man wouldn't be envious of a big dick like yours?" She slapped her hand against his thigh and sucked. God help her, she went at him like he'd gone at Luke only an hour or so earlier.

John seldom smiled, but he did then and he patted her head, caressing the hair away from her eyes like he fully intended to gaze into them. Instead, he grabbed the headboard and started pumping his cock into her mouth. "Ah yeah, swallow it. Swallow that dick, baby."

Billy reared back, shoved her legs up, pressing his palms down in order to brace himself against her knees and he fucked her so crazy that she was screaming against John's cock, a silent cry for more, a vocal expression of lust running over. She pressed her weight onto the balls of her feet, arching to the cock feeding her and the one filling her.

"That's it, Carly. I paid you to fuck me and suck me. Now, swallow that cum whore, swallow it."

Billy's release shot through her walls and John's jetted to the back of her throat. And that's where everything ended and all hell broke loose because of the man who encouraged it.

The salty spill filled her mouth and she drank it. She sipped every last drop she could get until he withdrew abruptly. Unwilling to grasp what had happened, Carly propped up on her elbows and realized John was on the floor and Preston was beating the hell out of him.

That's when it hit her. Preston witnessed enough and he was there when John called out to her, giving her the rightful title she earned as his whore. John was now paying a mighty high price for such a mistake.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Preston glared across the barn. "You had little to do, Carly." He blotted his bloody lip with a cloth, one she shouldn't have bothered giving him since he apparently came there to judge her.

"Oh really?" she asked, eyeing the blanket rolled up in the corner.

"Did they all leave?" he asked.

"No," she said realizing he'd spotted the old blanket, too. He knew the one who wasn't gone was still nearby, possibly even watching them. Preston wasn't an idiot.

"Are you in love with any of them?" he asked.

"Like I'd tell you," she said.

"You like Spotted Cloud, you always did have a thing for men like him."

"I'm assuming you're talking about his big penis," she said, smiling. "And yes, I like him. I actually like all of them."

The two stood there staring at one another with hatred and love dividing them. They loved one another, no doubt about it, but they hated the things that threatened to destroy them, the histories they couldn't escape, the people they'd become.

"So did you come back to pay your dead daddy some respects?"

"I did that a long time ago," he said, stalking toward her.

"So what? You left your place in the middle of the night to ride a few hours to rub salt in the wound?"

"I didn't come here to argue with you."

"Why did you come here, Preston?"

"There's something I need to tell you," he grated out.

"I know there's a woman with you. I know all about it."

"Rose told you?" he asked, then added, "If she hadn't gotten pregnant then..."

"Rose didn't tell me," she said, gagging on each word. Pregnant? He had a pregnant woman? The tears threatened to burn her eyes to where she'd never see again.

"I...I..." She wanted to be strong, she didn't want him there. She didn't want him anywhere near her. "Well," she tried again. "Congratulations, Daddy. I hope you and the little family will be very, very happy." She turned to run and he caught her around the waist before she could make her escape.

"Let me go!" And the tears came, defiantly staining her cheeks and then his when he pressed his face next to hers and held her around her torso as she withered away, falling to the ground and kneeling. She found herself sandwiched between the old planks boarded up across the barn door and the man squatting down behind her.

"Carly," he whispered, nuzzling her hair and inhaling the scent of her. The scent she felt sure was a mixture of manly sweat and feminine arousal, the scent of sex and heartache, destruction and lust.

"Get away from me!" she shouted.

"I can't," he admitted. "God help me, I want to run as far as I can and never turn back, but I can't. I...I'm in love with you as much today as I was the first day I held you in my arms. I can't walk away again, Carly. You have to help me sort things out."

Carly placed her palms on the dirt floor and rolled her shoulders back. When she stood, she regained her composure and her posture, though it proved difficult. "Then I can make it easier for you. Spotted Cloud is waiting for me. I asked him not to leave. I don't want to keep him waiting and if you're smart, you won't ask me to. Get out of here, Preston, and don't you come back. You have a new wife now, one who is going to have your bastard child. Go home to her and love her like the devil because out of her, the devil's spawn will be born and, with any luck, he'll do you proud, just like Slim and your pathetic daddy. Anyone having your child is bringing into the world a legacy of men who didn't deserve the lives they lived."

\* \* \* \*

Preston felt like he took a swift kick to the gut and he grabbed her before she got away with the lowest of blows. "My daddy and Slim put us here and I'll be damned if they're going to win after they're dead and gone. I've had a lot of time to think, Carly. A lot of time. I want you back and...we'll just work around Laura and the baby on the way."

She swiped away fallen tears. "Oh, so her name is Laura?" She forced a peculiar chuckle, a hearty and sickening laugh and then choked out, "Well, how nice, what a pretty name. I bet Laura doesn't know anything about me, does she?"

"She knows about you," he said. "She's a nice person, Carly. You'd like her."

"I doubt it," she countered. "And you know what, Preston? I don't want to like her. I don't want to know or like anything or anyone that has anything to do with your life. Do you understand me?"

Preston inched closer, closing in the space, the

distance that threatened to keep them apart forever if he didn't jerk her closer and show her how to love him again. "Carly, you still want me. It's why you're crying now. I still love you. Why do we keep hurting one another when it doesn't have to be this way?"

She looked at him dumbfounded. "What? What did you say?" Her tone changed, a little too drastically for his liking and she kicked him in the shins. It sort of hurt, but the pain didn't compare to the ache in his broken heart.

"How dare you, Preston Evans! How dare you leave me out here alone in the middle of the very place where so much death took place and then ride out without a word! The first I hear about you is that you've been in Dodge City and you've met a woman, not just a whore, but a woman you're bringing back here. Now, you're telling me...telling me that..."

"I love you," he said looping his arms around her middle and holding her tight.

She threw her fists against his chest and screamed. "You don't have the right to love me!"

"The hell I don't," he said before his lips crashed against hers and he pushed her against the barn and kissed her like he'd never leave her mouth again.

\* \* \* \*

Damn him for doing this to her body again. She drew him close, drawing his lips down on hers as she reached for him. After locking her wrists behind his neck, she parted her lips and welcomed his capable tongue, the kind of tongue that reminded her of what he could do when he was between her legs. Oh sure, other men could work their women, but Preston knew how to make his woman cry for a man, beg him.

She was dizzy. Her head was spinning and she couldn't stop kissing him, regardless of the thoughts jumbled in her brain. She wanted Preston to keep his mouth on hers and kiss her until she didn't feel, couldn't remember, refused to acknowledge everything standing in their way.

That's when she backed away from him. There were too many things standing in between them now and with a child on the way, one counting on him for his or her livelihood and parental guidance, she couldn't. She knew what it felt like to grow up without parents. She understood the loneliness a child felt when parents were taken away. She lost hers at a young age and she couldn't do it to someone else, especially Preston's little one.

"I want you to go, Preston."

"Carly, please. Be with me, baby. Let me make love to you, hold you. Be mine for the night, just tonight."

"I have clients waiting," she snapped.

"Yeah," he said, rubbing his chin. "I saw how quickly they headed for the whorehouse, too, when they realized I was here to bust up their little party."

"They'll be back," she assured him. "And I'll be waiting."

Preston snarled. "I never took you for a woman who wanted a whore's leftovers."

"Maybe you should go inside the cabin and take a good look at the separate stacks of payment placed there. I'm not in the rightful position to judge another whore when I am one myself."

Preston turned away from her and then threw his fist into the side of the barn, taking a hard punch guaranteed to leave a few splinters in his knuckles. He stalked forward and pushed his hands in his pockets. "You charging? Then I want to pay."

"We've done this before, Preston. It doesn't work out in the end, remember? I am on another man's time. I need to go," she said, choking still on the idea of Preston with another woman, a woman who knew what it was like to fall asleep in his arms. A human being who understood what it was like to have his baby growing in her womb, this Laura person deserved to be Preston's wife because she could bear his children. Loosening the ties at his breeches, Preston reached for her and then yanked her against him. She landed against his hard chest. "You are still my wife," he reminded.

"You took another and that means you have no right, no business to address me as yours ever again!"

"Damn if I don't!"

Spotted Cloud pushed the door back and looked from Carly to Preston, back to Carly again. "Spotted Cloud wants woman. Spotted Cloud wants pale face to go home."

Preston pursed his lips and then gritted out, "I am home, damn it!"

"No," she said shaking her head in protest. "This was never your home and I was never your woman, Preston. Go find Laura. Love her like you mean it. Hold her close and never let go because when you stop loving her like a woman needs a man's love, you risk losing her forever. I'm lost to you, Preston, but you have someone waiting for you—a new wife and a precious baby on the way. Go take care of them and never take them for granted.

Preston cleared his throat and tried to think of something to say. It was too late. He saw the way she took Spotted Cloud's hand and the way Cloud shielded her with his body. He could fight him and he might win, but even if he did, he'd never escape. Spotted Cloud was thought to be one of the unclaimed sons of the notorious Indian warrior, Geronimo. He could fight Cloud and defeat him, but he'd have to run for the rest of his life. Then again, he'd been running for quite some time.

\* \* \* \*

The sun rose and shone bright, cascading over the open fields and showcasing a new day, one filled with promises of a new life. Carly snuggled deeper into her covers and felt Spotted Cloud surrounding her. His body heat warmed hers and she flipped over on her stomach and kicked the blanket back. Cloud smacked her bottom and laughed.

She kissed his chest and licked a path across his breastbone, lapping at his nipples until he covered her hand with his and guided her lower. "Spotted Cloud like woman to suck his big dick, like John Wilcox."

Giggling, she moved down his body and translated. "You have a bigger dick than John's and I don't think you want John to suck your cock."

Spotted Cloud pressed his palm to her shoulders and chuckled, too. "John suck your cock, too."

"I don't have one of those," she explained, but when she glanced up, she saw it wasn't worth the effort.

His big, dark eyes were wide and he pressed his moist lips firmly together. Spotted Cloud was probably the sexiest Apache Indian to ever walk on western soil. He had high cheekbones, a chiseled chin and beautiful coal black hair as soft as fine silk. She loved Cloud's enthusiasm for sex and the way he attacked her body with his own when he fucked her.

When they had sex, Cloud washed over her like a sudden storm. He moved over her fast and with such a raw and fierce look in his eyes, sometimes Carly thought she only had to stare at him to find her release. He was too handsome for words, but unfortunately, the only way they could communicate best was through sex.

Sometimes, if he tried to form words or make light conversation, he'd get so frustrated and, to make up the difference, he'd drop his pants, grab his cock and suggest sex. When he bought and paid for her time, she often asked him to leave several times. It wasn't because he refused to leave, but rather the fact that he had a way of turning her on, a way of making her chase him down, pull him off his horse and beg him to come back inside. It was a game they played, she decided, and one that could turn dangerous if she let him stay with her often. She felt protected when she was in his arms.

Carly was glad Spotted Cloud stayed the night. She didn't know when the others would return, but she knew they'd be back, if Preston didn't kill them when he passed them on the way back to Stockton.

Carly lightly touched Cloud's cock with one finger. He shut his eyes and fisted his dick, pressing the tip of it to her mouth. "Big dick," he said, greedily forcing her to open all at once.

She snapped her jaws tightly around Cloud and breathed in. He had a distinct smell when he was aroused. He tasted better than most men, that something she had hard time а understanding. Once she tasted his pre-cum, the puddle in between her legs set her on fire and this was one morning she couldn't wait until he came in her mouth. She needed to fuck him.

Reaching for his hand, she pushed his fingers in between her legs and Spotted Cloud moaned. He fingered her as she bobbed over his dick and, when she felt the flesh draw tight under her suction, she released him and climbed on top.

"Big dick. Spotted Cloud loves white woman."

She smiled. A young man, Cloud probably thought he loved every woman he found in his arms. She slid up and down, riding his penis at a leisurely pace. She fingered her nipples and his timed thrusts immediately changed. He grabbed her hips, and pushed inside her grunting as he tried to capture the start of his release. His long dark hair wrapped around his biceps and she planted her palms on his hard stomach, marveling in the way he rippled under her touch.

Looking at her breasts, his eyes misted over. He opened his mouth to say something, but frustration took him. Infuriated that he couldn't find the words, he motioned for her to lean forward. She inched closer, dropping her nipple to his lips and he showered her with soft adoration, a careful tongue and a hand designed for holding a woman's plump, full breast.

Pumping into her, he cried out aloud. "White woman and Spotted Cloud."

She wished they could talk. Oh God, she wished she could just express herself and have him advise her. She imagined they had this great connection and she wondered how deeply they'd feel it if only they could communicate better.

Cloud lapped at her breasts. His smile widened and he hummed softly, a tune she'd never heard before, but one that sounded similar to a lover's melody. She continued to enjoy him, her legs gripped his sides and she rolled her hips forward and then back before drawing her knees up and sitting on him with a more erect spine.

"Cloud, harder," she muttered, realizing it

wouldn't matter. His gait never changed, but hers did. As the climax took her, the wind brought with it a strange and yet familiar feeling. Preston was out there watching. She quickly looked toward the window, but she didn't see him. She didn't have to. She sensed him. He was there.

## Chapter Five

Rose expected him and he showed up right on time. He took the steps three at a time and she heard the distinct sound of his pronounced walk. The man had a way of strutting like a mad cowboy when Carly boiled his blood.

"Come on in, Preston," she called out, running a heavy brush through her hair.

"She's whoring herself out to Indians," he exclaimed, marching inside her room and flopping down on the old settee he'd taken a seat on many times before.

"She's an entrepreneur. She can take any man she wants to her bed or to her barn for that matter, which looks like where you've been, by the way." Rose noted the excessive dust on his breeches. "It's her business, Preston. By the way," she drawled. "How is the new Mrs. Preston Evans this morning? Did she sleep well last night?"

Preston glared back at her. "She's taking more than one man at a time."

"Double the trouble, double the fun and triple the profit, Preston. We all wish we could do the same here, but you know, it's sort of inappropriate in a high class joint such as this saloon."

"You knew?"

Rose turned around and looked at a few accessories on her dressing table. She chose a small pendant, a gift from a client she used to see years ago. She pinned it on her dress right before Preston yanked her by the hair and held her tight against his middle. "Don't you fuck with me, Rose. We're friends, but after what I saw out at Carly's place, we might as well become enemies if you had anything to do with the reasons she chose to sleep with men she doesn't know."

Rose glared at the man in the mirror. "You really have no idea why Carly is whoring, do you?"

"I imagine you told her it was a good way to earn a living."

Rose cleared her throat. "It's a good way to forget a man worth forgetting. I should know," she choked out before wiggling free of his hand.

Preston caught her. He flipped his wrist and wheeled her around to face him. "Rose, please. Tell me what I can do to change this."

Rose laughed. "Sugar, I'll tell you what I told her. When you love someone, you don't always select the better person to love. You don't have a choice when you fall in love and you don't choose how many times you get up again when the person you fall for breaks your heart. Sometimes, you have to let love alone, let it have its own way. Those folks who are meant to be together always find their way back when the time is right. But you have to prepare yourself, too, Preston. Sometimes when lovers let you down, you can't get back up again and fight for the love you once had. Your body grows tired, your mind becomes weak. There are lots of folks who share in a great love, only to lose it because they never could love hard together, you know at the same moment."

"The time is right for me and Carly," he growled.

"No, Preston. You have a woman pregnant with your child. Timing is not your friend."

Rose walked across the room and opened the door. She looked out in the hallway like she expected to find someone waiting there. Then she closed the door again. "Why now, Preston?"

"I've always loved her."

"Then you shouldn't have come back here with a woman pregnant with your child."

"Carly lives on one side of Stockton and I live on the other. She won't have to see Laura, but she can still be my..."

"Your what?" Rose narrowed her gaze. "Your whore?"

"Yes," he said softly. "That's what she is now and she can be mine, just mine."

Rose studied him and then said, "And what a reward that would be, huh? You gave her your name for God's sake. You gave her hope and convinced her to love you and for what? To walk out on her, that's what you did. You built that girl up and taught her to dream in little things, believe in big things and reach for you on the coldest and darkest of nights. Then you abandoned her and you never came home."

"I'm home now!"

"You're home?" she chuckled, and it was more like a sickening bellow than a hearty laugh. "You're not home, Preston. You're here, but you'll never go home now. You have a wife with new responsibilities and Carly? She's made her own way. She has friends, a few men that actually love her, whether any of 'em would make her a wife or not, I don't know."

Preston swallowed hard. "What do you mean she has men who love her?"

"You have to ask?" She pointed down the hallway. "I have three fellows in three rooms here, resting today. They're riding back out to Carly's place in a few hours. They came here last night to get a good night's sleep and didn't touch one of my girls. Not one of them. The three of them came up with the lamest excuses ever told. Big Dick Wilcox even claimed his cock shrunk and he couldn't get a hard-on if someone gave him free pussy. So we offered and they all declined."

"And you think Carly is the reason your whores didn't get paid?"

"I don't think, Preston. I'd bet you a month of free ones with every girl in the house, gambling with their bodies and mine just to prove a point."

Preston slapped his hands together. "I'm gonna have a talk with Wilcox."

"You ain't doing your talking here, Preston. Go home to your woman. Take care of her. Treat her right nice and maybe you'll keep her."

"I don't need whores telling me how to treat a woman."

"Oh," she chirped. "I see Carly has already told you the same thing, huh?"

"Rose," he began. "How do I get her back?"

"You can't right now, Preston. Maybe you never will."

A loud blast of gunfire sounded off in the middle of the street and Preston quickly shut and locked Rose's door. "What the hell?" she ran to the window and he quickly pushed her to the side as he looked out in the street.

"I don't see anyone except the fellow who runs the telegraph office," Preston said.

"Dean?" Rose asked, leaping for the window and shoving it up with both hands. "Dean! What's going on down there?"

"Rose!" he exclaimed. "I have some horrible news. Mr. and Mrs. Barkley were in Sacramento and their stagecoach was robbed. Telegraph just came in and confirmed it. The Barkleys were shot and killed by outlaws."

Rose put her hand over her mouth and slumped to the bed. "Oh my," she said. "How awful. Oh, Preston!" She started to cry, burying her face in her palms. "Those poor, poor folks."

Preston took a deep, tortured breath. "Yeah, those nice people ain't had a moment's peace since their son passed, have they?"

Rose looked up and shook her head. After a long, uncomfortable silence, she said, "Robert Barkley went missing. No one ever confirmed he died, Preston."

Preston didn't make a habit out of lying to Rose. In the good old days, he spent a lot of time in her bed and he still considered her a close friend, even if she often took Carly's side of things more than his own.

"Preston, you look at me and tell me that boy ain't dead," she said.

"He wasn't a boy, Rose."

"Last time I saw him, he was with you and Carly," she pointed out. "No one ever saw him after that and Carly never breathed a word about him even riding out with the two of you." "I ain't saying he's dead for sure, but he must be if no one has seen him around. News traveled all the way to Dodge City, too. Speculation is he was killed by Indians since his mom and dad used to take up with them about like Carly is now."

"I doubt Mr. and Mrs. Barkley took Spotted Cloud with them to bed."

Preston stared off into space and then said, "You *shoulda seen* the way those two went at each other."

"You spied on them?"

"Damn right."

\* \* \* \*

Rose had about all she could stomach of Preston. He had no right doing Carly the way he'd done her and then riding back in with a woman at his side, a baby on the way, and stiff arrogance in his buckskins. He was a son-of-a-bitch, that's what he was and he ought to be ashamed of himself.

"Don't look at me like I'm some kind of outlaw."

"Criminals come and go, Preston. No, you're much lower than a common thug. I'm just trying to find a way to put a name on it, figure out what it is that you really are, you know?"

"How about Preston Evans, the only man who has any business loving Carly Corbaine Evans." "What the hell is wrong with you?" she screamed before slapping her hand across his gut. "Have you forgotten how you treated her?"

Preston took a deep breath. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't smack me again."

"Oh for the love of God, Preston, you need help. You need some serious help. A normal man doesn't spy on two lovers going at it. Hell, I'm a working whore and don't allow it unless I know about it and then I charge extra for it. What were you doing peeking in Carly's window?"

"Trying to figure out what she sees in the profession."

"From what she's said about Spotted Cloud, I imagine you got your eyes full," Rose said, smiling. "Probably did you some good."

"In case you've forgotten, woman, I have plenty of package tucked away in these breeches."

"I wouldn't know or remember, Preston. It's been a long time ago and thank God, I never got in the thick of things with you like Carly did. I guess I would've been plumb tempted to blow your pecker to kingdom come."

"You should've seen them," he moved the conversation back to the starting point. "She sucked his cock like she'd never had a dick in her cheek before and they must've had sex four or five times while I was there. That Indian thinks he's in love with her." "Half the men in this town are in love with her. Even the married ones."

"She is my wife!"

"Then do you mind to tell me who she is?" Rose said, nodding toward the door.

A young woman with a pale complexion and a blood-soaked apron immediately collapsed on the floor and Preston dropped right beside her. "Laura!"

"That's what I thought," she quickly rushed to the basin and dipped a cloth in the cool water while instructing a few girls who came up behind her. "Hurry up. Go get the Doc and tell him he's got a baby to deliver."

"Here?" one of them asked.

"It's as good a place as any. We ain't ever had to bring a child into this world, but we've damn sure dealt with enough overgrown babies. Now hurry along. Get the Doc!"

## Chapter Six

Three Days Later

Carly heard the news from John and Billy a few hours after daybreak. They rode out to retrieve the rest of the herd and Billy delivered the news. Luke Daniels was waiting for the covered wagon to arrive from Sacramento. It was carrying the bodies of Robert Barkley's parents. They were going to be buried at high noon and Carly had to ride like hell to get to the town's small cemetery.

She rode past the area about the time the townspeople started to gather there, but she didn't stop right then. She saw Rose waving wildly from the front porch of the saloon so she headed there first.

"I want you to look at yourself," she drawled. "What's a woman like you going to do for her business, venturing out into public dressed like a man?"

Carly grinned. "I figured it might hurt my

competition if I showed up with my breasts pushed up in one of those dresses you loaned me."

"I must've gave 'em to you since you never returned them," she said. "How are you, Carly?" She sauntered off the porch and opened her arms.

Carly hugged her tightly and people stopped to stare. "Let's give 'em something to talk about," Rose said, smiling. "Pucker up."

"When hell freezes over, woman," she exclaimed, pulling away from her. "I can kiss a man, but don't think you have the right parts to finish the job if me and you get started on some tongue dancing."

"You never know," Rose teased, waggling her brows. "Listen, Carly, you don't want to go down there until after the service. Preston and...Laura are going to be there."

"Well I reckon it's all the more reason to go," she said, tying off her horse in front of the saloon. "I might as well meet her. Preston says I'll like her well enough."

Rose touched her cheek in a gentle gesture. "Carly, she's real sweet, that she is. She's a good woman, too, I should know."

"You befriending the competition again, Rose?" Carly asked.

"No," she replied. "I don't have the first inclination to be her friend because the woman is headed for heartbreak." She took a step back and dropped her gaze in regret. "And so are you if you go down there."

"I don't think so. I might as well meet her," Carly stated. About the time she turned around, she saw them. The couple walked side by side up the dirty street with tiny bundles wrapped securely in their arms. She blinked, swallowed and then rushed into the saloon before she was forced to say hello.

Rose was right behind her. "I wanted to tell you."

"You should've," she barked.

"They had twins, Carly. A boy and a girl. She was out looking for Preston and found him here. Her water broke and she almost lost the babies during labor. I guess she thought Preston was here looking for a little sugar when he should've been home loving on her. Of course the doc says they're damn lucky to have them at all since they were born pre-mature."

"Pre-mature?"

"Doc says rough sex induced labor."

"Rose?" Carly felt like a stab of something rammed through her middle. "You've been with Preston enough to know he doesn't rough up his women."

"I talked to Preston about it, Carly," she said softly. "Seems he did take her pretty hard once, right before the babies were born."

"Oh my God, what has happened to him?"

Rose shook her head. "He's stuck in this life he doesn't want with a woman who gave him two kids he does want and that's the most I can make of it. The children look like him. I had to help deliver them and I'll be damned, they even have his dark green eyes and winning personality."

"Personality?"

"Yeah, they whine all the time."

Carly shook with laughter. "Preston never complained, Rose."

"Ah, but that's because when he's with you, he doesn't have a care in the world. Without you, he's worse than a whiny woman. And, Carly, remember when I came to see you all those years ago and I told you Preston still loved you? Well, honey, I'm here to tell you the same song and dance. That man still has no idea that he's lost you. He thinks you're his until the day one or both of you die."

"Speaking of death, I guess I'll go on out and pay my respects."

"I'll come with you," Rose offered. "At least you don't have to stand there and act like a lady by yourself."

"I'm not scouting for customers," she reminded.

"No, but you could use a friend and from what

I understand, I'm the only woman in this town who likes you."

The two women walked over to the cemetery and the minister had just said his last words by the time they arrived. Preston locked gazes with Carly and then looked at Laura. She whispered something to him and then eased her bundle of joy into the nook of his right arm while he tried to balance the one he held with his left.

Rose tapped Carly's arm. "Uh-oh. Looks like you get to meet the new Mrs. Evans."

Carly turned away and started to make her escape. She could stop by later to pay her respects.

"Carly?"

She froze.

"Carly Corbaine?"

The chit-chat among townsfolk stopped in the middle of everything. Everyone there knew she was Preston's wife and most probably wondered what the hell happened. Few women just handed off their husbands to another woman.

"It was Carly Evans," she corrected when she turned around.

"I know and I'm sorry," she said quietly. "I wanted to meet you. I'd like to invite you and Rose to our home for dinner sometime. Rose here was very kind to assist the doctor in delivering the twins. I understand the two of you are friends. Would there be a time when you could join us?" "I don't think so," Carly snapped.

"We live just on the other side of -"

"I know where you live. I used to live there, too," Carly blurted. "I hope you get to enjoy a longer stay than I did."

"Yes, well, as I said, I am sorry about what happened between you and Preston."

"I guess those two babies there in his arms makes up for any remorse you might have felt. Congratulations, Mrs. Evans," she chided, glaring at Preston. "I know the four of you are going to be really happy over at your place."

"Well, if you change your mind, I'd love to include you in our lives. You're welcome for dinner anytime."

Rose smiled and Carly thanked her before gritting her teeth and watching her walk away. "I wanted to hate her."

"Then hate her, but you'll have to do it for the both of us because I couldn't do it myself. She's too damn nice."

"I bet she's bad in bed."

Rose laughed. "Spoken like a true whore."

"Yeah, I guess so."

Preston walked by them then with Laura holding fast to his elbow. "Ladies."

"Preston," Carly drawled. "You got yourself a nice looking family. I hope you take better care of them than your daddy took care of you and Slim." Preston's eyes darkened and she saw Laura's jaw tense, but she didn't fall victim to Carly's notorious tongue, one she didn't care to use as a way to whip out insults or draw out an argument. The couple walked away with their new babies in their arms and Rose released an exaggerated sigh.

"I used to want children," Rose confided. "I used to want them with Preston, between me and you."

"Yeah," Carly said. "So did I, Rose. So did I."

"And now?"

"I'm glad it's her and not me."

"That's my girl," Rose said, hugging her.

After the area thinned out and folks headed back to their homes, Luke Daniels showed up and handed Carly some flowers. "I thought you might want to do the honors."

"Luke, thank you. You're so thoughtful."

"I'll be waiting on the outskirts of town to escort you home. I didn't want you riding back after dark."

"Thanks, Luke."

Rose made eyes at him and then slapped Carly on the hip. She ignored the smack, but listened to Rose try her own style of flirting. "Tell me something, cowboy, how is it that Carly gets to ride with the likes of you and none of my girls could convince you to take up with them?"

"I'm a man who knows what he wants," Luke

said.

Carly pretended like she didn't hear him. She knelt next to the two soft piles of dirt. "Mr. and Mrs. Barkley," she paused and closed her eyes. "It's Carly Corbaine. I wanted to..." She had to clear her throat and try again. "I wanted to come and talk to you before now and I kept looking for the right time, only there never was one. It's kind of hard to tell a man and woman that the son they keep wondering about ain't coming home. See, I knew what happened to Robert," she choked on the tears she tried to conceal. "See I was halfway in love with him. He was the kind of fella I saw myself with in the event Preston didn't want me back."

She stopped talking and stared at the ground. "Turns out, he didn't want me anyway, but at the time, when Robert was with me, I didn't realize it. Back then, I thought me and Preston had a fighting chance. We didn't." The tears came faster and she knew she was crying hard enough to cause a commotion behind her so she put up her hand to wave off Rose and Luke.

"Anyhow, I...came here today to tell you that Robert died and Preston's daddy shot him on account of finding me and him together. I wanted you to know. I planned on telling you, but I just had a hard time accepting the blame for it myself, but it was my fault and I'm so, so sorry. Robert was a...fine young man and I thought a lot of him."

She pulled three small crosses out of her shirt pocket and placed one on each of the shallow graves before placing the third in the middle. She placed the flowers in the area between the Barkleys, right below the cross marking the spot for Robert. "I wish I could've found the right time to tell you. Who knows, maybe you wouldn't have gone to Sacramento. Maybe you'd still be alive today." She heard heavy footsteps behind her and then felt the presence of the only man she ever had the innate ability to sense before she saw him.

"You can't carry that guilt, Carly."

Carly's head jerked and she cupped her hand over her brow. "You shouldn't be here."

"Laura told me to come."

"Well ain't she just puddin' and pie nice?" Carly grated out, standing. She looked around and noticed Rose and Luke had gone their separate ways. Rose was headed back to the saloon and Luke was riding on out of town. She swiped the moisture away from her cheeks.

"She told me you declined her dinner invitation."

"Yes," she said, dusting off her breeches and walking toward the small gate at the edge of the cemetery. "I don't think it's appropriate for me to break bread with a woman who has my husband, the same man who claims he still wants me and his wife and children, too."

"You're still my wife in every way that matters, but the one I need most."

She glared at him, maybe even saw right through him. He was breaking down her defenses and he damn well knew it. "Since when does a man have two wives, Preston?"

He grabbed her arms and pinned them to her sides and, right there in broad daylight, took her lips like he had the right to claim them, like he wanted to brand her with his love the same way he did years ago, publicly and for everyone to see it.

Carly squirmed, but she couldn't escape him.

"I love you, Carly," he whispered into her mouth. "I love you more than I'll ever love any other woman."

"Then let me go," she cried as she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Let me go live my life," she whimpered, drawing him still closer. "The only way I can live my life free of you is if you allow me to do it."

"I can't." He nipped at her bottom lip and then her jaw, kissing his way down her neck and ravishing her with his lips before he pressed his stout erection against her body. "I won't."

His kiss invaded her mouth again and he pressed his tongue against hers, moaning into her

lips while trying to find the buttons to pull free from her blouse. One hand kneaded her breast and the other worked fast, trying with fervor to find a way to touch her skin.

"Preston, please!" she cried out.

"Pleasing you is what I do best, Carly. No other man can take you the way I take you, love you the way I love you."

Oh and it was true. No one on God's earth made her feel so much like a woman. No one ever made her stand in the middle of town with a puddle between her thighs, seriously contemplating a thrashing fuck.

"Preston!" The heart-wrenching sound of a woman catching her husband in the arms of another woman filled the area. The way Laura called out made her heart stop. Her voice filled the area and Carly pushed him away.

"Don't go," he said. "Go to the saloon and spend the night tonight. Let me come to you. I'll be there, if you'll go there and wait for me."

Carly looked back at the three graves and then eyed Laura standing a good fifty feet away from them. She pushed by Preston and kept moving even when he tried to block her path. "Laura," she whispered as she passed her. "My apologies."

"You don't have a reason to be sorry, Carly," she cried out. "I knew what I was doing and I understood the risks. I did it anyway." Carly stopped, but didn't turn around right away. She stared at her horse, the damn animal stood there looking at her as if to say, *come on girl*, *it's just not worth it anymore*, but she ignored it. Carly's beating heart slammed against her chest. "I don't understand."

Preston walked up about the time Laura faced her. Tears painted her face and for the first time, Carly saw the woman Preston probably saw from the beginning. She was very thin and what little weight she carried in her chest undoubtedly came from giving birth. Carly decided if Laura was feeding her children, they were probably starving to death. She looked washboard flat and Preston liked a woman with big breasts. Her body didn't have curves or any shape whatsoever. Outside of the clear complexion, and she had real pretty skin, she was sort of plain.

"I knew he loved a woman once. Preston told me all about you, even told me he still loved you. I didn't care, you see. I wanted a man to take care of me and love me like Preston said he once loved you. I figured I could take your place since he didn't seem to have an interest in loving you again. Thing is, I never paid close enough attention to understand that his kind of love was a one-shot deal. He'll never love another the way he loves you."

Carly stood straighter, forcing her shoulders

back as she looked from Laura back to Preston. "I'm still sorry you had to witness all this. You have Preston's children and as far as I'm concerned, Laura, you are his wife. The only wife he has or ever will have." Choking on the tears threatening to suffocate her again, she sprinted for her horse, held the stirrup out away from the Palomino's side and quickly mounted.

Slapping the extra long reins against the horse's withers, Carly rode as fast as she could until she reached the outskirts of town. "Luke!" she choked out his name, hoping he'd appear if he was hiding or slow down if he was riding. "Luke!"

"Carly!" he exclaimed and she faintly heard him the distance. "Carly? Are you okay?"

"No," she fell over her horse's mane and then slid away from the saddle. Luke quickly dismounted and held her in his arms.

"Carly? What's wrong? Did Preston say or do something to hurt you?"

She shook her head and then reluctantly nodded. "Yes, yes he did. I'm killed. I'll never live again without him. I've always known it, but never accepted it until now."

"What did he do? Tell me what he did and I'll take care of it. He has too much to do to worry about you. He has a woman and two children who need him now. He shouldn't take the time to bother you." Carly cried into his shirt and then wrapped her arms around his waist. "I need you," she whimpered. "Right now," she begged. "I need you to take me right here," she continued dragging him with her, pausing only a second to drop her reins.

"Carly this is insane," Luke said. "What's this really about?"

"Me and you, just take advantage of it."

He grinned. "Sugar, I can take advantage of you every hour of every day." He slanted his lips over hers and she tugged at his buckskins, untying them as quickly as possible.

"Here now, Carly. Let's get out of the way. We don't want curious folks to see us." He grabbed both horses close to their bits and looped their reins over his palm so they hung freely from the bridles. Tying the leather straps around a low branch, he ducked his head, walked away from the animals and grabbed her playfully around the waist.

"You're so wet, you can't wait until you get home?"

She shook her head. "I just want you to fuck me. No foreplay. Just take me." She pulled his penis free from the material and pushed her pants down. He pressed his dick to her folds and then picked her up. When he released her a little, she fell over his cock and he sank into her slick walls. "Oh, baby, that's good," he said. "Now ride me, sugar. Ride me hard." He dropped to the ground and the two of them rolled over a few times. When they stopped, her heart raced and her pussy convulsed with a need so powerful, she felt empowered by it. She sat upright and released the pin holding her hair. Unmanageable and free, her locks bounced over her shoulders. She squeezed her legs tight against his thighs.

"Oh, pretty Carly, this is the kind of loving a man wants from a woman," he said, sinking deeper. "Use me, lover."

And that's precisely what she was doing.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Preston, at Laura's request, followed Carly home and ran up on the most sinfully delicious sight.

Carly was fucking for him.

He didn't know what to make of it when he first saw the horses tied up, but then he dared to move closer. Something told him to dismount and creep around the bushes. And the little birdie telling him to do it was right.

Luke Daniels was fucking her crazy, but the madness he saw in her eyes wasn't the lust she had for Daniels. Instead, it was the unknown and the unexpected, the fear of what if he did spot them, the danger of what would happen when he did.

Once her wild blue eyes met his, the way she responded to Luke changed. She savagely fucked him and everything about her changed. There was no question about it. The primitive way she bucked up against him and the reckless way she went crazy in his arms, it was all for Preston. And it served as a haunting reminder.

Carly fucked for his pleasure as much as her own, but she didn't get to ride out her climax until she saw him there, watching and yearning, longing for what they used to have and what they should never have again. Oh but they would. God help him, he would go to her one night and, in a moment of weakness, he would convince her and she would take him when her resistance failed her. She'd do it because she'd always love him and she'd do it because the look in her eyes right then told him she was already loving him. Another man's cock stroked at her walls, but it was he who fucked her.

\* \* \* \*

Preston narrowed his gaze and he slowly licked his lips. Oh, how she'd loved it when he teased her. "Faster," she cried over her shoulder. Luke bent her forward, slapping her ass when she didn't bend all the way toward the ground.

"If you want me to take you harder, gotta make it worth it. Hang onto your calves, baby. That's right. Let me fuck this pretty little pussy." He slapped her mound and her juices pooled around her folds, spilling into his palm.

She saw Preston's eyes glaze over and witnessed the first tear fall. Good, she thought.

She'd cried plenty. Now, she wanted to see his cock. She wanted him jacking off as he watched them. But she wouldn't get her wish.

Luke hammered into her and screamed out his release. "Damn you, Carly. You're the sweetest little whore this side of Sacramento."

She saw Preston flinch and she bit her lip.

"Tell me you like fucking me, go on now. Talk to me. Tell me."

"I love it," she said. "I love fucking you." She stared at Preston. "No other cock satisfies me like yours." She nodded in his direction. "No other ever will."

"That's so nice, darlin'," he said, slapping her ass again. "But we both know that's not true."

She squealed when he smacked her ass, but she still required more, "Can you spank me again?"

Preston pursed his lips. That's right, she thought, whip that dick out Preston. Let me see it. But he still didn't offer. Instead, he ducked down a little more into the greenery and she was left to wonder if his dick was in his pants or his hand.

Luke spanked her until she bucked violently against him, milking his cock while imagining it was Preston. Only she really liked fucking Luke, too, and she felt the rising guilt, as well as a surge of excitement, stirring her and driving her forward. She realized why. She was bouncing back and forth between fantasy and reality. It bothered her because while she cared for Luke, she was in love with Preston and no other man could ever take his place. She locked eyes and whispered, "I have to feel you again."

And that's when Preston stepped beyond the trees and slowly started toward them.

\* \* \* \*

Luke saw him. He'd bet money on it. He didn't stop fucking her though. He kept hammering into her like he earned the right to do it. His cock impaled his woman and he didn't have the decency to pull out when he stepped beyond the trees.

Carly's eyes widened. She wanted him to take her. She wanted him to join them, but that was the one thing he could not do. He couldn't share her the way he'd once shared her with Robert Barkley because then he might want to kill, just like his father had killed Barkley and saved him the trouble.

"Get out of here, Evans," Luke said.

"Not on your life," he warned. And it was a damn warning. "Get the hell away from her."

"Oh god," he said stroking her pussy still harder. "Come, Carly. Ah yer good, woman," he drawled, collapsing on her back. He got off in his wife's pussy. He got off with his eyes watching. He grabbed Luke by the neck and had every intention of killing him until seven riders raced by them like a pack of wild Indians riding toward town with a purpose. They didn't see them because Preston pushed Luke down and grabbed Carly to cover her. Only seven riders rode as hard and as deliberate. And he knew who led the pack.

"Get dressed. I'm going to have trouble at my place. Carly, go to the saloon and stay there. Don't ride back to the prairie, you hear?" Preston mounted his horse and took off like a unruly man, leaving only a cloud of dust spinning behind him.

"Don't just stand there," Carly said, staring down at Luke's spent dick. "You have to help him!"

"And why should I? So he can kill me the next time he sees me with you again?"

"He wouldn't hurt you. The two of you were friends, remember?"

"With friends like Preston, none of us will ever need an enemy. You think I don't know who those riders were?"

She swallowed hard. "I have no idea who they are. How could you?"

"I know them," he said. "Preston and Slim had a half-sister who led the Evans gang back east. She's meaner than any outlaw I've ever heard about and word has it, she's out for revenge. Don't you dare ride into town. Head back to your place and let Spotted Cloud take you into the hills. I'll meet up with you in a few days and get you some place safe."

"I'm not leaving Preston to face his sister by himself. He'll tell her he killed their father."

Luke framed her face and kissed her forehead. "She'll cut you up and scalp you like an Indian if she even suspects you had anything to do with her father's death. You need to get the hell out of here, Carly. Those men riding with her kill when they fire those guns."

"Maybe they miss when they're outnumbered," she countered. "You ride back to the prairie and bring the others with you. Billy, John and Cloud are there."

"We can't make it back in time," he said. "Now go!"

"Ain't any reason to send her back there, Luke," Billy drawled, whittling on a piece of wood, presumably the same one Luke left on her porch. "We've been right here watching over you the whole time."

He stepped out from behind a big Oak tree and grinned as he watched them dress. "Cloud here, sensed trouble." He nodded at Cloud who was perched high in the large tree. He tiptoed over the large branches before he dropped down in front of them. "I reckon he was right. The Evans' gal is a real cracker jack and I ain't too anxious to meet her or her boys, but I reckon Preston will need a little help."

"And you'll help him?" Carly asked. "Right?"

"What's it worth to you, beautiful?" Billy drawled.

John walked up from the river, dusting off his pants. "And you better promise something like what we witnessed just now because I'll be damned if I wouldn't rather fuck than die today, seeing as I just saw the most delicious sex acts ever known to a grown man."

"You ain't ever talked so much," Luke said. "She looked that good, did she?"

Billy winked. "Nay, he was talking about you," he teased. "He said your ass looked so pretty when it was squeezed nice and tight."

Luke snarled. "Shut the hell up, Billy."

"I'll do it," he said, kissing Carly lightly on the lips. "If she'll make us the promise, we go help out Evans and -"

Carly grabbed her horse's reins and swung her leg over the saddle. "Anything goes for all of you at one time for a full day. Free one on the house. Now get your asses moving and if you fire, you better not miss or else you won't have a dick worth using tomorrow."

Every one of the cowboys had a hard time mounting their horse after her gentle reminder, everyone except Spotted Cloud. He just smiled and hummed as he followed Carly back to Stockton. And Carly imagined Cloud would follow her just about anywhere. A hard cock generally guaranteed a woman a certain amount of loyalty.

\* \* \* \*

Laura placed the babies in their cradles and looked outside. She heard the riders when they approached and was thankful her children were sound asleep in their beds. Preston never mentioned they were expecting company. She kissed both their foreheads and started downstairs.

She met a woman on the steps. Dear heavens, she was probably another wife Preston forgot to mention. "Who are you?" she asked cautiously.

"I'm Beth Evans," she said, her voice holding steady, but the whiskey on her breath was as stout as liquor pouring out of twenty bottles.

"Beth Evans, great," she drawled. "Another one."

Beth drew her pistol and pointed it. "Yeah, bitch. Another one. You killed Slim and you killed my father. Now, my half-brother is too smitten to notice you're leading him right into a well-laid trap. You ain't going to get away with this. I came here to kill you and I want to look you in the eye when I do it."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Laura said, realizing it was a mistake, one she'd have to encourage Preston to set straight. She walked down the steps and the woman cocked the gun.

"Hold it, lady. I'd rather shoot you face to face, but I ain't got a problem shooting a killer in the back."

Laura kept walking. "Sometimes a woman faces all sorts of deaths. Many of them while she's walking among the living, so if you're going to shoot me, you'll have to do it with my back turned. I don't have any inclination to look at a woman with killing on her mind."

"Then I'll send you to hell without looking in your eyes when I do it. Goodbye, Carly Corbaine."

\* \* \* \*

Preston's half-sister pulled the trigger about the time Carly rushed in and tried to stop her. It was too late and the sound of gunfire filling the house all at one time guaranteed a showdown, sealed the fates of those gathered there. The chaos broke out and guns were aimed, pointed and fired. Someone pushed her out of the way before Spotted Cloud hovered over her. Men rushed in from all directions. Carly heard a gurgling sound and dropped to her knees. It was then she realized that Laura had been shot.

"Laura!" she pressed her hand to her stomach and realized the bullet she caught was too close to the heart. She stripped both of the sleeves out of her shirt and bunched the material up so she could use it for a bandage.

She whispered something and Carly leaned down so she could hear her. "Laura, you hang on now. Don't you die on me! Preston will never forgive you or me. You have to hang on." Men rushed by them and Spotted Cloud knelt down to help her. He started some kind of spiritual chant and rose and fell over her body.

"Preston!" Carly called out, the room was pitch black except for the occasional flash of light when a gun sounded off. "Preston! Damn it! It's your wife!"

Preston appeared at the top of the stairs. "Carly?"

"Preston, please! You have to help her!"

Someone fired a shot into the air. Preston cursed and then disappeared out of sight again.

Laura continued to gag on her blood, trying to catch her breath, fighting for air and for her voice. When she found it, she arched her neck upward and said, "They...thought...I was...you."

"Preston! Hurry! It's Laura!" Panic punched her in the stomach. "Laura, I know. It's the hell of standing too close to the wrong people. Good folks get hurt, real fine people die. I don't want you to be one of them. You hang on, you hear me?"

Spotted Cloud stood and began death's dance around Laura's body, he swept his arms over his head and, like a limp rag, continued to parade around her like a crazy man who thought he was exempt from the guns being fired around him.

"Spotted Cloud!" Carly shouted. "Get down!"

Harder and harder, his feet stamped the floor under them. Louder and louder, he sang out.

Laura was dying and Preston was guarding his children, as he should be, but Carly wanted him there. He needed to be with his dying wife.

"Car...ly," she gurgled. "Take care of little Presley and sweet Annie...you and...Preston take care of...each other."

"No, oh no, Laura! Don't you do this!" Carly held the woman's corpse and she shook her so hard that she honestly thought she might shake the life back into her. Instead, she had to leave her. She had to go help Preston protect his children.

Carly barreled up the stairs and raced for the nursery. "Preston!"

"In here," he said, hovering around the babies with his gun aimed at the door.

Carly rushed inside the small room. It was easy to locate even in the dark because Preston always told her it was his dream to fill his house with children and they once discussed this very room as the likely place for a nursery. Apparently, Laura thought it made a great room for little ones, too. "Preston," she said softly. "Laura is dead."

He glanced up, but she couldn't make out his expression. "What?"

Carly stood at the door for a long time before she moved inside the room and slumped against the wall, realizing when she swiped a hair away from her brow that moisture dampened it. Laura's blood was on her hands and she wanted to wipe it away, out of sight, before Preston accused her of his wife's demise.

"Laura's dead?"

"Yes, Preston. I'm so, so sorry."

Preston stormed forward and grabbed her from the floor, holding her shoulders tight against the wall. "What the hell happened to my wife!"

"I don't know! She said something about your sister. Your sister mistakenly thought she was me and she...killed her."

Preston clutched her still harder. "Carly, you have to help me. You have to promise me something." He shook her a few times. "Promise me!"

"Promise you what?" Carly stiffly swallowed back her fear. "What is it? Name it."

"You...have to promise me you'll let Beth think

she killed you. Swear it now! Right now, this minute. We can't defeat them. There are too many of them and she rides with the cruelest men I've ever known. All of them, even my sister, are without morals and cold-blooded killers."

"She couldn't possibly believe it after I called out for Laura so many times."

"You...called out for her?"

"Yes, Preston, didn't you hear me?"

"No, I heard some yelling in the distance, but the guns were fired so quickly that I couldn't make it out. Laura's dead?" He dropped his hands away from her and stared back at the cribs. "Laura's gone?"

Carly bowed her head and was shocked when Preston grabbed her and held her close. "You have to promise me, Carly. Say it right now. Promise me you'll let Beth believe she killed you."

"I promise."

"Stay here with the children. I'll try and reason with her. Don't let her near them and don't you leave them, understand?"

Screams filled the house and more gunfire sounded off in the distance along with plenty of passionate threats. Preston had to know what he faced below. He must have realized death waited downstairs. His sister was angry and she came there to kill all of them, not just Carly, but maybe even Preston, too. "I won't, Preston. I'll never leave them." He placed his gun in her hands and then he gripped her wrist for a split second. "Maybe I can still save Laura. The children need a mother. Maybe she just passed out when she saw her own blood."

Carly nodded, but knew better. She'd watched her eyes set in the shadows of the night and she knew without a doubt the woman Preston once cared about had already slipped away. As if he understood it, too, he studied Carly's face for another second, then pursed his lips, drew another gun from his belt and left his children behind. She'd protect them and Preston trusted her enough, even now, to guard them at all costs.

The marshal arrived some time after the smoke cleared and Carly vaguely remembered him being there. She was in the nursery with the children and had changed their soiled clothes as best as she could. Then she tried to comfort them when they cried out in the night.

Preston slipped into the room with his head down a few minutes after the marshal left. "Beth and all of her men got away."

Carly looked down at her feet. "How about everyone else?"

Preston walked over to the window and stood there staring outside like he didn't see what he wanted to find there, but felt compelled to stare anyway. His eyes were cold, his expression blank and his shoulders were slumped over. He was tired and she wanted to sleep as much as he needed it, but she was afraid to leave the children. She promised a dying woman she would care for them.

"Laura's gone," he whispered.

"I know," she said.

"I don't want you carrying the blame. We've placed and carried the burden of guilt so often that we've experienced enough for three lifetimes. It's time we started trying to live again, get passed all of the mistakes and make a life. It's what Laura would want."

Carly rocked back and forth in the old rocking chair and studied Preston. "Is it what Laura would want or what you want?"

"It's what I want, Carly. You are all I've ever wanted and Laura accepted it."

"I'm not the same person I used to be, Preston, and you can't go around killing everyone who has been in my bed. They bought and paid for services and none of them, none that I recall anyway, took out a little extra insurance. No one feared dying after the fucking business was over."

Preston pulled her up and brushed his lips against her cheek. "I won't kill any of your past customers. Besides, I'm not sure how many of them are left living after tonight anyway." "What?" Carly pushed him away.

"Luke Daniels and John Wilcox are dead, Carly."

"No," she shook her head. "They can't be. You're mistaken."

He walked away from her and she flew into him like a mad hen. "You killed them!"

"What are you talking about?" He pushed her away, but held onto her forearms. "I didn't kill anyone at all. Much less Daniels."

"You knew I cared about Luke and suspected John cared about me. You killed them!"

"That's the craziest notion you've had in years. No, you're wrong this time. Luke and I were once friends for crying out loud and John never made the first enemy."

"Apparently he found one if he's dead!"

Preston extended his hand and opened his palm. "Carly, we have to stop this right here, right now. I've had enough killing to last me. I promise you. I didn't have anything to do with it. They were shot, according to Billy while Spotted Cloud performed his death ritual. He was trying to protect you, and from what Billy said, Luke and John were trying to cover him and that's when Beth and one of her men shot them."

Carly buried her face in her hands and slowly fell against the wall, sliding to the floor. "This can't be happening. I can't be living this kind of life all over again. There's too much death and not enough living. What will Spotted Cloud do without Luke to watch over him? He's only friends with our kind, he's never known another life outside of that he led with the white men who took him in."

"Then we'll take him in, Carly. We'll befriend him if that's what it's going to take to make you happy."

"And Billy Jackson? What about Billy? John and Luke have been riding with Billy since he was a teenager."

Preston narrowed his gaze. "Do I have anything to worry about with you and Billy?"

"I care about Billy...and I care about Spotted Cloud. They're my friends, Preston. They're part of the life I built when I didn't have you around."

He slowly nodded his acceptance. "And those children are a part of my life now, too, you know."

"Yes," she said slowly. "And I promised Laura I'd take care of them. You can ask Cloud. He'll tell you. He heard her. I know he did. She asked me to care for them and to..."

"And to what?" he asked, almost as if he expected her reply.

"She asked me to take care of your children and wanted us to take care of each other."

"And Spotted Cloud heard her ask you this?" "Yes," she said. "And that does me some good for verification since he's so fluent in English, right?"

"I guess you'll have to take my word for it, huh?"

"Yes, I imagine so." He pressed her head to his shoulder and kissed her brow. "Let's get you to bed."

"I'll sleep here," she whispered, already nodding off to sleep. "I promised Laura to watch over your children."

"And I promise you I'll never leave you again if you'll have me."

She mumbled into his chest and then allowed her dreams to take her. She had a lot of nightmares to face, but a few fantasies she could finally revisit. A lot of dreams she could dream again after she mourned her friends and put the past to rest once and for all. Preston Evans still loved her. He loved her in spite of her mistakes, regardless of the men who'd had her after him. He loved her unconditionally and she was going to do her best to live up to his expectations. If possible, she might even surprise him by exceeding them.

## Chapter Eight

Two Weeks Later

Preston leapt from his horse and tossed his reins at Billy. "What's this?" Billy asked. "Do I look like one of the hired hands?"

Preston skipped over the front steps. He felt like he'd been on the longest cattle drive of his life, but in fact, he'd been sitting in a jail cell because after the smoke cleared, he was arrested for John and Luke's murders.

Not a minute went by that he wasn't thinking about Carly. He'd missed his woman and wanted to see his children. On occasion, he'd thought about Laura and, in his own way, mourned her. The marshal allowed him to attend her burial, but it wasn't anything too elaborate. Laura had always said she never wanted to die a fancy death and by that she meant—because she'd told him a few times—she wanted dirt tossed on top of her and those still living to get on with it. There was no sense in mourning the dead for longer than it took to bury them or so she believed. He had to disagree.

Rushing into the nursery, he peered over the tops of the small baby beds and started to reach in and wake up little Annie. He stopped when he heard Carly behind him.

"Don't even think about it," she said, standing in the doorway. "They've barely slept and I need the break."

"Look at you," he drawled, taking one step at a time. "Don't you look as pretty as ever?"

Carly rolled her eyes and then released a heavy sigh. "I should. I've been fucked hard and rode well while you were away."

"Ah now, there you go. Trying to make me jealous, aren't you?"

"No, it's the truth. It's not easy teaching Spotted Cloud the English language. Now that he knows how to say *sex* that's the only word he uses and you might say it's overused to a fault."

"Is that right?" He grabbed her and pulled her into his arms. "And what about me? If I say it twenty times really fast, can I earn a little alone time with my wife?"

"Oh, Spotted Cloud doesn't say it real fast, he drawls when he speaks about it. It's like the word is a language in and of itself. It's as beautifully spoken as I've ever heard." "That one word, huh?" He yanked her to him and his mouth crashed down on hers. He nibbled on her lips, placing his palms to her lower back and pressing his body into hers so she sensed his excitement, understood his hunger.

"Oh yes, you should try it sometime. Just say it real soft like," she purred.

"How about I don't say anything at all, until morning?" he suggested, bending his knees and then scooping her into his arms.

She ran her hand through his thick hair and nervously touched his cheek. "Sounds like the best plan I've ever heard."

Preston moved them toward his bedroom, kicked the door and watched as it opened up. They both looked at the bed and Preston remembered the last time he'd taken a woman there. Laura wasn't the woman he wanted in his arms, she wasn't the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life loving, but somehow in her death, he remembered the things he loved about her.

Laura possessed an unselfish heart, and proved it in the way she encouraged him to remain friends with Carly. He wondered if he had the heart to share Carly, the way Laura had planned on sharing him.

He took a deep breath and knelt with Carly, easing her lower before he released her. She fell

against the mattress. "You're so beautiful," he said. "You take my heart places I never wanted it to go."

"Is that right?" she asked, quickly freeing him from the buckskins binding him.

"You're the only woman I want, Carly. You're the only one I'll ever need."

\* \* \* \*

She knew what Preston wanted her to say, but she couldn't tell him what he longed to hear most. Carly recognized the feelings she had for Billy and Spotted Cloud. She cared deeply for them and she wanted them to live with her for as long as they wanted. Preston had agreed, but with a little more reluctance than what she'd originally hoped. Then again, she couldn't blame him. She never wanted to share him with another woman.

"I love you, Preston. I'll never love anyone as much as I love you." And it was true. She loved Billy and Spotted Cloud in a way she'd never love Preston, too. Preston had the greatest of loves, he was her truest love, but she would never trust him not to leave her again. She found that kind of security in the connection she shared with Billy and Cloud.

Preston drew her close and stripped her dress over her head. "Then love me, Carly. Love me right through the pain of losing you so I never let you go again."

His lips took hers with a rite of passage, the kind of ownership she only allowed Preston to have. He sipped at her lips, indulged in them like they held some sort of erotic flavor. Her head fell back against the pillow, her neck fully exposed and he kissed his way to the base of it. Allowing his fingers the time to skim over her breasts, tweaking the nipples he'd lavish with the same kind of attention.

Her body prepared for him. Her nipples were ripe, pointed with anticipation, and her legs fell away from one another. With his head to her chest, he sipped at her mounds, kissing a path between both before swatting her mound with a hard, quick slap.

"Preston," she mumbled, against the back of her hand. "Oh yes, that's what I've missed."

Parting her folds with her own fingers, he slapped away her hand and flicked his wrist, patting her pussy with fervor, drawing out the heat of a woman, the kind of woman she always was whenever he locked her in his arms. It had been too long, so long.

She was dead without him, but now she felt alive again. She received a death sentence when he was with Laura, but now, she was free again. Free to be with him and the other men who made her happy. She had so much to appreciate because the woman who temporarily took her place in Preston's bed, also allowed her the opportunity to reenter his life.

She swallowed as a little twinge of remorse filled her heart with sadness, but then she reminded herself what Laura once told her. She'd known all along who Preston loved and yet she took him anyway. In a way, now Carly looked at it like she loaned Preston to Laura, and in return, she gave them two bundles of precious joy.

Carly raised her head off the pillow and watched as Preston's dark head moved lower, sipping at her skin like he truly intended to devour her and as she expected, he did.

Throwing her legs over his back, he entered her pussy with a thick tongue like only he possessed. Billy came close, but even he didn't know how to shower a woman with this kind of sweet attention.

"Preston, let me...feel you."

"Ah, baby," he whispered, kissing her inner thighs. "You're gonna feel me." He thrust his tongue inside her tight cave and he ate her like a man who'd never ate a woman for a lust-filled meal before. He licked at her until she felt her walls collapse around his thick and meaty tongue. And he continued to drink her in, his tongue refusing to retreat as her body unraveled and her juices poured onto his thick lips. "Preston!" she gasped, rising up to watch him. She braced her body with her palms flat on either side of her hips. "Stop, oh please...stop!" She pressed her legs together and he pushed them apart, his mouth still hungry, his body jerking in an effort to fight off his own needs, his own desperate arousal. Then he rose over her and stared at her with evidence of her pleasure literally dripping from his chin.

"I love you, God help me, I love you more than I love drawing air. And I'll never leave you again, Carly. You're my wife, my lover, my woman and if you still take another man to your bed, you'll take him there with me watching. Promise me, give me that much."

Carly nodded and he smacked her pussy. "That's my girl, my wild and sexy woman."

She flinched with the slap. "Preston," she hummed, wrapping her legs around his waist. "Make love to me."

"Ah, baby, I've been making love to you since we got here, don't you know that?"

She nodded and he raised her hips once more to sip out another taste of her nectar. Then he pushed her legs apart and sank into her folds, deeply penetrating her with a cock all men would now envy. With every thrust, she was reminded of the cowboys she'd serviced until all of a sudden, she only felt Preston again. His gaze met hers and he framed her face while he loved her. Holding her cheeks in his hands, he kissed her as he stroked her and she braced for the orgasm moving closer.

"I love you, Carly," he said. "Forever, I love you."

The earth then moved and his pace changed, but he never left her body or her mouth. His gaze never shifted with his weight and soon, his body was drenched with sweat beads, her pussy weeping with more desire than she'd ever known. And he loved her through the night, the way she'd always hoped he'd love her when he held her once more.

## Epilogue

Three years later

"Preston!" Carly gripped the bed sheets as Spotted Cloud dampened the cloth again and held it to her head.

Cloud started humming, a sweet song, perhaps a lullaby. Little Presley and Annie stood at the door until Billy finally encouraged them to wait in another room. The town doctor rushed in and, like the little child knew it was safe to arrive, a few minutes later the prettiest little baby girl fought her way into the world.

Carly collapsed on the bed and three large men gathered around the newborn and the doctor cleaned her up, taking the time to examine her before he pulled down the sheet and offered her a reassuring smile. "You're going to be a fine little mother," he said.

A few minutes later and Carly watched as the doctor took the baby from Preston's arms and

studied the child. "I need some space, please," Doc said, right before the little one released a loud squeal.

Spotted Cloud jumped backward and looked down at Carly. "Sex," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

The doctor stared at Billy and then Preston. "Someone should tell him that she needs her rest."

Billy pulled Spotted Cloud aside and tried to explain in Spotted Cloud's native tongue, something he'd picked up on through the years. Spotted Cloud nodded and then sank beside her, propping her head on his lap. He reached for a cool rag and draped it over her forehead. "Sex next time."

She grinned. "Another time," she promised, rolling her head and watching Preston with their beautiful little girl.

"What are you going to name her?" Billy asked.

"Laura," she said.

"Rising Flower," Spotted Cloud corrected proudly, never realizing that the child in Preston's arms was indeed Preston's child. Preston and Carly had been on a long cattle drive when she fell ill with morning sickness and it was then they realized, they were going to become parents again.

"I like Laura, the Rising Flower," she told him, pressing her palm to his cheek.

"Laura will do," Preston growled.

"She sure is beautiful," Billy said. "We're going to spoil her rotten."

As soon as the words fell from his lips, Presley and Annie rushed in the room and hopped on his lap. Soon, Presley was on his back, begging for a piggyback ride and Annie wanted him to skip rocks.

Billy leaned down and kissed Carly gently on the lips and then poked Spotted Cloud in the ribs. "Come on, Cloud. She needs sleep."

"Sex," he said gruffly. "Sex and Spotted Cloud."

Billy leaned over and whispered something in his ear and, with great reluctance, Spotted Cloud followed him outdoors. The doctor watched them before he turned back to address them.

"You have a fairly unique family, Preston," he said.

"That I do, Doc McClain. We're an unusual bunch, but we're a family and I finally have one to call my own," he said, smiling at Carly. "And I never take any of them for granted."

"Good," Doc McClain said. "I'll have to say you have one of the prettiest women I've ever seen."

Preston stood a little taller, his pride guiding him as he squared his shoulders. "She makes my life worth something."

"Then I imagine you're a very wealthy man."

## About the Author

Destiny Blaine is the pseudonym of an awardwinning, bestselling author of hot and sweet romances. She lives with her husband of nearly two decades and their teenagers in East Tennessee. You can visit her on her website at www.destinyblaine.com or follow her around on Twitter at www.Twitter.com/DestinyBlaine