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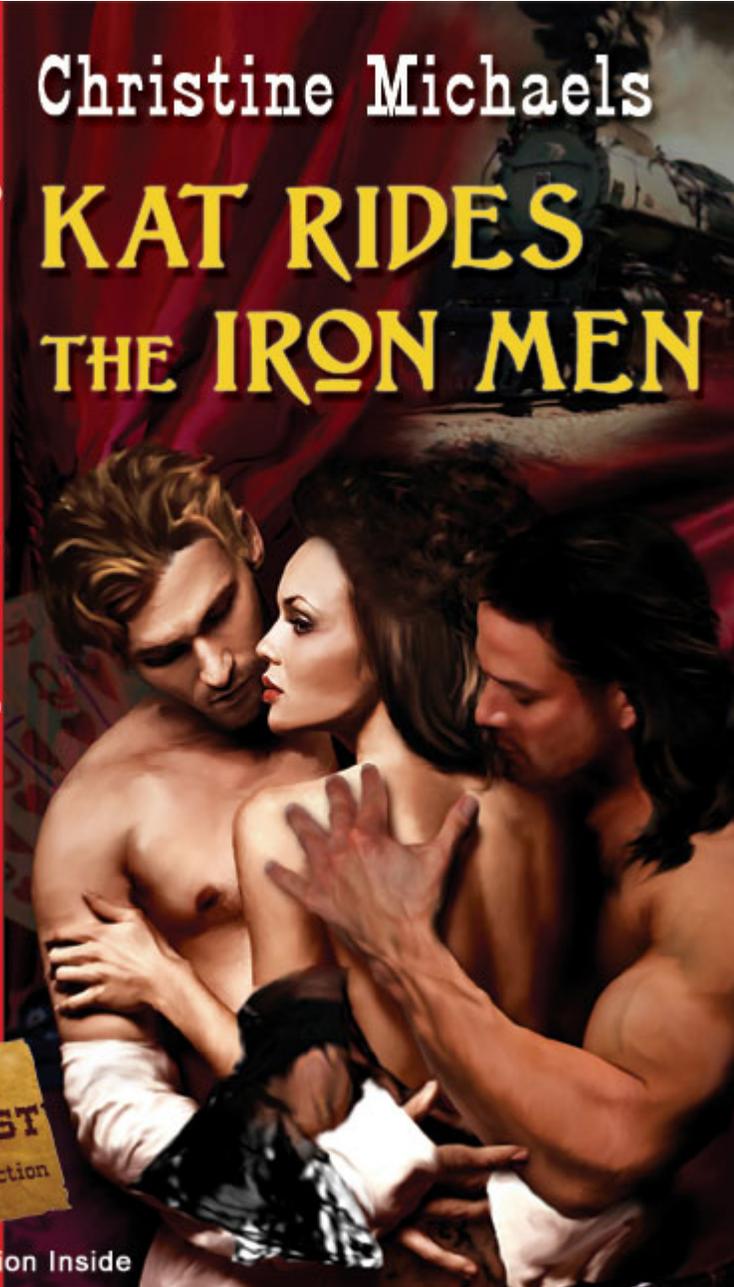
Christine Michaels

# KAT RIDES THE IRON MEN

*Ménage Everlasting*

The  
**LOST**  
Collection

Illustration Inside



## *Siren Ménage Everlasting*

### *The story behind The Lost Collection*

During recent excavations in several abandoned western U.S. mining towns, a Siren editor/archaeology enthusiast discovered crates of old, tattered diaries and journals buried and lost for more than 100 years.

Hot passion and daring romance was alive and well among the intrepid women of the Old West. Siren Publishing invited a few of our most distinguished bestselling authors to take on new pseudonyms and use their imaginations to bring to life some of the love stories of the Old West.

Once Siren releases the 50th book in *The Lost Collection*, we will reveal the identity of some of these authors.

# KAT RIDES THE IRON MEN

Christine Michaels

*Ménage Everlasting*

*Sophia*

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# **KAT RIDES THE IRON MEN**

*The Lost Collection*

**Christine Michaels**

**MENAGE EVERLASTING**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
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# KAT RIDES THE IRON MEN

CHRISTINE MICHAELS

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## Prologue

Katherine McCoy dumped the heaping pile of clothing into her suitcase.

“I don’t want to talk about it anymore, Anna,” she said to her younger sister. “I’m going and that’s final.” She wiped away a stray hair that fell loose from her chignon as she straightened, flicking her gaze over to her sister who stood in the entrance of Katherine’s room.

“But I want to go with you, Kat,” Anna repeated for the fourth time in fifteen minutes. Katherine ignored her, sweeping past her in a swish of billowing skirts and the sharp clapping of her boots against the wooden floor. Anna retreated to the doorway where she leaned a slim shoulder against the frame. “I can help, too, you know. I mean, I may not be as good at cards as you are, but I am certainly capable of other things.”

Katherine brushed past her again. “Like what?” she asked over her shoulder.

While she made her way back to her suitcase, she glanced up to see Anna fidgeting slightly.

“Well, I…” Anna started.

“That’s what I thought.” Katherine threw ribbons, a petticoat, and stockings on top of the growing clothing heap.

“Kat, please.” Anna pleaded through clenched teeth, but Katherine flitted past her again. Anna stomped her foot and curled her hands

into rigid fists. “Would you please stop?” she screeched. “Kat, please don’t leave me here alone. It’s just you and me now. Ever since Papa—” Anna broke off, swallowed hard, and straightened her shoulders. “Being alone is a little unnerving.”

“I know, but I can’t think of any other way to arrange this. One of us has to stay here, otherwise our creditors will think we’ve up and gone. I don’t want to think about what would happen if they thought that. I’ve stayed here as long as possible, but there’s just not much money left, Anna.” Katherine walked over to her sister and pushed a thick blonde curl from her shoulder. “We’ve barely enough to get us through to winter. What then? What will happen when the frost comes?”

Anna blew out a frustrated breath. “I wish Papa taught me cards, too. We could work together, conquering the West, one poker game at a time. I wish I had a skill for something that could make us a little money. You wouldn’t have to do all of this on your own that way.”

“You were always wonderful at making your own dresses.”

“True, but what kind of money can we make selling my dresses? I’d need to buy good material, ribbons, lace, silk, all of that. And no one here would want to waste their money on my party dresses when what they need is sturdy farming clothing.”

“Maybe someday we’ll be able to open a shop, you and me, and you can make all the dresses and gloves you want to make.”

“Someday, maybe.”

“We still have to figure out this mess we’re in now.”

The sisters stood close together, arms crossed over their chests, touching. Their mother died suddenly when Katherine was ten. Anna had been seven. Papa never seemed to fully recover after their mother died. A lingering emptiness always seemed to haunt his smile, and before Katherine was old enough to realize it, he found a new love. Whiskey.

Katherine could never find it in herself to blame him. She always suspected he wanted to find a way to escape and forget about the

hollow feelings that ate at him. She knew what it felt like, too. A day never went by that she did not miss her mother and the way she smelled, or the way she give her and Anna a goodnight kiss after tucking them into bed.

It did not take very long before their father became ineffectual at making enough money or simply being productive, and the bills started piling up.

He died two years ago, and the bills still needed to be paid.

Anna looked at Katherine through her lashes. “There are other ways I can help, you know. It’s no secret that widower Brown has taken a liking to me,” she said in a low voice. “I am pretty, you know. I could—”

Katherine’s anger rose. “Don’t even think about it.”

“Just listen, Kat.”

“No! Don’t you dare even think it! I won’t hear any of it!”

“Why does it always have to be you? I feel so worthless just staying here. I want to help. I want to contribute. It’s my home, too.”

“I know, Anna, but what you are thinking about doing isn’t...”

Anna crossed her arms over her chest, her expression daring Katherine to say what was really on her mind. “It isn’t what?”

“Well, it’s unsavory, that’s what it is! And you know we don’t have enough money to spare for traveling and sleeping arrangements.”

“I still don’t understand why we can’t just borrow some money. I could go with you that way.”

“We can’t just borrow money, Anna, because then we have to pay it back. Maybe even with interest! That is reason we are having this discussion, is it not?”

Anna rolled her eyes. “Well, at least you won’t be traveling alone if I come with you. Kat, just borrow some money.”

“No. End of discussion. I will not borrow any money from any man, do you understand me? I refuse to make the situation Papa put

us in any worse.” She flinched when the words flew out of her mouth. Anna’s face paled. “I didn’t mean that.”

Anna held her hand up and shook her head. “I know you didn’t mean it that way. It’s been hard on the both of us. But I never said anything about borrowing only from men.”

“Who in the hell do you think makes all the money? Men. That’s who. I refuse to owe any man a favor, money, anything! We need to be able to make our own way, Anna. That way we won’t rely on anyone else but ourselves. Haven’t you learned that yet?”

“What exactly are you trying to say?”

Katherine blew out an exasperated breath. “I’m telling you that we should never rely on anyone else to help keep us afloat. We have to do it ourselves. That’s how we got into this situation in the first place. Our father, God rest his soul, spent almost all of our money and then died on us. We don’t have any extra assets or have any way to make the money that we need to in order to get ourselves out of all of this debt. We’re stuck in this mess, Anna, and I won’t have it anymore. We are going to rely on ourselves and ourselves alone because that’s the only way to guarantee that we’ll be safe.”

Anna stomped past her sister, her shoulder bumping Katherine’s as she went. “So I’m just supposed to stay here and wait, am I?”

“Yes, that is what you’re going to do. I’ve spoken to the Grahams down the road. They said you are more than welcome to stay with them as often as you need, and Nora said they would be more than happy for you to have supper with them every evening.”

Anna’s knees buckled and she sat heavily on the bed. She clasped her hands in her lap, and Katherine knew her sister refused to meet her eyes. “You better hurry back, Kat.”

## **Chapter One**

Gideon Marshall pounded on the rails with his sledgehammer as the sun pounded down on his back.

It was another dry, hot day just outside of Carson City, and when the sun finally set that evening, he would be free to go into town and play a poker game at the Red Door Saloon. He couldn't wait. Poker ran through his blood, and he knew he played better than anyone else in town.

"Gideon! Why are you slowing down? Pick up the pace!" Nathan Harcker yelled. Nathan owned the railroad company and oversaw the construction that began in San Francisco and now snaked its way to Nevada.

Gideon stared back and sneered, annoyed that someone interrupted his reverie.

Immediately, the other men on the line also paused. Their faces showed their anticipation of the tongue thrashing that was sure to come. The other workers always stiffened up when the tension between Nathan and Gideon intensified. Gideon knew they suspected Nathan singled him out because of the half-Indian blood coursing through his veins. Even in the progressive town they lived in, many still commonly looked down on Native Americans, particularly if they also happened to be half-breeds.

Gideon straightened up so he now stood nearly eye to eye with his boss, staring into Nathan's dark blue eyes. Although Gideon stood slightly shorter than Nathan, he could easily overtake Nathan's lean though muscular build.

“Why don’t you make me?” Gideon smirked and rolled his eyes. He knew this smart talk would get on Nathan’s nerves, but he couldn’t help but push his buttons. Nathan’s face reddened with anger.

“How dare you speak to me that way? Step into my office so I can teach you a lesson.” Nathan turned and walked toward his office, his fine leather boots crunching lightly on the gravel beneath him in a perfect staccato. Gideon followed, though his steps were heavier and slower, but longer paced. He didn’t mind making Nathan wait for him at the front door.

And indeed, Nathan did wait, staring at him with daggers and impatience.

“And as for the rest of you, get back to work!” Nathan yelled sternly to the other workers.

Gideon could see the other men practically holding their breath in anticipation of the beating he was sure to get.

As Gideon finally walked up, Nathan got out of the way just so he could kick him square in the ass on his way in before slamming the door closed.

\* \* \* \*

Nathan eyed Gideon in his dim office and waited a moment for his eyes to adjust from the brightness of the afternoon sun. Inside, the shades were drawn and the only light came streaming between the slats of the shutters. Nathan heard the distant sound of metal hitting metal as his workers went back to pounding the iron stakes necessary to secure the railroad tracks to the ground. Nathan reached for his insolent employee, but Gideon violently grabbed Nathan’s arm instead, and in one smooth motion pinned it to his back and pulled him into his chest.

“What are you going to do to me?” Nathan asked. Gideon breathed heavily against Nathan’s ear. He could feel the stubble on

Gideon's face scraping against him and the side of his neck. He inhaled Gideon's smell of dirt, iron, and sweat.

"Just what you've got comin' to you." Gideon grabbed the sides of Nathan's face and pulled him toward his own and hungrily kissed him. Nathan moaned in appreciation, intoxicated by Gideon's touch and rugged odor. Nathan kissed him back with equal zeal and sucked hard on Gideon's extended tongue. He reached his hand back to run his fingers through Gideon's long, wavy black hair that just barely hit below his shoulders. He waited all day for the perfect pretense to get Gideon in his office. He only needed to catch Gideon slacking off for just a moment and he would be able to get him in his office without raising the suspicions of his other employees.

Nathan and Gideon had been together almost since Nathan first laid eyes on Gideon two years before when he first started overseeing the leg of railway construction originating in California and moving east. It took weeks of them eyeing each other from afar with interest and curiosity before their suspicions of the other proved correct. Nathan called Gideon into his office under the same circumstances as those that played out today, except the first time it happened Nathan truly seethed with dissatisfaction at Gideon's work, catching him daydreaming about something. That first afternoon, after a bout of wild, ravenous sex, Nathan learned that it was him that Gideon was thinking about to the point of distraction.

Now, they made a habit of recreating their first "date" every month or so, though not so often that others would figure out what they were really up to. In the past, they both dated women and loved being with them, but nice ones proved few and far between in this town and in their line of work. Besides, something just felt right between them. Despite coming from completely different backgrounds, the two men understood each other perfectly, emotionally and physically, the latter being shown right at that very moment.

“Fuck, please don’t stop,” Nathan said between moans. He reached his hand back, scraping Gideon’s rippling muscles, his skin a dark, golden brown from years of hard labor. Gideon bucked into him. Nathan slipped his fingers into Gideon’s warm and inviting mouth while Gideon simultaneously bit and sucked. He could feel Gideon’s large cock swelling beneath the heavy fabric of his workman’s jeans.

Nathan’s cock reciprocated, begging to be grabbed by Gideon’s strong, calloused hands. Despite being the overseer of more than one hundred employees, Nathan loved the feeling of being overpowered and manhandled, and Gideon knew just what to do to get his lover off. After years of being in charge, Nathan relished in his relationship with Gideon and his ability to trust someone else enough to hand over all control.

Gideon’s plunging right hand invaded Nathan’s trousers. With his left hand, Gideon unbuckled Nathan’s belt and unbuttoned his pants and pulled them down. A stark chill ran down Nathan’s torso when Gideon backed away from him. Goosebumps covered his body as he imagined his lover eyeing him as Nathan stood there, vulnerable and half-naked, his ass begging for Gideon to return his masculine touch.

In answer to Nathan’s silent prayers, Gideon went back to him and grabbed him up, forcing Nathan onto his expansive wooden desk. Gideon bent him over, pressing Nathan’s face onto the desk’s surface. Nathan appreciated the coolness of his desk against his skin in contrast to the heated friction that Gideon created behind him.

Nathan heard the rustle of clothing and the clinking of metal buckles hitting the ground and then heard Gideon spit quickly into his hand. Nathan flinched at the sting of Gideon’s hand slapping the delicate skin of his lily-white ass and then the moist caress of Gideon’s finger brushing against his ass hole, rubbing it and lubricating it with Gideon’s spit.

One finger and two and then three entered Nathan’s waiting hole, slowly and carefully stretching him out. Nathan gasped from the

exquisite bloom of arousal building up inside him and began rocking his hips back and forth. He grabbed the corners of his desk for support until his knuckles turned white. Nathan moaned when Gideon grabbed his cock, bracing himself for the onslaught of Gideon's feral thrusts into his ass. The excruciatingly pleasurable feeling of Gideon stimulating him on both sides with his firm, knowing hands made Nathan tense up and cry out in hungry agony. He needed more.

"Gideon, please," Nathan nearly whispered, his throat growing drier and drier with each gasping breath. His eyes fluttered to the back of his head when his lover's tantalizing cock brushed the hairs on his thigh.

"Please what? What is it that you want, huh?" Gideon slowly pushed his fingers deeper, in and out, until he finally pulled them out completely. "Is this what you want?" Gideon brushed his hard cock against Nathan's ass, caressing his crack and then spreading his cheeks open. As the rounded head of Gideon's cock danced around Nathan's ass hole, Nathan grew more and more desperate.

"Yes, please, Gideon. I need more, must have more, please, fuck me and fuck me hard."

Nathan again heard Gideon spitting into his hand. His body vibrated with anticipation, knowing that Gideon rubbed his wet hand all over his cock, moistening it just enough to slide easily into Nathan's waiting hole, but leaving enough friction to combine his pleasure with just a touch of pain. Nathan braced himself for the luscious impact of Gideon's cock impaling him.

"Oh, dear God!" Nathan screamed as Gideon mercifully thrust himself deeper and deeper, completely filling his ass hole. Gideon continued stroking Nathan's cock with his rough hands. Nathan reached back and stuck his fingers in Gideon's mouth, and after being sufficiently kissed, sucked, and lubricated, he reached down and pushed them into Gideon's ass hole. Even after years of nearly constant companionship, the two never grew tired of each other's touches and the sound of each other's cries of sexual transcendence.

“Gideon, I don’t think I can wait much longer, I’m going to co—” Nathan said breathlessly.

“Not yet. Not until I say you can.” Gideon thrust even harder and faster, teasing his mate to hold in his impending climax.

“But, Gideon, please, I can’t.” Nathan squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for his man to give him the permission to do the one thing he needed more than the air he tried his damndest to continue breathing.

“Now. Come for me, come for me now!” Gideon commanded. Nathan let out a moan of relief and released his pearly seed into Gideon’s hands. As he came, Nathan plunged his fingers deeper into Gideon’s ass hole while his own clamped down on Gideon’s hard cock, milking it of his hot seed. Nathan’s body relaxed as the warm fluid flooded his insides. The corners of his lips turned up in a faint smile when Gideon’s body went nearly limp on top of him. Both of the men lay there for a moment, panting, immersed in each other’s sweat.

\* \* \* \*

Gideon carefully pulled himself out from between his lover’s ass and walked to the other side of Nathan’s desk to his large, leather chair, sat down and exhaled deeply. He watched Nathan grab a towel and place it in the porcelain wash basin filled with cool, clean water. Nathan quickly wiped himself off and then grabbed another towel and headed toward Gideon.

“How is this?” Nathan slowly wiped Gideon down, following the trail of the moist towel with soft kisses. Gideon’s eyes fluttered in relaxation.

“That feels great, baby.” The towel soothed his rough skin. Gideon grabbed Nathan’s wrist and maneuvered him onto his lap so Nathan could lean against his chest. Gideon caressed Nathan’s soft, skin and deeply inhaled his scent emanating from his body. Some men may feel threatened by having a partner who made more money

and wielded more power and, technically, to the outside world, Gideon was just one of Nathan's employees. But, in their personal relationship, it was Gideon who called the shots and wielded the control. He didn't feel threatened in the least.

And besides, he loved that Nathan's fortune afforded him to bathe with fancy, imported soaps redolent with the smell of bergamot and spices, and that his dark blond hair smelled of citrus and not machinery oil. Yes, Nathan was exactly his cup of tea, and he could drink him in all day and all night.

"Did you give any more thought on what we talked about last night?" Nathan asked as his graceful fingers raked through Gideon's mess of hair.

"You mean about me going to play poker tonight or about adding a woman? If it's the former, I already told you I'm planning on going, and if it's the latter, I think it's a great idea. But we have to keep in mind what we have is special and we need to be very careful about who we choose to join us." His intense love for Nathan surprised him even now. He once never thought himself capable of feeling this way about any person, let alone a man. Nathan changed all that, and Gideon never wanted to lose him or have anything come between them. While he also longed for a woman, he wanted to make sure they found someone who could add to their coupling to form a more perfect union.

Someone who would complete them.

"I know. And with the dearth of women around here, I don't think we'll ever find her." Nathan sighed heavily, making Gideon's heart ache at not yet being able to satisfy his man's longing. Gideon knew how important this was to Nathan, who loved to pamper and care for his loved ones. He knew Nathan thought the world of him, but Gideon's needs were fairly rudimentary. He didn't care for fancy food or clothing or sparkly, expensive objects. Nathan needed someone to dote upon and lavish with his wealth, earned from years of hard work and shrewd management. This was a role only a woman could

provide him. Only a woman could appreciate that which Nathan longed to offer.

“Don’t worry, baby. We’ll find her.” As Gideon reassured his lover, secretly he was unsure about the probability of him finding their perfect woman. But that would have to wait. The day grew late and the time came for him to get back outside. He dressed, kissed Nathan on the forehead, and went back to pounding the rails. He admitted to the other men that he received a beating, but he would never let on what kind.

## Chapter Two

Katherine stepped off the stagecoach that brought her to Carson City from where the train tracks stopped in Reno. She traveled for nearly three weeks and finally landed here in this dusty town, now known all over as the place for high stakes poker. Grabbing her bags, she looked around and surmised her surroundings. She adjusted her hat to block out the sun's late-afternoon rays.

*What now?* This was her first time to be alone, away from her sister, and so very far away from home.

Parched from the heat and travel, Katherine spied the nearest saloon and headed toward it. She walked up the creaky wooden steps, and before she could open the saloon's swinging doors, a slovenly man reeking of whiskey tumbled out onto the street.

"Get out and stay out, you good for nothin' drunk!" screamed a heavysset woman with a heaving bosom barely contained within her dark red corset, a striking contrast to her bright red, curly hair piled atop her head in a mess of frizzy curls. "And who the hell are you and why are you standing there with your mouth hangin' open?"

Katherine didn't know what to say to this woman who single-handedly tossed a grown man out onto the dirt road as if he were nothing but a rag doll. "I'm...um...my na—" she blubbered.

"Well, get it out, girl. I don't have all day. My name is Bessie Montgomery, and this here is the Red Door Saloon." She pointed to the saloon's swinging red doors. "Get it?"

"I'm Katherine...Katherine McCoy." Katherine, proud that she was able to compose a coherent statement to this imposing woman,

just stood there with her hands tightly clenching her suitcase and forced a quivering smile.

“Well, pleased to meet your acquaintance. Now are you in or you out, 'cause I've got a saloon to run and I can't be standing out here lollygagging all damn day!” She stepped aside and opened the door to give Katherine space to enter.

“Um, I guess in.” As Katherine stepped in, she straightened up and tried not to look too much like a fish out of water.

“This here is all mine.” Bessie gestured her arms expansively. “You see all those men gathered around the tables? They're playing poker and they come from all over to play cards in my saloon. And if they get too crazy, well big Bessie here has no qualms throwing their good-for-nothin' asses out of here.” Bessie threw her head back and let out a loud, cackling laugh. “And there's the bar where my barkeep Pete hands out the drinks, and over there sittin' at the piano is Johnny Pretty Fingers.” Hearing his name, Johnny looked over and smiled at Katherine with a wiggle of his long, dainty fingers. “Don't mind Johnny,” Bessie said. “He's what you'd call a queer, and we don't have a problem with his kind here at the Red Door. I say, what you do with your spare time is of no business of mine.”

Bessie led Katherine to the bar and Pete poured her a glass of water. Katherine gladly took it, drinking it down in one long swallow. “Thanks, I needed that.”

Bessie looked down at Katherine's bags. “So, you travelin', honey? You got a place to stay?”

Katherine fiddled with the empty glass in her hands and shook her head no. “I'm new in town and—”

“Well, hon', you're in luck. Now that I've thrown out that drunk scoundrel, Buddy,” Bessie gestured toward the saloon doors, “you can have his room. I'll take you up there. It's just up these stairs. And then you can freshen up and come and go as you please. Rent is usually ten dollars a week, but for you, I'll make it five. I'm sure you can make

that.” Bessie squeezed Katherine’s shoulder and smiled, grabbed her bag, and led her up to her new, temporary home.

\* \* \* \*

Gideon looked at his cards and then at the two other men playing with him. He already figured out all of their tells. When Jessie held a good hand, his hands trembled ever so slightly. If he looked really carefully, Virgil’s eyes always gave him away. With a good hand, his eyes got ever so slightly bigger, and when his cards were bad he would squint ever so slightly, as if he couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

Gideon looked up from his hand and his gaze went directly to a woman he’d never seen before descending the saloon’s staircase from its upstairs rooms. What felt like minutes later, Gideon realized he stopped breathing and his mouth hung open. She was pretty and somehow managed to give off both strength and vulnerability at the same time. The tendrils of her dark brown hair peeked out from beneath her hat, and he inexplicably found himself wanting to throw it aside so he could get to the mane of hair underneath and run his fingers through it. Her lips were the color of raspberries. He wondered if they tasted as sweet and juicy as they looked. If anything, this strange woman fascinated him, and he couldn’t wait to learn more about her. His heart nearly skipped a beat when he realized she walked in his direction.

“Is this seat taken?” Her voice dripped with sweetness, and she batted her eyelashes while pointing at the table’s empty chair directly across from Gideon.

“Well, little lady, you want to sit beside ole’ Jessie and rub some of your luck off on me?” Jessie sneered and looked her up and down, rubbing on his thighs.

“Actually, I wanted to play,” she replied in a cool tone.

Virgil whistled and shook his head and laughed. “Oh, really. You, a woman, want to play poker? Lady, this isn’t gin rummy, I hope you know. This is a man’s game, and you’d be well advised to stay out of it.”

“Oh, Virgil, why don’t you let the woman play? What harm could it do?” Gideon said in her defense. Her interest in the game intrigued him and even with his years of being able to peg people at a glance, he had a hard time pinning her down. Was she just a silly, but incredibly attractive, woman wanting to play a man’s game, or was she really any good? He had to find out.

“Yeah, the worse that could happen is we take all her money and she cries.” Jessie laughed.

She rolled her eyes. “Don’t worry. I may not be the best player around, but I can hold my own and I certainly won’t shed any tears,” she replied haughtily. Gideon noticed a flash of ferocity in her eyes, and it seemed to shoot straight down to his groin.

“Well then, let’s get started. By the way, my name’s Gideon.” He reached out his hand only to have her look at it with disdain. Finding out more about this woman was going to be interesting. He smiled in the face of her revulsion toward him.

“I’m Katherine.” She pulled a short stack of chips that had been wedged between her breasts from the top of her corset. Gideon felt another thump in his crotch as he thought about what it would be like to be caught between her breasts as that stack of chips had. He didn’t know what about her turned him on so much, but he eagerly waited to find out.

But first, he had a game to win.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine sat down and placed her chips on the table. She noticed Gideon’s eyes flash when she pulled the chips out from within her brassiere and instantly felt embarrassed for her accidental brazenness.

Well, she told herself, maybe it would take his mind off the game long enough for her to take all his money.

Even though she was nervous about joining a poker game with all these burly, drunken men, she tried to focus on the task at hand and remember what her father taught her about this game that once provided him both fame and fortune.

When she first came down from her room, her eyes scanned every table looking for one with the men who seemed the least menacing. And then she saw him. A man with onyx hair and a body that was monolithic. Just looking at him from that distance made her face flush. Oh, how she wanted to see him more closely. She knew better than to play poker with a man who already proved to be incredibly distracting, but her curiosity and latent lust got the best of her. And so, she chose his table for her inaugural poker game. And now, here she was, sitting across from a stranger who made her pulse quicken by his mere existence and whose name was Gideon.

So far, every man she saw in this town wasn't worth a second glance, which made her job of focusing on winning the money to save her house a lot easier. Even though she wanted love in her life, this was not the time and nothing would distract her from her goal.

But this one, Gideon, seemed entirely different, though she couldn't pinpoint why and it wasn't just because he had all his teeth, unlike most of the other men in Carson City. Maybe it was the way his shirt clung to his broad chest or the way he smiled. Or maybe it was the way he talked to her, as an equal and not some "little lady" without a brain. She noticed herself getting distracted, her heart beating a little too hard every time Gideon looked up from his cards to stare into her eyes with his smoldering hazel ones—dark golden brown with flecks of green and blue.

As her pulse sped up, she noticed a pulsing sensation in her core and could feel the growing wetness developing in her knickers. What was with her? She reminded herself again and again why she sat there at that table and what the stakes were. She needed to win that money,

and no man, no matter how handsome and seductive, could deter her. No, she had a job to do.

She tried to figure him out, but it proved to be difficult. He gave almost nothing away, unlike the other two buffoons. Gideon would be a formidable opponent just by the way he held his cards. Katherine could tell he was, if not a good player, then a confident one. Her father always taught her to pay attention to her opponents' hands and eyes, for they always gave something away, something that she could take and use against them in the game. Gideon's hands were strong and steady, and his eyes always stared straight ahead, never shifty. He was also very economical and consistent with his movements, never looking at his cards longer than he needed to, no matter how good or bad they were. Even though her father's tricks helped her figure out every hand that Virgil and Jessie had, they weren't working on Gideon. She just had no way of knowing what kind of cards he held.

But, at least she could control her tells, of which she possessed none. From an early age, her father drilled into her the importance of a "poker face." "Never give anything away," he would say to her. "Faces can be read like an open book. Never let anyone know what you're *really* thinking."

She knew Gideon looked for them and she knew just what to do to throw him off her track.

\* \* \* \*

Gideon continued to up the ante, but he knew for sure he figured out her tell. Katherine's lips gave her away. When she held a strong hand of cards, her lips looked full and relaxed, but when her cards were weak, she pouted. It was a barely perceptible change, but Gideon could see it, especially because he spent most of the game staring at her lips, imaging what he would do with them. And there they were, a little pouty. She must be bluffing.

“I’m all in.” Katherine pushed all her chips to the center of the table. The eyes of the other men at the table widened, and they instantly folded. Both Gideon and Katherine already won almost all of Virgil and Jessie’s money, and so far, to his surprise, she fared slightly better than he. Gideon was very competitive and he could not let her win and go off with all the money. No way. Hell, he couldn’t even stand the idea of someone leaving the table with more money than him. It rarely happened and when it did, it annoyed him to no end.

*Ah hell.*

He didn’t have enough money to match her bet, but the thought of folding made him sick to his stomach. That would be tantamount to giving up.

*Oh, what the hell am I worried about? The woman is obviously bluffing.*

“I’m in, too, though I’ll have to cover the rest of the pot with an IOU—but don’t worry, they know I’m good for it.” Gideon gestured in no specific direction. He could tell Katherine was slightly suspicious, as she paused for a moment to consider his proposition and then furrowed her brow.

“Hmm...I guess they call it gambling for a reason. Fine, I’ll accept the IOU if you’re sure you’re good for it.”

“Sure I’m sure. Although you may think I look like a scoundrel, trust me when I say that I am a man of my word.”

“All right, call.” Katherine laid her cards down. Nine of clubs, six of clubs, six of diamonds, six of spades, and six of hearts. Four of a kind. Katherine beamed and started collecting her winnings. Gideon’s mouth dropped open, and he could feel all the color draining from his face.

Gideon held a full house, which he had been sure was the winning hand, but it was not enough. For the first time ever, he had been bested by a woman in a game he considered an integral part of his

life. “Well, I’ll be,” he muttered under his breath. “She wasn’t bluffing after all.”

“You thought I was bluffing? Why? Because of this?” She put her raspberry lips in an innocent pout. “Anyway, I’m sure it was beginner’s luck.”

Gideon’s brow furrowed. *That girl played me.* He let out a laugh.

“Beginner? Yeah, right. Lady, you and I and this whole table know that you ain’t no beginner.” Gideon shook his head and let out a low whistle. “But a bet’s a bet and a deal’s a deal and, yes, I owe you the rest of your money.”

“That’s right and not a penny less, you hear? I will collect every last cent you owe me or you’ll be sorry.”

“Is that a threat?” Gideon licked his lips. “Or a promise?”

“Very funny. No, it’s not necessarily either, but you don’t want to cross me.”

“Aren’t you a feisty one, sugar. I think you’re the one. I think Nathan’s gonna love you.” The last two sentences slipped out of his mouth without him thinking about how it would sound to her, and he instantly wished he had been able to keep his mouth shut.

“What did you say? Who’s Nathan?” She looked at him quizzically.

“Nothing, forget I said anything. Anyway, where were we? Ah, you were threatening my life.” Gideon grinned.

“I said I wasn’t really threatening you, but believe me, I could be your worst nightmare.” Now Gideon knew she was bluffing, for this little spitfire could be nothing but a sweet dream come true.

Gideon held his hands up as if to surrender. “Okay, sure, sure. No need to get my dreams involved. Why don’t you meet me at this address where I work, and you’ll get paid what’s due.” He scribbled on a scrap of paper and handed it to her, their fingers barely caressing, but it still sent shivers down his spine. He looked up and thought he could see a slight change in her demeanor. Maybe she felt it, too.

“I think I’ve had enough excitement for one evening. Please excuse me.” Katherine got up, gathered her things, and headed back to her room. Gideon’s eyes trailed her as she walked away and then up the stairs. He watched as her ass shifted underneath her dress with each step she took, and he imagined what it would be like to rake his hands underneath that dress, up her sweet thighs, and then firmly on her sweet, supple ass. It made his mouth water and his dick jump just thinking about it.

As soon as she disappeared from his view, Gideon ran out the saloon doors to find Nathan. He knew that this woman could be the one he and Nathan searched for, and tomorrow Nathan could decide for himself.

## Chapter Three

Katherine looked at herself in the mirror as the morning sun began to illuminate her sparse room. She pondered the events of the night before while tucking a wavy piece of hair behind her ear and ran her fingers over her chignon. She always liked the dark, rich color of her hair even though she found its wavy texture frustrating. When it rained, her hair formed a huge puff around her head, and little pieces of it stuck out around her face making her look like a human dandelion.

She ran her fingertips over her cheekbone and took a small amount of pride in its smoothness. Not many women she knew had skin like she and her sister did.

A pang of loneliness shot through her when she thought of Anna. Katherine wondered how her younger sister fared without her to watch over her.

*Perhaps I should have taken Anna with me in the first place.*

Katherine quickly shook off the thought. Anna would cause quite a stir with the men downstairs, and not one that would incite love sonnets. Katherine suspected if those wild men set their eyes on her sister, they would stop at nothing to have her.

Katherine stepped away from the mirror before she found more faults with herself and prepared for her meeting with Gideon. The idea of seeing him again made her nervous.

Even though she was dead tired when she went to bed last night, she had trouble falling asleep. She tossed and turned, feeling anxious, even though she knew she should concentrate on the game and winning the money that would not only save her childhood home but

also her parents' legacy, and perhaps even the sanctity of her sister's body.

But all she could think about was him. Gideon. She couldn't help but imagine the things she wanted to do to him and his hard, strong body. How it would feel to be held in his hands the way he held his cards, steady and with confidence. She waffled between feeling an excited but guilt-ridden lust and self-chastisement for her naughty thoughts and lack of focus.

No, Gideon could easily endanger her plans and she swore that after she picked up her winnings, she would never see or think about him again. She needed to accomplish these goals in the next few weeks before the creditors swoop in like vultures and take away the only home she ever knew.

She went downstairs and immediately Bessie called to her in her big, brassy voice. "Well, look who's up, Red Door's newest poker extraordinaire!"

Katherine blushed, feeling sheepish. "No, I'm not that good. Maybe I just got lucky."

"Oh, nonsense, girl. You're good, and I knew it. I have a way with these things. And besides, you beat Gideon, one of the best if not *the* best player in this town. That in itself is no small feat. No, luck didn't have much to do with it."

"Well, maybe he was having an off night or his mind was somewhere else."

"Oh, his mind was somewhere else all right, mostly all over your body and pretty little face. The moment you walked down the stairs, I saw Gideon look at you like he just couldn't take his peepers off you. I swear he looked like a thirsty man watching a tall drink of water."

Katherine blushed even deeper as her heart pounded at the thought of Gideon looking at her and again began piquing the curiosity she tried so hard to suppress. "Oh?" She tried to sound nonchalant.

"And you know what? I think I saw you looking at him, too. Like I said, I have a way with these things. Mmmhmm, something is in the

air and it ain't the smell of horse shit comin' off of Pete's boots. Pete, go take those stinkin' boots outside!" She yelled as he walked into the saloon carrying a barrel of whiskey.

"Sorry, ma'am, but it ain't my fault all these damn cowboys roll into this town and let their horses shit right in front of the saloon where everybody walks." Pete set the crate down and made his way back outside, leaving a trail of manure.

"Anyway, like I was sayin', Kat," Bessie turned back to Katherine, "I think you're sweet on him, and it's plain as day that he's sweet on you, too."

Katherine didn't know what to say and then remembered the piece of paper Gideon gave her. "Do you know where this is and how I can get there?" She handed Bessie the scrap of paper with the scrawled address. Katherine held her breath hoping she successfully changed the subject, at least for the moment. "Gideon owes me the rest of my winnings and he told me to go here to get it at his work."

"That's funny..." Bessie held a finger to her chin and looked up as if in thought. "This is Nathan Harcker's home address. I know that Gideon works for him at the railroad, but there ain't no railroad construction going on at Mr. Harcker's place. Very interesting..." Her voice trailed off and then a smirk formed on her face. Katherine could see the gears turning in Bessie's head as if she put together the pieces of a very entertaining puzzle. "Well, it's just up the road. Pete can take you if you can stand the smell."

\* \* \* \*

"You know, you looking out the window every time you hear something rustle out there isn't gonna make her get here any faster," Gideon said to Nathan, who usually started his morning calmly reading a newspaper, but not today. Gideon watched as Nathan reclined on his delicately brocaded chaise lounge trying to concentrate on his paper, only to sit up at every sound he heard outside and then

eagerly scamper over to peek out the window. Seeing nothing, Nathan would slump his shoulders and return to his seat to start the waiting process all over.

“I know, but I’m just so excited to finally meet her, after everything you told me about her last night.”

Gideon was both touched and anxious because of how excited Nathan was to meet Katherine. Touched because seeing Nathan happy always made him happy, but anxious because of how upsetting it would be if Nathan didn’t feel about her how Gideon hoped he would and how he actually thought of her himself. Gideon thought she would be perfect for the two of them, but he would have to wait until they actually met to accurately gauge their reaction. “I know, but I just don’t want you to get your hopes up. She doesn’t know she’s coming here for anything except for the money I owe her. There’s no telling what her reaction will be.” Gideon walked over to Nathan and planted a reassuring kiss on his lips. Even that simple kiss made his cock shift in expectation. If he hadn’t known company was coming, he would have forced himself on his lover right there. Nathan smiled at him.

“Don’t worry, Gideon, I know. I may be acting like an overly excited child, but I’m not oblivious to the reality of the situation. But there’s nothing wrong with optimism, right?”

“Yeah, sure, optimism is great.” Gideon couldn’t deny that he, too, felt incredibly nervous and excited for what the future might hold. Gideon was surprised by how intensely he felt about this woman whom he just met.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of hoofs pounding the gravel outside. This time both Nathan and Gideon rushed to the window. She was finally here.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine thanked Pete for the ride and headed toward the house while he waited outside. She began walking up the dirt path leading to the expansive house when the door opened and Gideon appeared. Katherine hadn't realized back in the dimness of the Red Door quite how chiseled his features were. And his body. Sitting at the poker table only exposed Gideon's upper body. That already tempted Katherine enough, but now that she saw his strong legs, firm ass, and the conspicuous mound in his crotch, she felt a sudden heat all over her body that intensified in her center.

"Don't worry, Pete. I'll take her back. You just go on back to the Red Door," Gideon said, waving Pete away.

"Sure, Gideon. I'll see you later, Kat." Pete turned the stagecoach around with a tip of his hat. "And don't worry about Gideon," he said as he noticed the flash of unease appearing on her face. "He don't bite. He's one of the few honest fellas around this place." And with that, he waved goodbye and headed back to town.

"Hello, Kat, so good to see you again. Please come in, sugar." Gideon removed his hat and took a deep, theatrical bow. Katherine grazed her side against him as she walked through the door, causing nerves along her arm to perk up from the tactile stimulation. As she brushed by, she inhaled Gideon's scent, a virile combination of machinery, musk, and cedar wood, which made her pussy clench in hopeful anticipation.

No, just focus and get the money and then get the hell out of here, she thought to herself, fighting against the strength of her physical urges.

"I'm just here for the money you owe me and then I'll be expecting a ride straight back to the saloon," Katherine said firmly.

"What, no 'hello, how are ya', pleasant small talk?" Gideon shrugged his broad shoulders with a devilish smirk on his face.

She looked around her at the magnificent house, turning as she absorbed the surprising hominess of it. "If I hadn't played you myself last night, I'd think you made money hand over fist with your poker

winnings.” She tried to sound caustic, even though she could tell her voice began to quiver as Gideon eyed her. “‘Cause there’s no way you got this working on the railroad.”

“Actually, the railroad business can be quite lucrative,” a voice said behind her.

Katherine spun around, and her eyes landed on the most beautiful man she had ever seen. “Oh, I didn’t see you there...umm...” The sight of him shot a hot bolt straight to her clit. For a moment, she lost her breath.

The man extended his hand and gently held Katherine’s before kissing the back of it. He eyed her with interest, and she hoped he didn’t notice his effect on her.

“Pleased to meet you. I’m Nathan Harcker and this is my home. Welcome.” He gestured around him. He then walked over to Gideon and placed his arm around his waist. “Gideon’s told me a lot about you, Katherine.” Katherine paused mentally as she surmised what she saw before her. Two handsome men, one ruggedly handsome and the other breathtakingly beautiful, were intimately holding each other. This closeness between men wasn’t something she had ever seen before, and her reaction went from stunned to intrigued.

“Please, let me take your coat and get you something to drink. Is tea okay?” Nathan pulled away from Gideon and took Katherine’s coat, draping it on the back of a chair. He then sat down on a two-person settee before a low table. He grabbed the intricately engraved silver teapot and poured Katherine a steaming cup. “It’s Earl Grey, my favorite, brought over by one of my Chinese workers.” Nathan patted the seat beside him and held the cup out to her.

Not knowing what else to do, Katherine sat down beside him and took the cup of hot tea, trying hard to keep her hand from trembling, though a few clinks of porcelain hitting porcelain could not be prevented, making her self-consciousness grow. Her body thrilled at the soft caress of his velvet coat brushing against her skin. She had never met a man so impeccably dressed and with such refined

manners who managed to be gentle yet masculinely warm. Beneath his jacket, he wore a smart vest and bow tie, the gold chain of a pocket watch dangling elegantly from his vest pocket. She suddenly realized she had never been so close to a man, besides her father, since they lived so blissfully isolated in the Wyoming Territory.

“So, you manage the railroad?” She tried desperately to make small talk and maintain her composure. She sat so close to him on the small sofa, it was nearly impossible to look him in the eyes, but when she did manage a glimpse she noticed they were a sparkling dark blue. He looked at her so intensely it made her uncomfortable and suddenly aware of her body and herself. Why was he looking at her this way, and what could he possibly want with a plain girl from a tiny town miles away? She shifted and brought the tea to her face, inhaling its heady perfume and hoping the steam would calm her nerves.

“Yes. In fact, I manage and own the railroad. We’ll be finished with this leg of construction any day now, which is to stop in Carson City. Then I start the next leg, which will connect it from here to the Wyoming Territory and then the line will be complete.”

“Wow, seems like a lot of work.” Katherine grew more and more uncomfortable as she sat there. She squeezed her thighs tightly together as if to squelch the blossoming ache and dampen the growing wetness forming between them.

“It is,” Gideon said as he walked over to sit in a chair across from the love seat, “if you’re the one building it.” As he sat, the heaviness of his muscled body sank into the chair, making it groan. Suddenly, the image of him placing all his weight on Katherine’s body raced through her mind. Blushing, she quickly averted her eyes and swallowed, hoping he hadn’t noticed.

\* \* \* \*

Gideon loved how flustered Katherine got and how clearly uncomfortable it made her. He could tell by the way she quickly

averted her eyes from him that this was one of her flustered moments and that she probably prayed no one noticed. Well, those prayers weren't going to be answered today. Gideon did notice, and he intended to take advantage of every opportunity he had to break that hard, stony facade and get Katherine to at least admit her body, if not yet her heart, wanted his.

"Are you blushing, Kat?" Gideon asked slyly.

Katherine's face bloomed again. Inside, Gideon laughed at this little spitfire who had the most impressive ability to mask her emotions and thoughts while playing poker, but whose face was an absolute open book outside the game. Gideon looked at Nathan, who was obviously just as amused by Katherine's display. Watching them sit side by side, Gideon felt his pulse quicken and his cock stirring underneath his pants. Now it was his turn to hope Katherine didn't notice.

*Well, on second thought, let her notice. The girl probably likes it.*

"No, of course I'm not blushing. Don't be ridiculous," Katherine said forcefully, turning her face away from him. She shifted and set her cup down and then carefully folded her hands in her lap. "It's been very nice meeting you all, and I appreciate your hospitality, but really, I must be going." She got up and headed toward the door.

Gideon and Nathan exchanged a quick glance, and Gideon could see a hint of panic in Nathan's eyes. Gideon quickly stood and cleared his throat. "But what about the winnings I owe you? That is the reason you came after all, right?" Gideon couldn't help but inject as much lasciviousness into his everyday statements with Katherine as possible.

"Yes. The money. Of course that's what I came for." Katherine straightened. "And don't think for one moment I didn't catch your tone, Gideon, and how dare you suggest otherwise. I'm a goddamn lady and I want nothing to do with you. Either of you!"

Gideon raised his hands in an “I surrender” pose, but he could tell he got to her. Nathan quickly stood and reached for Katherine’s elbow.

“Please, Katherine. Gideon didn’t mean it that way.” Nathan gave her his most endearing look and Gideon a flash of anger.

\* \* \* \*

“Well, then how did he mean it?” Katherine asked, pausing at Nathan’s touch.

He had no more than three fingers on her elbow and she craved to feel more. More fingers on more parts of her body. She couldn’t understand how she felt this way, and she fought hard to tamp those feelings down knowing that they could only jeopardize her focus and keep her from getting back to her sister in time. She looked up into Nathan’s deep blue eyes and thought she might drown in them. With Gideon’s imposing and powerful body looming on her other side, exuding his intoxicatingly masculine odor, Katherine’s head began to spin. She felt claustrophobic and pinned in, but what she wanted most of all was for the men to close the space between them until she was absolutely smothered.

“Hey, sugar. I didn’t mean no harm. You all right? You’re lookin’ a little pale.” Gideon moved toward her and tried to steady her by gripping her other arm. As he hovered over her, Katherine felt overwhelmed with his scent invading her nostrils, traveling through the length of her body to her aching darkness.

“I’m fine. It just seems a little warm in here, that’s all.” Barely touched by the men, she felt her temperature rise as heat seemed to radiate from her throbbing pussy straight through to her limbs. Katherine tugged at her collar and felt a small trickle of perspiration roll between her breasts, which only caused her nipples to perk up even more. She was suddenly very aware of her breasts and how uncomfortably tight and rough her clothing felt against her body. She

wanted nothing more than to rip her bodice open, allowing every inch of her skin to be exposed to not only the coolness of the air, but the heated stares of these two men.

Katherine, feeling the tension in her body near its breaking point, began to panic and was awash in guilt and shame. How could she feel so intensely about these two men whom she just barely met? And these *two* men. Being so aroused by any man, no less two, made her feel like a cheap, sinful, wayward harlot. No, she had to get out of there and escape this ever-increasing feeling of wanton, physical need.

“I best be leaving now. Really, I...I...must...” Katherine prattled, knocking over her teacup with her petticoats and leaving a pool of tepid tea in her haste. “Oh, goodness. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean...” Katherine made a motion to pick up the cup but then stopped and continued her mad dash to the front door.

“But wait, please don’t leave. Don’t worry about the teacup, just please don’t leave quite yet,” Nathan almost pleaded. “And your money. Gideon still has to give you the money he owes you.”

As Katherine began to open the front door, she felt a massive presence behind her that felt as if it were closing in on her, and then the door slammed shut. She turned and felt Gideon’s hot breath on her ear as he leaned into her. Her cheek brushed against rough stubble that ignited every nerve it touched. Terrified, Katherine’s breathing grew shallower as she tried to quiet the pounding of her racing heart.

“Yes, Kat, don’t leave just yet. I still owe you a whole wad.” Gideon reached for her hand and placed it squarely on the firm mound growing exponentially in his pants. He held her fingers there and gave them a squeeze. Katherine could make out the feeling of the head of his swelling cock, its long form, and his sizable sac. She moaned and arched her back. She could barely hear a word as the blood in her body rushed through her and forced her heart to pump at a maddening speed.

“No, I must...I can’t...” Katherine said in a hoarse, dry whisper as Gideon turned her around and pressed his lips against hers, parting them to push in his moist, soothing tongue. It was like a cool, cleansing tidal wave crashing into the desert of her mouth.

Without wanting to, she reached up and grabbed his head between her hands and pushed his face even deeper into hers. She sucked on his tongue, hard, as if she meant to devour it. She felt Gideon’s hand squeeze her buttocks, kneading them, sending shivers throughout her heaving body. He then pulled her up, forcing her crotch to collide into his own. Katherine dug in, as if trying to scratch an itch deep within the recesses of her soul that could only be reached by his throbbing cock. Her hips began to rock uncontrollably as if they had a mind of their own. Utterly lost in her lust, at that moment she couldn’t even remember her name, much less her morals and conservative upbringing.

Katherine then felt a coolness against her neck as her hair was brushed to the side and then a moist, pillowy warmth. Someone kissed her, then nibbled at her neck and shoulders. She rolled her head back, moaning at the new sensation she experienced. Seeing Nathan out of the corner of her eye sent her reeling. A wave of erotic, aching lust pounded into her clit, causing a gushing wave of wetness to drench her panties.

“Oh, Katherine, you’re so beautiful, so very beautiful.” Nathan’s voice sounded muffled by her flesh against his lips. “I could kiss your sweet skin forever.”

She couldn’t believe what was happening, but her intense desire for these two men made her powerless to stop them and her body’s crazed reactions to their touches. Deep down, her feelings of guilt and confusion were clouded by a thick haze of sexual longing. Gideon devoured her neck with hungry bites and bruising kisses. She reached her hand back and tangled them in Nathan’s silky, soft, brown hair. Nathan pulled his head back and enclosed her fingers within his

mouth, gently biting them with his teeth. Her body ached when Nathan suddenly lifted his lips from her fingers.

“Sugar, I’m gonna lay you down and we can really get down to business,” Gideon said gruffly.

She felt her body moving and then being lowered onto a cushiony and then firm surface. Gideon had laid her on Nathan’s chaise, which he just so happened to be lying on at the time. Katherine lay against his lean body, her head in the crook of his neck. Gideon crouched on top of her and began unbuttoning her bodice, kissing her body as he went. She felt Nathan’s long arms reach around her, one gripping her thigh while the other gently cupping one of her breasts. Gideon’s rough, calloused hand kneaded the other. He bent down and pulled her nipple into his mouth, bathing it with his tongue.

“Ohh, Gideon.” Katherine moaned as she arched her back, pressing her buttocks into Nathan’s crotch. She felt her nipples grow tauter, becoming two hard nubs engulfed in never-before awakened nerve endings.

“Kat, sweet mercy, your breasts, your nipples are amazing. Amazing,” Gideon murmured.

No one besides herself had ever touched her breasts before, and the sensation only made her hunger for exploratory grasps to venture toward her pussy. She tugged on Gideon’s shirt and reached underneath, feeling the virile thickness of his body pulsing with hard, feral masculinity, his crotch digging into her own. A light mist of sweat formed on his skin beneath her touch. Her hands went farther and soon she gripped a firm buttock in each hand. Behind her, Nathan sank his teeth into the sensitive flesh of her shoulder. She squealed with delight and could barely catch her breath. Dear God, these men were incredible. She never wanted this feeling to end.

“Oh, Gideon, she’s perfect,” Nathan whispered. “Katherine, my dear, you are perfect.”

Perfect? She couldn’t believe her ears. Nobody ever said that about her, nor had she ever felt that way, until that moment. Every

touch, every warm breath, every sweet kiss epitomized perfection. She couldn't take much more of this all-consuming need. She had to have them touch her and satisfy the gnawing yearning in her weeping pussy. To have them reach down and feel the effect their touches already had on her. Katherine grabbed their hands, forcing them lower on her body. She heard moans escape from their lips, and they looked up slowly. She watched as Gideon leaned in closer as he pulled Nathan's head toward his own and planted a voracious kiss on his mouth. Confusion turned to shock as she watched them inhale each other.

Even though she knew men sometimes loved other men, never before did she even fathom the notion of two men kissing, let alone passionately invading each other with their tongues. Katherine didn't know what to think. All of this was so new to her, and everything up until that point felt so wrong but oh, so right. But now, she didn't know what to think or what to feel, and panic once again set in.

"What is this? What are you two..." Katherine's voice trailed off as she sat up with a lurch and clumsily grabbed her bodice closed to cover her exposed breasts. She hastily pulled herself away, pushing Gideon to the ground, cloaked herself with her coat, and ran out the front door. As she turned to slam it behind her, she looked back and saw Gideon and Nathan still seated, mouths agape in stunned disbelief. Tears of confusion and frustration streamed down her face as she ran into the darkness and away from a pleasure she could not yet begin to comprehend.

That night, as Katherine lay in bed, her mind couldn't help but return to the events of that evening. As much as she failed to understand it, she couldn't deny the way it all made her feel deep down into her bones. Her body clouded in a mix of tension and relaxation, pleasure and pain. Katherine felt alive like never before. She couldn't deny the pool of wetness in her panties as she ran out of the house just hours before. As she closed her eyes and tried to fall

asleep, her mind was consumed with one image that even then kept her clit throbbing.

A magnificent vision of two men kissing.

## Chapter Four

Nathan walked through the saloon's red doors looking for Katherine. His reasons were twofold, though one was clearly more important than the other. In his pocket, he held the winnings Gideon owed her, but in his heart weighed the desire to set things right and convince her that their intentions were honorable. That morning he awoke beside Gideon after a night of rehashing what went wrong with their foolhardy attempt to woo Katherine. Clearly, he and Gideon underestimated her temper, and it was downright foolish of Gideon to kiss Nathan in front of her without any explanation. Gideon could be so thick-headed and rash at times, always acting before thinking. But his spontaneity was one of the qualities that drew Nathan to Gideon. Nathan's life had always been so strict and planned out. Every choice Nathan made had always been deliberated ad nauseum, and Gideon freed him from that. Gideon allowed him to experience a life worth living, a life with passion and surprises. But still, Gideon did get them into trouble now and then, and this was just one of those unfortunate times. Nathan convinced Gideon that it would be best for him to try and speak to Katherine on his own, to charm her with the gentleness and panache that only Nathan possessed.

"Hi, Bessie. How are you doing these days?"

"Just fine, Mr. Harcker. And what brings you to my saloon today? You don't normally come 'round here." Bessie leaned against the bar, sipping a beverage that looked brown and stiff. That Bessie could hold her liquor with the best of them.

"Well, you see, I came here to see..." Nathan found himself uncharacteristically flustered.

“You’re here to see Kat, aren’t cha?”

Nathan smiled sheepishly, fiddling with his hat in his hands as if he were twelve years old again. “Yes, ma’am, I am. Have you seen her?”

“Of course I have. This is my saloon, ain’t it? Don’t you think I know what goes on here?”

“Yes, of course, Bessie. I’m just a bit um...”

“Nervous? Maybe you’re a bit parched, too. It’s awful dry out there. Hey, Petey, why don’t you give Mr. Harcker here a glass of liquid courage.”

Nathan took the glass of what looked like the same drink as Bessie’s and shot it back. It burned on its way down and hit the pit of his stomach like a ball of flames that slowly found its way to the tips of his fingers and toes, loosening up his entire body.

“Thanks, I needed that.” He managed a stronger, though still meager, smile. Though the drink helped, it surprised him that a bit of his nerves still remained.

“So, Mr. Harcker, now that I’ve got you loosened up, why don’t you tell me what you’re doing here?”

Nathan’s eyes widened in shock at Bessie’s bluntness. “Umm...I...uh...I don’t see how that’s any of your business, with all due respect, ma’am.” Nathan tipped his hat in small a gesture of supplication. It took balls to say “no” to a woman like Bessie Montgomery.

“Well, Mr. Harcker, with all due respect, Miss Kat is staying in one of my rooms. She’s a young, pretty girl who doesn’t know a soul in this town. Someone’s got to keep an eye on her, and who better than Big Bessie. I just want to make sure she don’t get hurt.” Bessie leaned toward Nathan until they were eye to eye and gave him the coldest, most chilling stare Nathan had ever been subjected to. “And if she does, I will *make* it my business to see that the son of a bitch who hurts her will never pee standing up again.” She continued to eye

Nathan, as if to punctuate her point. “I’m sure we have an understanding, Mr. Harcker.”

Nathan once again stood with his mouth hanging open, not knowing what to say. An awkward silence weighed heavily in the air. Nathan found his mind scrambling for a response to give the large woman staring daggers at him.

“Yes, ma’am, I catch your drift, and I assure you Gideon and I have nothing but honorable intentions.”

Bessie’s left eyebrow suddenly shot straight up into the air. *Crap!* She rattled him and he said too much. Way too much. Nathan suddenly felt a tight knot forming in his stomach.

“Gideon and you?” Bessie suddenly smiled from ear to ear. Nathan could see a distinct twinkle in her eye. “I had a feeling something funny might be going on between you two.”

Nathan must have looked completely mortified because Bessie’s face softened and she put her hand on his arm. “Oh, Mr. Harcker, don’t you fret about that,” she said in a low voice. “Whatever you and Gideon do in your own time is of no concern of mine, and I’m certainly not one to go blabbing all over town about someone else’s private life. I just want to make sure Kat is safe. I barely know her, but you can tell, plain as day, that she is a good girl. I can also tell she’s in a bit of trouble and what it is, I have no idea. I just don’t want anything adding to that.”

Nathan exhaled deeply. He realized he held his breath the entire time Bessie reassured him.

“I would never want any harm to come to Katherine, either, nor would Gideon, and that’s why I’m here. I just need a chance to speak with her. Will you tell me where I can find her?” Bessie looked appeased and then her eyes lit up as she looked at the staircase.

“Well, here she comes now.”

Nathan felt relieved to get a break from Bessie’s third degree, but as soon as his Bessie-induced agitation began to wane, anxiety of a different form began to bubble to the surface. She looked even more

beautiful to him today than the night before. Nathan watched as Katherine gracefully descended the staircase from the saloon's rented rooms.

He felt blood rushing to his face as well as his lower extremity. His entire body instantly warmed as he thought about how amazing it felt to be with her, to caress her porcelain skin, inhale the sweet ambrosia that exuded from her body, and taste the lavishness of her expressive mouth. He felt a pang with the realization that last night may be the first and only chance for him to be with her, that is, if he didn't convince Katherine to give them another chance.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine saw Nathan as she started down the staircase. As soon as her gaze hit his, her clit began to throb and she prayed the arousal she felt didn't express itself on her face. The last thing she wanted was for this man and the whole saloon to know she quietly soaked her panties with need. Need for this man she only just met and need for another man she also barely knew. Her mind went back to the day before when they touched her, kneading her flesh with their hands and with their mouths. She never felt those sensations before and never even considered them possible. Just a few moments with these two men changed her entire life. But then she saw them kissing. Two men. She didn't understand it and especially didn't understand the feelings it stirred within her. Watching them made her heart beat so fast, made her pussy ache so strongly, it scared her. And so she ran away. Now, as she met Nathan at the bottom of the stairs, she knew there was no running away this time.

"Hello, Katherine, it is a pleasure to see you again." He extended his hand to hers and pressed a soft, gentle kiss on her knuckles, warmly filling the tender skin between them. The affection of his kiss completely distracted her from the fact that this handsome man,

whom she had the pleasure of kissing the night before, waited for a response. “Umm...Nathan Harcker, remember from—”

“Yes, Mr. Harcker,” she said in the coldest voice she could muster, “I know who you are.”

*You are one of two men currently making me confused and crazy with a need I have never experienced when I should be focused on saving my home and my sister.*

Katherine knew that as much as her body cried out for their touch, what she really needed to do was to stay far, far away.

“Of course.” Nathan cast his eyes down as if embarrassed. Katherine felt a twinge of guilt for being so curt, but she had to do everything possible to keep these men at arm’s length.

Nathan reached into his pocket and held out a wad of money. “This is the money Gideon owed you from the poker game. He wanted me to give it to you.”

With trembling fingers, Katherine grabbed the money and put it in her purse. “Thank you for bringing it to me, Mr. Harcker.”

“Please, call me Nathan.” He looked at her in a way that made Katherine feel like swooning. She knew she needed to get away.

“Okay, Nathan, thank you for bringing me the money. And now, please excuse me, I must get going.” Katherine turned away from him and started walking in the opposite direction, though she had no idea where she intended to go. Immediately, long fingers grabbed her by the arm and completely halted her movement. “Are you actively trying to aggravate me?” she yelled back at him.

He spun her around, and the smell of bergamot wafted to her nose. She found herself in Nathan’s clutches, and her mind reeled, overwhelmed with everything, his smell, the warmth radiating from his skin, the firmness of his body. Her knees buckled, and Nathan grabbed her with both hands just to keep her from hitting the floor.

“Katherine, are you okay? Please, sit down for a moment.” Nathan led her to a chair and sat her down, then kneeled beside her. As he fanned her with one hand, he put his other hand on her cheek and then

her forehead, concern written all over his angelic features. He pushed a stray tendril of her hair out of her face, and Katherine was struck by the profound affection in the gesture.

“I’m fine, really.” Katherine started to stand, but Nathan’s strong hands held her firmly in place. She couldn’t believe it, the second time in two days that she nearly passed out. These men had a dangerous effect on her. Either that or all the stress she was under was making her anemic.

“Just rest for a bit. I think you might be feverish,” he said sincerely. Katherine knew she didn’t have a fever and that her flush came only from embarrassment and an impossible desire.

“I assure you, I do not have a fever.” She rolled her eyes.

“Perhaps you’re hungry. Please, let me take you to get something to eat. Surely, you haven’t eaten yet.” Nathan looked into Katherine’s eyes and held both her small hands between his two large ones. They were so soothing that Katherine couldn’t help but take a moment to soak in their warmth and his sweet smell. “Katherine?” His voice shook her back to reality.

“That won’t be necessary. I’m fine. Now get your goddamn hands off of me.” She shook his hands off of hers and then crossed her arms tightly against her chest. This man completely exasperated her. Why wouldn’t he leave her alone?

“Have you or haven’t you eaten today?” His voice grew stern, and Katherine thought it best to just answer his questions now and hopefully she could get this interaction over with sooner. She just needed to be firm with him.

“No, I haven’t, but—”

“No ‘buts.’ At least let me take you to supper to apologize for yesterday. Please, just give me a chance to explain.”

“There’s nothing to explain or apologize for. It was a mistake, just a mistake. I have no interest in you or Gideon or whatever indecent things you two are up to. I don’t have time for this!” She again tried to stand, but Nathan bent down and pressed his face against hers so

that his lips just barely graced her ears. His moist, hot breath caressed her skin, and all she could think about was that mouth on her breasts, sucking on her nipples, bathing her sweetest spot with kisses.

“Katherine,” his voice a low whisper, “you cannot deny what we had together and how fucking fantastic it made you feel. I saw your face and heard your moans. Do not deny yourself this. Do not deny us. Now please, come with me, share a meal, and just give me one chance.” His words shocked her. She knew what he said held more than a grain of truth to it, but how could she allow this distraction? But then again, how could she not when every fiber in her body called out for it, for him and for Gideon. It made no sense to her and yet, there it was.

Nathan pulled his face away from her cheek and stared into her eyes. He looked at her with such intensity and longing, Katherine felt the icy facade she tried so desperately to maintain beginning to melt under his gaze. Damn him! She could tell Nathan saw he was successfully chipping away at her defenses. She could do nothing but sit and stare at him. No words formed no matter how desperately she tried to say something, say anything to get away. Nathan seemed to take her silence as a concession.

“Great. Let’s go.” He scooped her up onto her feet. “We’ll eat a little something and get to know each other. I know just the place.” As Nathan lead her out of the saloon, Katherine stopped fighting him, for now, and finally let herself get swept away by this handsome man. Swaddled in his warm embrace, she felt her face doing something it hadn’t done in months. She smiled.

\* \* \* \*

“Where are you taking me?” Katherine asked as she held on to Nathan, her face pressed against his back as they rode his horse to God knows where.

“It’s a surprise,” he yelled back. “We’re going someplace with an excellent cook who is guaranteed to make your mouth water.” Katherine could picture him saying that with an irresistible smirk on his face. Nathan intrigued her, and it was nice to finally feel like somebody took an interest in her.

“What are we doing here?” Katherine asked as they stopped in front of Nathan’s home. “You said we were going to eat.”

“And we are, Katherine. I am the excellent cook, I daresay the best in Carson City, and I will make you an incredible meal that I am sure you will never forget.” He positively beamed as he helped her off the horse and into the house.

Nathan immediately sat Katherine down at an elaborately set table and disappeared into the kitchen.

“Make yourself at home, sweetheart,” Nathan called out over his shoulder as he left.

She looked around at her surroundings. The plates and flatware before her were elaborately gilded. Above her, a crystal chandelier sparkled in the afternoon sun. She imagined it would be breathtakingly beautiful at night when all the candles were lit. The chair cushions were brocaded in an elegant floral pattern. The level of opulence astounded her. As she waited, she began to feel more and more awkward surrounded by such wealth when she couldn’t even afford to even save her humble home, let alone fill it with fancy ornaments. Katherine couldn’t believe she came here and the impulsiveness of being alone in the home of a man she hardly knew. Still, even though she knew the practical response would be caution, somehow she felt comfortable around this man. She trusted him, as crazy as it sounded even to herself. Several minutes of indecision and doubt passed, and just as Katherine started to talk herself back into leaving, Nathan reappeared carrying a silver tray. She was impressed by his speediness.

“Oh, my. How’d you cook a whole meal so quickly?” Katherine’s mouth watered as the food’s glorious smell wafted into her nostrils.

“It’s nothing, really. I only had to cook up the steak, rare if that’s okay with you, and everything else was either warmed up or already prepared.”

He set the tray down and looked at Katherine in anticipation. Before her was a glass of red wine, a small steak, and a heap of toasted bread beside a small crock of fresh, sweet butter. In a small dish, fresh strawberries covered in whipped cream glistened with an eye-popping red. Katherine’s stomach growled, eagerly anticipating the decadent food she was about to consume. She hadn’t eaten a decent meal since before her father passed and certainly hadn’t had a delicious meal since her mother’s passing. She hadn’t had fresh fruit since she was a child and her father triumphed during his poker-playing heyday.

“Oh, Nathan, it looks amazing.”

Nathan sat down in the adjacent seat so that he resided at the head of the massive dinner table. “Please, go ahead and eat. No need to be shy.” With that, Katherine dug in. She realized she probably looked like a beast devouring all this food, but she didn’t care. It tasted so good. She briefly looked up and saw Nathan smiling at her.

“I was going to say I hoped you liked it, but I have a sneaking suspicion that you do.” He looked down at her already half-eaten steak.

“Excuse me, Nathan. Where are my manners?” Katherine quickly dabbed at the corners of her mouth with a napkin. Now that he brought attention to her eating style, she realized that she did care. “Yes, it’s wonderful. This steak is amazing. I don’t think I’ve ever tasted anything like it.”

“It’s buffalo meat. I know it’s not very common to eat, but Gideon introduced me to it. He’s half-Indian, and his mother, God rest her soul, used to make it for him when he was young. Now I always try to prepare it for him whenever he requests it, which is quite often.”

“It’s delicious.” Nathan’s face brightened at Katherine’s compliment.

“Katherine, I brought you here so I had a quiet place to explain to you my relationship with Gideon and our intentions with you. Good intentions, I swear.”

“I’m listening. Now that you’ve buttered me up with actual butter, it’s the least I can do.” Katherine smiled.

“Gideon and I have been together for a while now. We met on the job. He worked as one of the men on my line. One day he forced me to reprimand him for daydreaming, and alone in my office we felt an instant...connection.” Nathan smiled wistfully as he reminisced. “We’ve been together ever since.” His obvious fondness for Gideon made Katherine feel warm and comforted. The stability he described in their relationship was something Katherine yearned for since her mother’s passing, when all that she thought permanent in this world wasn’t. She needed to know what his permanence had to do with her.

“So, where do I come in, in all of this?”

“We’ve been looking for a woman to add to our coupling because we’ve both been with women before, and it’s nice to have a woman’s touch around, you see. We want someone to dote upon. I want someone to lavish. Gideon’s needs are so plain and simple, and I have all this wealth and no one to share it with. But we would never want to do anything to jeopardize our relationship, so finding the right person would be difficult. We think you’re that right person.” He paused and looked at Katherine hopefully.

“Me? But why me?”

“Gideon saw you that night at the poker game and he just had a feeling.” Nathan chuckled. “Obviously not the right feeling about his poker hand, but the right feeling about you, which was proven the day you came over. You can’t deny our chemistry and attraction yesterday. It was positively explosive, something I’ve never felt before, and I know Gideon feels the same. When you ran away that night I was so heartbroken, more affected by a person’s absence than I should have been considering we barely knew each other. That’s why

I think this is special. Just give this a shot and give us a chance. I know you'll feel the same way." His lips curled into a warm smile.

Katherine looked into his face and pondered his words. She had to admit the truth in what he said about their physical attraction, but love was more than just the physical. Plus, she didn't have a lick of time for love right now anyway.

"Nathan, I...I don't know. This is all so sudden, and now is really not a good time for me to be pursuing any kind of romance, let alone one as complicated as this one."

"Katherine, sweetheart, there's always time for love. And I promise you, though it sounds complicated, it won't *feel* complicated."

"That's easy for you to say." She cast her glance downward, and Nathan held her chin up with his strong but tender fingers and forced her to meet his gaze.

"Don't worry, we'll take it slow. I promise you, Katherine, everything will work out. I know it will." He pulled her face toward his and planted a cool kiss on her lips. She already struggled enough as a young girl to last a lifetime. It was time for her to have a chance at something more. It was unlikely to last, but what was so bad about one kiss? She kissed him back.

\* \* \* \*

When Katherine's lips pressed against his, Nathan felt a sudden peacefulness followed by a hot rush of attraction that penetrated him straight to his growing length. He cautiously slipped his tongue on her lips, which felt smooth and plump. Upon feeling no resistance, he went further, gingerly sliding it into her mouth until it struggled with hers, their tongues pushing and twisting against each other fighting from one mouth to the other.

"Love, you taste so good. How can you taste so exquisite?" It may have been the strawberries she ate for dessert that made her mouth

taste so sweet, but he doubted it. It was all Katherine. Beautiful, lovely Katherine, the last piece of their puzzle.

“I just never thought this would...ever...” Katherine moaned, stopping mid-sentence. He could see her face becoming flushed with desire.

“It’s happening, Katherine, whether you fight it or not, this is happening, so just give in to me.” He felt her body tense for a moment, as if wanting to fight this passion, but then her posture loosened. She was giving in to him. He knew it to be true. “I want you, want to feel your little body on top of mine.” He grabbed her and sat her on his lap so she rode him sidesaddle. Her eyes widened at the feel of his throbbing cock against her round, sumptuous ass.

“Is that...is that what I think it is?” Her voice unsteady, she sounded alarmed yet intrigued.

“Yes, sweetheart, that’s my cock and I hope you’ll get to know it a lot better in the future.” He watched as her eyes grew wide. From fear or shock or hunger he didn’t know, but it didn’t matter. Ultimately it would all lead to pleasure. “But don’t worry, love, we’re taking it slow, remember? No need to rush anything. I just want to take my sweet time with you.”

“Who says I want to take it slow?”

Nathan smiled at the devilish look on her face. She was even more fearless and gutsy than he thought. He intended to have a lot of fun with this girl, now and forever. But, right now, he wanted to feel more of her.

“I want you to put your legs around me, pretty thing, and ride me, ride me hard,” Nathan said in her ear. He slipped his hand under Katherine’s dress and grabbed her left thigh, hoisting it over his body so she straddled him. She tugged on the hem of her dress to free it from between them. Nathan closed his eyes for a moment as he put a hand on each leg and reached around her hips to her simple, cotton panties. With his fingers pressing firmly against the skin of her

buttocks, he pulled her deeper, letting her grind her pussy on the thick mound forming in his pants.

Even through all the layers of her dress, he knew she could feel him growing for her. She sat on him hard and slowly rocked her hips back and forth, grinding into him, applying more and more pressure and speed as their desire grew. His hands tangled in her hair as she put her arms around his neck, pulling him in even closer. Their lips ravished each other. Nathan wanted to consume her, the woman who stirred up passions in him he didn't know possible, this woman who he knew he was starting to love.

He looked into her eyes and saw the ferocious attraction that burned within her. Her eyes blazed with passion. He pulled away for a second, causing Katherine to gasp at the sudden removal of his face from hers.

“Where are you going?”

He cast his eyes down toward her breasts and, without meaning to use such force, ripped her blouse open, exposing her lovely, pale, smooth breasts. Her nipples tightened at the sudden exposure to the cool air and the sensation of his thumbs gently caressing them. Katherine arched her back and inhaled with a deep hiss, her mouth parted in shocked ecstasy. As her back arched, her breasts thrust closer to Nathan's face. He leaned down and put one of her tempting nipples into his mouth. He felt her press her face against the top of his head, her fingers massaging his skull as she pulled it deeper into her heaving bosoms. Nathan gorged on them, filling his mouth with each breast, one at a time.

“Oh, Nathan, more, I want more.”

Nathan took this as a sign that his lady wished him to continue and push her tender buttons even more. He licked his middle finger and then slipped it into her slit, thrilled to discover that it already seeped with the wetness of her slick juices. Katherine's eyes popped open for a moment and then she closed them hard, pursing her lips and then running her sweet, pink tongue over them.

“Is that enough to satisfy you, love?” Nathan then slipped in another finger while massaging her pussy lips with his thumb. “Or is that better?”

“Better,” Katherine blurted out between gasps of air. “Better, but more, please more.”

Nathan slipped a third finger in, surprised at Katherine’s seemingly unquenchable desire. Well, he planned to do his best to sate her thirst.

“Put your arms around me, tightly.” He pushed the empty plates off the table, sending them crashing to the floor. With his hand still deep inside of her, he placed his free hand on the small of her graceful back and hoisted her onto the table so that her luscious cunt rested right at the edge, giving him perfect, open access to her dripping core.

“Oh, God, fuck, Nathan. Oh, God, this is too much, too much for me, pl-plea-please, you must stop!” She cried out, her body bucking at the sensation of Nathan expertly moving his hand up and down, pressing against the hot button inside her that he knew would send her plummeting into an abyss of searing pleasure. Seeing that she balanced right on the edge of her climax, Nathan kept going, increasing his speed and pressure.

“No, Katherine. There will be no stopping until you come for me, sweetheart. Just hold on and trust me. Do you trust me?” Nathan said, ignoring the deep ache in his cock that yearned to replace his hand and delve into her dark nectar, bathing in it. But that would have to wait until Gideon could be there and they could do that together. Just the mere thought of Gideon joining them, made Nathan’s cock flex even harder than it had been for just Katherine. How he loved that man and how they would all love Katherine. Long and hard.

“I...I...trust you. I trust you, Nathan,” Katherine cried out between gritted teeth. “But it’s too much. I’ve never done this!”

“No, sweetheart, believe me. It’s just right.” With one final thrust, Katherine came, her body bucking wildly on the table. Her luscious fluids dripped down his forearms, his fingers drenched. He never met

a woman as responsive as Katherine and who looked so stunning when climaxing. Being with her was new and invigorating. Nathan felt alive and ravenous for more.

He watched her, wishing he had been able to climb on top of her and ride this beautiful creature as she bucked like a crazed animal. Instead, he comforted her, knowing that this was likely her first deep orgasm and certainly her first orgasm with a man. Nathan massaged her tender mound and with his other hand smoothed the hairs away from her face, especially the stray wispy ones that he knew must be tickling her adorable button nose. He kissed her all over her face and breasts, cooing at her while she lay there, unable to do anything but gulp in air through her parted mouth.

“Now you’ve done it and that wasn’t so bad, was it, sweetheart?”

Katherine responded with a shy grin and giggle. Her skin looked dewy and glowed. She perched herself up on her elbows and looked up at Nathan. She looked so beautiful, so perfect. He never wanted her to leave.

\* \* \* \*

“I can’t believe what just happened,” Katherine said. “I just, I’ve never done that. I want you to know, I’m not that kind of girl.”

She wiped the sweat off her forehead and began noticing how unseemly she must look, all disheveled and in a most obscene position. What kind of girl would do such a wanton thing? She lay on top of a table, for Christ’s sake. She could imagine her brain wagging a finger at her, *tsking* her for her bad behavior.

Still, the rest of her felt differently. The rest of her body couldn’t feel more right. Katherine couldn’t decide whose side to take, so she decided to err on the side of caution as she always did and, instead of reveling in the moment, as her body wanted her to do, she sat up and pulled her blouse closed. She was sure her brain breathed a sigh of relief. She looked at Nathan, his smile now gone, and a look of

concern spread across his magnificent face. He must have seen her brain winning, she decided.

“There’s nothing to be ashamed of, Katherine. What we did just now was beautiful.” He wrapped her with his arms, treating her like a precious gift. She never felt more safe and secure than now. Katherine just sat there in silence, not knowing what to say.

“And once we’re all together with Gideon, it’s going to be...” Nathan’s voice trailed off as he looked up toward the ceiling as if at a loss for words. “It’s going to be perfect.”

Despite his obvious concern for her, Katherine was surprised at how happy Nathan still looked, especially since she hadn’t done anything to him. She hadn’t even seen his penis, but just felt it. And it felt good against her body and she found herself longing to see it and hold it. Perhaps she could even put it in her mouth. She started to feel hot again, her center perking back up, ready for more. But no, there wouldn’t be more. She needed restraint.

“No, I don’t know what we just did and there will not be you, me, *and* Gideon. I must get out of here.” Katherine got up and tidied herself to the best of her ability.

“Where are you going, love? Can I get anything for you? Why don’t you stay awhile longer?”

Katherine softened as she saw how clearly Nathan wanted to please her. No one ever extended that kind of treatment toward her.

“No, Nathan. I’m fine.” *Wonderful, actually.* “But, I really must get back to the saloon.”

She looked out the window at the setting sun. Good Lord, how long had she been in his house? Time stood still and now it sprinted to catch up. She planned on playing a poker game that night and didn’t want to be late. She wanted to make sure she picked a table with Jimmy or Mr. Davis, since they proved to be easy marks. Ideally, they wouldn’t all be at the same table, though, because then it could get ugly. One idiot, she could certainly handle, but two pushed it.

“I have a poker game.” She smiled at him, hoping to calm his concern for her sudden departure.

“What is it with you two and poker?” Nathan crossed his arms, still smiling. She could tell he resigned himself to let her go.

“It’s my only chance at survival.” Katherine shrugged her shoulders. She kissed Nathan, which did nothing to erase the puzzled look on his face, and walked out the door.

## Chapter Five

Katherine looked at the cards in her hand, lowered them a fraction, and looked over them at the men sitting around her. Under the dim light of the candlelit chandelier, all five men looked a little imposing with their barely groomed facial hair, shadowed eyes, and guns hanging from their belts.

She took a deep breath and asked, “Are those your final bets, gentlemen?” with more coolness than she felt.

They stared back at her, and she knew they all wondered whether or not she was bullshitting them. She had the second highest chip count on the table, and the two men straight across from her were all-in. Katherine took a small, calming breath. Her heart beat like a jackrabbit’s, but she kept her hands steady, her countenance carefully blank, and her eyes cold.

In her hand, she held an ace high full house. A niggling certainty in the back of her mind told her she had the best cards at the table.

“Yep,” the man next to her mumbled. He lost the ability to enunciate clearly almost an hour ago when he took his last shot of whiskey. He did not lose his ability to play, though. Katherine wondered how much better he would be sober. A part of her hoped she would never find out. Another part of her, the wild woman side, wanted nothing more than to prove to herself that she could take someone like him.

“All right, then, Smitty.” She gestured to his cards with her chin. “What do you have?”

He laid his hand down. A flush. Katherine ignored the jolt her heart gave. She looked at the men across from her. “Billy? Mr. Davis?”

“Well, purdy lady, what do you got?” Billy challenged. A bottle of whiskey sat next to his elbow, and his gun lay on the table. His hard gaze met hers and in the candlelight, she thought he looked a little off his rocker. A lick of fear went down her spine and settled in her gut.

She cocked an eyebrow and set her shoulders, refusing to let him intimidate her. “I believed I asked you first, Billy,” she said with harsh, forced politeness.

“I know. But seein’ as yer the only woman at this here table, missy,” he thrummed his index finger against the dried out wood, “I do believe yer down right outnumbered.”

“Do you have anything worth arguing over or not, Billy?” she snapped with bravado she did not know she possessed.

“Now why do you ask that?”

“Because it seems like you’re stalling, sir, and I don’t have time for that. It seems to me if you had something worth showing,” she flicked her gaze to his lap, then up to his face, “you would have done it by now.”

*Jesus, where did that come from?*

Billy flashed his yellow teeth at her. “Why, you little—”

“Now, now, Billy,” Mr. Davis, who sat next to him, said. “There’s no need for name calling.”

Katherine broke into a cold sweat. It made her nervous being surrounded by so many liquored up men.

*Why in the hell did she have to go mouthing off?*

She suddenly wished Gideon was with her. Gideon, with his hard, exotic face and heavily muscled form or Nathan, with his distant beauty and lean hardness. Or maybe if both of them were there with her...

She shut the door on her errant thoughts. Why she imagined the two of them when she smelled a victory and had clearly pissed off the armed, rough and tumble man in front of her, she did not know.

“Ms. Katherine,” Mr. Davis laid his cards on the chipped wood surface, “three of a kind. I believe Smitty there just fair kicked my ass.” His voice held an undertone of malice. He just lost all of his money.

Katherine, seeing that Billy refused to show her his cards, set hers down on the table. “Unless you have something higher, Billy, and the odds are quite heavily against you, I believe I won.”

For a moment, he just stared at her, the blackness of his eyes intensifying as the candlelight flickered over his rough, ugly face. He stood up slowly, turned, and before Katherine could register his movements, he threw his cards in her face.

“Fuck you, you little bitch!” he seethed.

Katherine jumped when the cards struck her face, their stinging impact sharpened by the rage and malice behind them. She watched, frozen, as they fluttered into her lap, little blurs of red and black. Never in her life had she been the recipient of any sort of violent or malicious intent.

In that moment, as she stared at the three of hearts as it landed face up on her left leg, she realized how far away from her Anna was, felt the claustrophobic pressure of isolation, knew in her gut that she was truly, utterly alone. If this man had it out for her, no one would help. She wished she could close her eyes and open them to see her sister reading in the candlelight next to the window and smell the wind that carried the scent of the river to their front door. She wished she knew what in the hell she was doing.

She realized, with grim fascination, that her hand shook. It laid palm up in her lap, and her fingertips twitched with her fear. As if from far away, she heard the smashing of glass, heard the clinking, ringing sound of shards hitting the wooden floor, and watched numbly as they rolled to a stop at her feet.

She leapt out of her chair at the last possible moment, her swift movement and her heavy skirts knocking it backward. She pivoted on her heel and realized Billy stalked after her, throwing chairs out of the way, and brandishing his whiskey bottle. Now broken in half, the jagged edges looked like the teeth of a feral animal, the last drops of the dark liquor gleaming like blood in the dim light.

She shook her head and refocused her eyes and, suddenly, the world moved at a dizzying pace. Before she could think, she reached next to her, grabbed a chair, and hurled it at Billy with enough force that he whooshed out a breath.

“You bitch!” he screamed, lunging for her again.

Katherine backed away, but Billy grabbed a fist full of her dress and yanked. Hard. She felt the exact moment her feet left the ground, and she hovered in the air for a moment, then landed on her back, her breath knocked out of her. Her mind reeled from the impact of the fall, and she felt the vibrations bouncing off the inside of her skull like a ricocheting bullet. Somehow, she managed to push herself up from the liquor soaked floor and snap her head up in time to see Billy kick the chair in front of him out of the way. He reached for her with his grimy fingers, but Katherine shot her foot out from under her skirts and kicked his balls, grunting as she put as much strength as she could muster behind it.

“You fucking bastard!” she shrieked as she scurried to her feet.

She skittered away from Billy, her arms and legs moving like a spider’s, only to be grabbed by the scruff of her neck and yanked to her feet. She struggled against the hold, but thick, heavy fingers wound violently into her hair and pulled her head back with such force she yelped.

“Stay still and get what’s coming to you,” a voice whispered against her ear. Mr. Davis. “I got her, Billy. Git yer ass up.”

Billy unfolded himself from his crumpled position on the floor and slowly balanced on his feet, his hands gripping his crotch.

“Jesus fuckin’ Christ,” he moaned. He leaned down to pick up his broken whiskey bottle and shuffled toward Katherine, who struggled against Mr. Davis’s hold.

Katherine trembled, but refused to cry or to show her terror. Instead, she lifted her chin and said in the steadiest voice she could muster, “I won that game fair and square, you fucking asshole! And you and your buddies know it.” She gestured with her eyes at the other men in the saloon who stood watching the spectacle in front of them. Anger overrode fear, making her apprehension easier to deal with as he stepped closer to her, his stinking hand leaving his crotch to touch her face.

“Now, you just shut your mouth and let me teach you a lesson called ‘women need to know their place.’”

She reared her head back as far as it could go, flung it forward, and spit in his face. The sound of it landing on his cheek echoed in the room and for a brief second, a sense of elation filled her. A heartbeat later, he wrenched his arm back, his face hideously contorted with rage. The broken bottle made a wide arc as it careened toward her face.

\* \* \* \*

Gideon walked toward the Red Door Saloon as the sun’s last rays dipped below the horizon. Dusk was his favorite time of day. He never ceased to marvel at how the murky gray-blue light blanketed his vision, making it difficult to differentiate the colors and textures surrounding him. Dusk was the brief moment when the balance between day and night teetered on knife point, when the darkness finally won its battle with the light. In that moment, everything, including time, seemed suspended, as if hovering in the air. The Indian in him went on alert, listening for the sounds of the emerging nocturnal animals.

As he approached the saloon, however, he heard the racket produced by animals more dangerous than those that stalked their prey at night—drunken, greedy men.

Then he heard a scream, a woman's scream. And the voice sounded chillingly close to Katherine's. Fire and ice burst through his veins as he bounded toward the stairs, leaping over them in one jump. He flung himself through the doors of the saloon to find Katherine struggling in Mr. Davis's grip while Billy advanced on her, the broken bottle in his hand swooping toward her face.

Gideon reacted without thinking. He rushed toward them, his long strides eating up the distance. His fist collided with Mr. Davis's cheekbone, right where it curved up and around his eye. He heard the man howl in pain, then grunt as he fell to the floor, releasing Katherine. Gideon's gaze roamed over her body, assessing her, looking for any blood or signs of pain before he pivoted around to face Billy, who slashed the bottle down toward him.

Gideon pounced backward, let the jagged edges pass over his body, grabbed Billy's wrist, twisting it up until he heard Billy screech. The bottle fell to the floor. Gideon pulled the other man toward him, shoved his knee into Billy's stomach, felt the mad rush of air escaping his opponent's mouth, then used his free elbow to hit Billy just under his ear. Billy fell to the floor face down, arms and legs splayed haphazardly. He was out.

"Are you all right?" he asked Katherine. He glanced at Mr. Davis's and Billy's prone forms before returning his attention to her. He noticed she had not moved an inch since he freed her from Mr. Davis's grip.

She just stared at him, her mouth hanging open a little.

"Katherine?" He dipped his head so he could look into her eyes. He put his hands on her shoulders. They felt so small. He shook her. "Katherine, are you all right?" If Katherine did not need his attention, he would have slit the other men's throats for laying their filthy hands on her. Fucking shit. He needed to hit something.

She nodded, swallowed, and closed her mouth. Her pouty lips turned white and her whole body trembled.

“I..I’m all right. I think.” She sank against him and buried her face in his chest. “Oh, God.”

The door to the kitchen burst open. Bessie stood in the threshold with her shotgun drawn and her hair in a tangled mess about her head.

“What the *fuck* is going on here?” She scanned the room down the barrel of her shotgun before her gaze landed on Gideon and Katherine. “You. Gideon.” She gestured at him with the barrel of her gun. “Explain what in Christ’s balls is goin’ on here.”

“Put your gun down, Bess. It’s all right. I got it all taken care of.”

“How’s she doin’?” She pointed her chin toward Katherine who still clutched at Gideon’s shirt front.

“Hell if I know. She won’t say anything.”

“Is she cryin’?”

Gideon cringed, feeling the wetness seeping into his shirt. “I think so.”

“Aww, the poor baby, all comin’ here new to town and havin’ all these crazy fools scarin’ her.” Bessie crossed the room, kicking Billy and Mr. Davis for good measure as she went. “Now, you come here, darlin’.”

She took Katherine from Gideon and gathered her in arms but not before unceremoniously dumping her shotgun into Gideon’s hands. Then she eyed him.

“You, bein’ a man, ain’t got no clue as to how to deal with a cryin’ woman. Go make yourself useful by takin’ out this here trash.” She spat on the floor right next to Billy’s face.

\* \* \* \*

“I’m fine, really. It’s just a scratch,” Gideon said as Katherine opened her bedroom door and dragged him in. By the time he

returned to the saloon, she had stopped crying and honed in on the gash on his arm.

“But it’s bleeding so much,” Katherine complained.

“It’s fine. Really. I’ll just go and—”

“Oh, no you don’t,” Katherine said when Gideon turned toward the door. “You need to get that washed before it starts to fester. Lord knows how dirty that thing was.” She grabbed his shirt and dragged him farther into the room. “I need to look at it now.”

Gideon felt a smile play across his lips when she grabbed him. Feisty little thing. She let go of his shirt. He watched her hips sway as she crossed the room, reached for her matches, and lit the lamp next to the bed.

She noticed the blood on his shirt the moment he came back from throwing Mr. Davis and Billy out of the saloon. She took one look at him, told him to sit down, and bent over to tear a strip of cloth from the hem of her dress.

His cock jumped at the beautiful sight her ass made hovering in the air like the most luscious offering. He wanted to lift her skirts, grab her hips, and plunge into her right there. He knew her pussy would be as sweet as her pouty mouth. She must have seen the look on his face because when she straightened, something passed over her eyes and shifted her gaze away from his.

“Here, let me tie this around your arm. It’ll help stop the bleeding,” she said. She held her hands steady this time. Thank God. He did not have the first clue about how to deal with emotional women. He stiffed when she rose up on her toes and brushed her lips against his cheek. “Thank you,” she whispered.

Gideon snapped out of his reverie and looked around the threadbare room. The window stood directly across from the door, and the bed sat to his right with a washbasin on one side and a nightstand on the other. A small dresser leaned against the wall next to the door.

Bessie must really like Katherine. Gideon noticed that the bed, covered with clean white sheets, would comfortably fit two people. Maybe three if the occasion called for it. He smiled to himself and reached up to his collar, unbuttoning his shirt with his right hand.

Katherine's back straightened and she turned around, wiping her hands together. Her eyes widened when her gaze landed on his chest.

"What are you doing?"

"Well, you need to assess the damage, right?" he asked, as if it made perfect sense that he would take off his shirt in order for her to clean a wound on his forearm.

Her eyes followed his hand as it undid the last button and his shirt gaped open. "Yes, but I—"

Gideon shrugged out his shirt. "Well, come look at it, then."

\* \* \* \*

Katherine struggled to get the wild beating of her heart to stop. She took in so many shallow breaths, she knew her heaving bosoms would draw his attention. Gideon's hazel eyes raked over her body and landed on her breasts, confirming her suspicions. Her nipples hardened and rubbed uncomfortably against the cloth covering them.

Christ, he was beautiful in the candlelight, all sinewy muscle wrapped in strong veins, rough golden skin and a thin brushing of dark hair. She swallowed and felt heat gathering between her thighs. She squeezed them tightly together, hoping he did not notice how much she fidgeted because of him.

She walked over to him. "Sit down. Let me get some water poured and we'll get you cleaned up." She surprised herself when her voice stayed even despite her heightening state of arousal.

Gideon slid past her, and she watched the way his taut buttocks flexed when he walked.

*Oh, if I could just sink my teeth into—*

“Any time you feel like it, you can hop on,” Gideon said, interrupting her lustful thoughts. He looked like a wolf that just trapped its prey. His eyes were hooded and all of a sudden his lips looked so inviting. He sat down and splayed his legs out into a V, and Katherine saw his thickness growing within his pants.

Katherine straightened her spine, set her shoulders, and cocked an eyebrow. “Mmm. Too bad. I’m not feeling like it right now.” Her bluffing abilities increased by the second.

Gideon barked out a laugh. “Keep tellin’ yourself that, sugar.”

“Is this how you normally sweet talk your lovers? I’m sure they were all *so* charmed,” she said with sugary sweetness.

“I’m sure your prickliness has attracted dozens.”

“I am not prickly!”

“Whatever you say, Kat.”

“And I have not attracted dozens. There hasn’t been anyone!”

Gideon jumped off the bed, his long legs quickly closing the distance between them. “You best keep it that way, Kat,” he said in a low, intense voice. Then he grabbed the back of her neck and pulled her face toward his.

He kissed her, his lips bruising and intense, forcing her to realize that he was not a man to be trifled with. He was a man who owned, mastered, and tamed. He pulled back, leaving her breathless in his wake. Up close, Katherine saw the flecks of gold in his eyes, felt his breath brushing against her cheek, felt his hardness. Gideon stared at her as if he could see through every wall she put up and every bluff she ever told. She shivered.

“Your arm,” she whispered, trying to break the tension.

He glanced down at it, then removed his hand from her neck. “I am at your bidding, sugar.”

“I’m so sure.” Katherine pulled away from him and put a little too much effort in trying to locate her bar of soap.

Gideon sauntered back to the bed and sat on the edge. Katherine found the soap where she left it next to the washbasin.

*Damn him for making me so nervous.*

She poured fresh water from the pitcher into the white and blue bowl, found a washcloth among her things, and walked back to Gideon. It amazed her there was not any fat crumpling his middle section. He was all lean hardness. Katherine's eyes flicked down to his lap where the hardest part of his body lay. She swallowed hard, then looked up to meet his glittering eyes.

The bastard had the nerve to smirk at her.

Katherine huffed out a breath. "Arm," she snapped.

Gideon's smile widened. "I believe what you were looking at is actually a cock, and I'll give that to you whenever you please, Kat."

"You insufferable bastard," she said as she backed away from him before she scratched his eyes out. "Does everything always have to be about you satisfying your rutting urge?"

"What I intend to do to you has nothing to do with rutting, Kat." His eyes sparkled with sex and wantonness. "I fully intend to—"

"Do you want me to clean your arm or not?"

Gideon held his injured arm out, placating her. "Come back here, Kat. I won't bite."

"Or make any more of your comments?"

"Agreed."

Katherine walked over to Gideon and grabbed his hand harder than she expected. His arm started bleeding again.

"I'm sorry," she said, fretting her lip.

Gideon shrugged his meaty shoulders. "Don't worry about it. It'll take a hell of a lot more than opening up a measly scratch for me to complain."

"I doubt you would ever complain about being in any kind of pain." Katherine wiped the wet, soapy washcloth along Gideon's arm, cleaning away the dirt and dry blood there. Her hand looked so small and white compared to his forearm's girth. She never considered herself particularly delicate, but next to Gideon she felt like porcelain.

He made a show of rubbing his chin thoughtfully. “I think your estimation is spot on about that. I did cry that one time, though.”

Katherine stopped her ministrations and turned her face toward his. “You cried?” she asked incredulously.

“Oh, I cried for days.”

“Well, what happened?”

“My best friend died, you see.”

Katherine lifted her free hand to her chest and placed it over her heart. “I am so sorry, Gideon. What happened?”

“Bubba jumped in front of a wagon. The horses didn’t have time to stop and, well, you know what happens when horses...” He didn’t meet her eyes.

“That must have been so hard for you,” Katherine cooed, resuming her work and avoiding his eyes to give him some privacy.

“Yeah, I really miss the little man.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“He was the best frog I could have ever asked for.”

“Your best friend was a frog?”

“I lived way out of town, you see. There weren’t really any other children my age for at least six miles, so I made friends with whatever I could find—oww!” He yelped when Katherine struck her fist into his shoulder. He rubbed the spot and looked surprised at how hard she hit him. “Damn, you got one hell of a hook, Kat. What’d you do that for?”

“I cannot believe you!”

“What?”

“Here I was tending to your battle wounds and listening to your heart wrenching story about you losing your childhood friend, and it was a damn frog,” she said, fists on her hips.

“Yeah, but it got you going, didn’t it?” He winked at her. “I bet you thought about comforting me in my moment of weakness, weren’t you?”

“Shut your mouth, you rat bastard, before I—”

Gideon caught her hand before it could strike his face. He pried her fingers apart and brought them to his lips, kissing each finger tip. Katherine found it increasingly difficult to be embarrassed about how easily she fell for his charms.

“I’m sorry, Kat,” he whispered against her skin as he kissed her palm, the inside of her wrist, the crook of her elbow. She shivered.

*Jesus, God.*

Katherine’s eyelids fluttered closed before she could will them not to, and a soft sigh crossed her lips. When she opened her eyes again, they met his and held. He looked up at her with the most apt expression, as if trying to drink her in. She cleared her throat.

“You know, you need to stop using this arm until I get it bandaged.”

Immediately, Gideon’s eyes lost their softness. The moment was gone. “Yes, ma’am.”

She finished cleaning his wound and started tearing an old nightgown into strips she could use to wrap his arm when a thought came to her.

“Gideon, where did you get your name?”

He looked puzzled. “My name?”

“Yes. It’s so...” She pondered for a moment, trying to find the right word. “It’s so biblical.”

Gideon smiled, but it did not reach his eyes. “I suppose you can say that. It’s meant to be.”

Something about the way his voice sounded made Katherine glance up from her work and meet his eyes. There was a story behind it, she surmised, but she kept her mouth shut. If he wanted to tell her, he would do it of his own accord.

The room fell into silence for a few moments, but to Katherine, they seemed interminable. She could hear the floorboards creak when she shifted her weight, could hear Gideon’s quiet breaths, felt every fiber in her shirt as it moved against her skin.

“My mother was Indian,” he began, “and my father was a white man. I don’t have many memories of her. She died when I was young.” His teasing smile left his face with his confident air and the remarks intended to fire her blood. Gideon stared at the wall in front of him, his deep voice hypnotically quiet, lost in reverie. “I don’t think my father was ever the same after her death. He didn’t know what to do with a child, so he gave me to his parents to raise. I saw him every few weeks, but I honestly don’t think he could stand the sight of me. I think I have the look of my mother.” He turned toward her. The candlelight flickered on his face, casting his eyes in shadow.

“Your father named you, then?”

“No. My grandmother did. She thought Indians were heathens. She wanted to name me something biblical in hopes that a godly name would fight the Indian devils out of me.”

Katherine could not respond. She did not know how. Instead, she started wrapping the scraps of cloth around his arm.

“Gideon,” he continued, “was the name of a tribal leader in Israel before the people united. During those times, the Israelites’ enemies constantly attacked them, so God would appoint someone to lead the tribe against their attackers. Gideon was one of them.”

“I see.”

“It didn’t help with the devils, though,” he said sardonically.

Katherine finished tying the last strip around his arm and straightened. “What do you mean?”

“I’ve still got devils in me, Kat.” The heated look in his eyes returned. Suddenly, she felt as if she was being stalked by a giant wolf. She backed away from him as he unfolded his body to his full height. Katherine tilted her head back to meet his eyes.

“Devils?” She walked backward until the wall stopped her.

“Oh, yes. Plenty of them.” He stalked her until he hovered a breath away from her.

“You’re acting oddly.”

“Am I? I wonder why that is.” His lips closed in on hers.

“I’ve heard men seek a woman’s company after facing death,” she blurted. “I think the fight downstairs counts, don’t you?” Gideon straightened and pulled away from her, smiling. “Where...where are you going?”

\* \* \* \*

Gideon walked over to the door and locked it, then turned around and pinned her gaze with his.

“Well, I’m not just any man, sugar.” He walked over to the bed and stood in front of it.

Katherine swallowed hard and took a deep breath, but her eyes never wavered from his. “You’re not?”

“No.” He undid the top snap of his pants. “I’m not.” He looked at her from head to toe, from her wild hair to her dainty ankles that peaked out from the space between her boots and the torn hem of her dress.

*Fucking Christ, she’s beautiful.*

“Kat?” he said, his voice low and soft.

“Hmm?” Her big, chocolate eyes flicked from his waistband back to his face.

“Unbutton your dress.” He saw her lips purse and heard her release a sharp breath from her nose.

“No.” She crossed her arms over her full chest. “I won’t.”

“Kat, unbutton your dress.” He did his best not to snap out the order. Jesus, if he took her shirt off himself, he would rip it, then she would get pissed off at him and would never give him another chance to get his hands on that body of hers.

“You’ll enjoy it. I promise.”

She rolled her eyes. “Of course I’ll enjoy it, Gideon. That’s not the issue here.”

“Then what is?”

She rose from the bed and closed the small space between them. “If I want to take my shirt off, I’ll do it when I damn well please.”

His jaw ticked. She looked beautiful in the room’s dim light. He could see her pupils widen. He glanced down to where the neckline of her shirt met her neck and saw the pulse beating like wildfire under her skin. He touched her there, and the right corner of his mouth lifted.

“It seems to me you want to.”

Her eyes narrowed a second before she reared back to strike him. Gideon caught her arm, pulled her to him and leaned into her. Her body bent under his weight, and he fell onto the bed behind her. He landed on his right side so he could spare her his weight. Kat’s eyes flashed black in anger.

“Gideon, you bastard!”

“You know, I think you may be right about the bastard thing,” he said before he slanted his mouth over hers and kissed her.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine met his lips with a force of her own, but when Gideon slid his hand up her neck and cupped the back of her head, his thumb rubbing the sensitive spot under her ear, she moaned into his mouth and sank back into the bed. He won, blast the man.

Her flesh warmed and goose bumps formed over her sensitive skin starting where his thumb grazed over her neck. She shivered when she felt more of his weight, his warmth seeping into her clothes, into her skin. Her nipples hardened and pressed against her chemise, creating a rough yet delicious sensation.

Katherine reached up and grabbed his arm, pressing him closer, but he pulled away. Her eyes popped open to find him looking down at her, smiling.

“Unbutton your dress,” he said, his voice low and his eyes full of lust.

Fury burst through her veins, and she tried to sit up, but he leaned over her, refusing to let her up.

“Just listen to me. I’m not trying to embarrass you.” He reached down and gathered her hands in his and kissed them. His lips were soft against her skin. He entranced her. The candlelight cast shadows over his skin, making the bulges of his muscles appear bigger, more dramatic. His skin glowed and his eyes glittered as they stared down at her.

She fell under his spell.

She reached up to her collar of her own accord and unbuttoned the first button, then the second and the third. Katherine looked at his face the entire time, panting, watching his unbanked lust grow as her hands went lower, freeing her body from its shell.

The more her dress loosened, the more aroused she became. Her fingers started trembling, her nipples tightened even more, and she felt her legs widen wantonly, begging for the space between them to be filled. Before she could reach the last button, however, Gideon snapped out a curse and yanked her chemise down, then lifted her breast to his mouth roughly and sucked on its beaded tip.

Katherine’s mouth fell open on a sigh, but nothing came out. She arched her back, her head digging into the mattress as she forced more of herself into his mouth. She hovered between the pleasure she felt and the almost violent manner Gideon sucked on her. She gasped, her eyes looking blindly at the ceiling while she scratched and clawed at his back. She kicked her skirts up, wrapped her leg around his and rubbed her center against him.

*Oh, God.*

Gideon released her breast, his hand coming up to fondle the moistened nipple as he blew on it, then moved to the other one.

“Kat,” he whispered against her breast, then sucked on it. “Stop that.”

She ignored him.

“Kat.” He nipped the sensitive underside of her breast, eliciting a moan from her. Was that a rush of moisture she felt between her legs? He clicked his tongue, then moved his leg to the side, spreading her wide.

\* \* \* \*

He found the fevered skin of her thigh and felt its softness before trailing his fingers toward the dewy wetness waiting for him. God, she already spread herself wide for him. He felt the blood leave his brain and head straight for his dick.

*Fuck.*

She lurched under him when his fingertips found her short, soft curls. He let his fingers drift softly over her labia and felt her flesh grow hotter under his touch.

“Gideon, please,” she whimpered, clutching at him. He looked down at her from her heavy, naked breasts, to the rest of her body still covered by yards of cloth.

Jesus fucking Christ, she was so beautiful when she writhed under him, her eyes wild and her cheeks flushed with sexual abandon. He wanted to shove his pants down and sheath himself in her hot pussy, but he wanted her a little hotter, a little wilder before he did that. And Nathan. He wanted, needed, Nathan to be there to share the experience with him. He could do other things, though.

Gideon dragged his calloused finger over her drenched slit, getting it good and lubricated before he found her clit and rubbed. He felt Katherine’s body tensing, and her fingers latched onto his skin, creating little half moons on his shoulders. He pressed harder against her, and she fell into the bed, her body limp and pliable. She swiveled her hips toward him, and he watched as her mouth fell open and her eyes closed. Her moan shot right through him, making his dick jump with anticipation.

He pulled back, ignoring her scratching protests, and kneeled astride her on the bed, unbuttoning his pants the rest of the way. Gideon saw her pupils widen, and her gaze followed his fingers as they went lower and lower down his crotch. Heat bloomed over his skin from the way she looked at him, and his lust deepened like he never felt before.

Finally, blessedly, his cock sprang out of the confines of his pants. He got off the bed, stepped out of them, and returned to her, stroking his cock.

Gideon grinned down at her. "Do you want this, Kat?"

She looked up at him with eyes wide. "You...you're..."

He looked down at himself, at his familiar hardness. He never had anything to be embarrassed about in that department. Quite the opposite, actually. "I'm what?"

"You're so..."

"Yes?"

"Is that really supposed to fit?"

Gideon threw his head back and barked out a burst of sexually charged laughter. "Oh, yeah, sugar." His eyes met hers again. "You're going to be so tight. It'll be so fucking delicious. I might come from just being inside you." He looked at her splayed legs and the glistening softness between them. "But I think we'll wait on that for now."

"We are?" Katherine tried to pull her knees closer together, but he stopped her.

"No, Kat. I want to look." He sank down on his knees, grasped her ankles and yanked her down the bed and toward his waiting face when he sensed her blossoming shyness. He inhaled her scent. "I want to taste," he forced out before he separated her lower lips with his thick fingers and licked all the way up her center. Her thighs clenched around his head.

"Oh, my God. Oh, my God," she chanted.

Gideon drank her in until he could not breathe any longer. He ran his hands along her thighs, widening them and folding her legs back. Then he went at her again.

He teased her tight little clit with the tip of his tongue until she bucked under his mouth.

“You’re delicious, Kat. So sweet and luscious. I can’t get enough.”

“Gideon, please!” she screeched. He gave it to her, sucking gently on her while his tongue danced over her clit. She bucked and thrashed under him, but he kept at her, tonguing her hot flesh until he felt those little flutterings against his mouth.

He pushed his finger into her tight, dripping heat, bending it to tease the sensitive spot inside her pussy. He heard her take in a giant breath before her screams started.

\* \* \* \*

She clutched at him, trying to gain purchase on something before she flew apart. Katherine tried to stop her body from shuddering, but he worked the heel of his hand against her clit, and she was helpless against the hot, piercing sensations that streaked through her veins. Her hips countered his movements, gyrating against his hand, seeking another release. God, who knew she’d be such a greedy thing?

Gideon pressed his lips against hers, and his hazel gaze held hers captive. She could not look away. He looked like a wild man, his eyes darkening while a slow, smoldering smile formed on his lips. His thick, heavy cock pressed against her leg, and she knew he held back even as he teased the passion out of her. The depth of his experience and his control over her body intimidated her. She did not want to find out what would happen to her if he really got down to business.

Gideon stroked the hair back from her face. “I can’t wait to—” He did not finish his thought. His body tensed, and he lifted himself on

his hands, his head turning toward the door. He sniffed the air. “Get your clothes on!”

His urgency snapped her out of her post-orgasm trance.

“What? Why?” she asked as he threw her skirts down over her legs and yanked her off the bed and onto her feet. She started straightening her clothes when her nipples hardened. She looked up to find him staring at her. She raised an eyebrow. “Did you get me standing up only to stare at my tits?” she snapped.

“Fuck.” He quickly ran a hand over his face, then bent down to pick up his pants. He shoved his legs into them. Katherine stared at him, completely awestruck at the power and grace of his large body. His gaze raked over her. “Get yourself decent.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

“I smell smoke,” he said, buttoning his pants and shrugging into his shirt.

“What?” Katherine flew into motion, her fingers flying to button up her dress.

“Smoke. As in fire, which tends to bring about painful death.” He snapped.

Katherine stopped and sniffed the air. She smelled it now. She looked at the door and saw wafts of smoke starting to billow underneath. “Gideon...” She pointed at the door.

“Shit.” His eyes scanned the room quickly and landed on the wash basin. He grabbed it and threw it through the window. Then he seized the sheets from the bed, wrapped them tightly around his arm, and brushed the rest of the glass out of the way. He held his hand out to her. “Come on. You go first.”

“Excuse me?” she screeched. “If you expect me to jump out of a window two floors above the ground, you’re sorely mistaken.”

“Do you not see that fucking smoke, Kat?” He pointed at the door. “Can you not feel it starting to burn the inside of your nose? Get your fucking ass out of the window.”

Katherine hesitated. She was deathly afraid of heights. If she could have laughed, she would have. Sure, she could face off with a few drunken assholes, but jump out of a window?

“Don’t make me have to throw you.” He was dead serious. She it saw in the hard set of his jaw.

She looked at his face for a moment longer, then tiptoed to the window and looked over.

*Oh, dear Lord, the ground looks so far away.*

Katherine whipped her head around to glare at Gideon, her hair slapping against her cheeks. “You go first.” He glared at her, then nodded his head once.

Gideon kissed her cheek. “I’ll catch you, sugar.” He winked at her. The bastard still tried to charm her, even as they faced their imminent deaths.

Katherine stared at his graceful form as he swung his legs over the window sill, turned around, and let himself dangle in midair before letting go. She heard his grunt as his feet absorbed his landing.

“Your turn, Kat,” he called up to her, holding his arms up toward the window.

“Uh...I...I think I’ll just try the stairs, or...” She looked over her shoulder. The smoke billowing up under the door thickened in the past minute. Damn. Katherine looked at the door, down at Gideon, then at the door once more. Before she could think twice, she backed five paces from the window, got a running start, and flung herself out the window. She closed her eyes the second she felt the cool night air brush her skin. She was flying blind.

“Gideon!” she screamed.

Katherine flew into something hard and fleshy, knocking it over. A gush of hot breath blew the hair out of her face, and she cracked an eye open. “Am I on the ground?”

“Technically, no. You happen to be on top of me,” Gideon ground out. His voice sounded strangled to her ears.

She pushed herself up, using his shoulders for balance. He grunted. “Are you trying to kill me, woman?”

“What?”

“I can’t breathe.”

“Oh! Oh, I’m so sorry.” She scrambled off his body. While she dusted her skirts off, Gideon rolled onto his knees and got to his feet slowly.

“Christ’s balls, you nearly fucking killed me.”

“No, I didn’t! You told me you would catch me.”

Gideon narrowed his eyes at her. “Yeah, I told you I’d catch you, but fuck, woman! I meant I would catch you if you lowered yourself out the window like I did. Your blind flying squirrel act did not come anywhere near to carefully lowering yourself out the window! I had to run to catch you!” He advanced on her and the longer he spoke, the louder his voice got. “I think you broke one of my ribs,” he complained, rubbing his left side.

“What exactly are you trying to say?”

“I’m saying that you almost killed me!”

“Because of my large form?”

“No, not because of your large form.”

“Oh, so you think I’m large then, do you?” she yelled

“Jesus Christ, Kat, no! I never said that!” He held his hands up to her, placating.

She crossed her arms over her chest. “Well, it certainly sounded like you were complaining about—”

The sound of a gun shot erupting behind her cut her off. Katherine shrieked, and Gideon grabbed her by the waist and shoved her behind him. She saw a flash of silver and realized Gideon pulled a knife out.

“Where in the hell did you get that?”

He turned his head slightly but kept his eyes focused in front of them. “That’s a secret, sugar.”

“But—”

“Shh! Stay behind me.”

Katherine rose on her toes to look over his broad shoulders at the Red Door Saloon rising up in flames. Her room started burning, and she stared at the sight in abject horror. “Oh, my God, Gideon! My things! My clothes, my money! Everything is inside!” She stepped out from behind his body, taking two steps before he grabbed the back of her dress and threw her behind him again.

“Don’t you fucking go running in there like a chicken with its head cut off. It’s too late, Kat.”

“Gideon, please. Let me try and save something.”

“No.” His voice was hard. “You’ll die. Now stay behind me!”

Katherine saw Bessie come around the corner, shotgun dangling at her side and a full, heavy bag slung over her shoulder.

“Bessie!” she called.

Bessie looked at them and walked over. Her curls were a ball of fuzz on top of her head and soot covered her cheeks and forehead. A crazed smile lit up her face.

“That cocksucker Billy started that there fire. Set all my hard work to burn, he did. But I shot him in the ass!” She turned around and lifted her shotgun, aiming it at the form of a man crawling around the corner on his elbows. “You fucker!” she screamed. “Tell me one reason why I shouldn’t shoot you again.”

“Let me handle it, Bess.” Gideon put his hand on her shotgun and pushed it down. “Just stay with Katherine. I’ll take care of it.” He turned around and pinned Katherine with a hard glare. “Stay with Bessie. Don’t move, do you hear me?”

Katherine nodded, silent. With that, he stalked off toward Billy. The other man tried to turn around, but Gideon reached him, grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, and dragged him into the dark alley.

“Bessie, he’s going to kill him!”

“Aww, little darling, no he ain’t. He’ll prolly just drag him over to the sheriff’s and tell him not to treat that bastard’s wounds.”

Katherine felt the blood leave her face. “But what if they get infected?”

Bessie looked at her. In the orange shadows the fire cast, Bessie looked like an avenging devil. “So what if they do?”

“It’s just hard to imagine people are capable of such things.”

Bessie cackled. “Of course they are, sweet thing. But speaking of people being capable of certain things, how’d your big wild man do up in yer room?”

Katherine’s eyes flew wide. “I—”

“That good, huh? I knew it! Just lookin’ at him you would know. I bet he’s bossy, but he’ll make sure to treat you good.” Bessie nudged Katherine with her elbow. “You’re a lucky little thing.”

Suddenly the dirt under her shoes seemed extremely appealing. Bessie continued, “And you met his friend, right?” She wiggled her eyebrows.

“What about him?” Katherine asked.

“Oh, nothing, dearie. Nothing at all.” But the Cheshire cat grin on her face said otherwise.

## Chapter Six

Nathan paced back and forth in front of the large front door, his steps echoing off the marble floor. Gideon should have been back by now. The clock chimed midnight a while ago, and dark clouds covered the moon.

*Did he get lost? Perhaps one of the horses lost a shoe.*

Damn it all.

One of the servants walked into the darkened room. “Would you like something to drink, sir?”

Nathan stopped pacing. “No, thank you. I do not know how much longer I will be awake. You may retire now.” He turned his back to the servant, dismissing him.

Nathan moved his pacing to the foyer, then to the drawing room, where he finally sat in his favorite chair and brooded in the darkness. His thoughts wandered to what Gideon and Katherine might be doing. Was Gideon simply sitting and talking with her? Was he exploring her deliciously lush figure with his hands, tongue, and mouth? Nathan’s dick hardened at the thought despite his worry. Katherine was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. She was not beautiful in the way society women were. She did not need the bustles, corsets, and rouge. There was a natural beauty about her. A grace she exuded, one that did not need to be painted on.

He had been waiting for a woman like her for a long time. Although Gideon refused to admit it, he had, too. While their relationship was more than mutually satisfying and they understood each other better than anyone ever had, they both needed something a little softer, someone to love and cherish, someone to balance out

their rather large masculine egos. He knew the moment he laid his eyes on Katherine's wild hair and full lips that she was the one for them. He knew she would be the one to complete them.

Nathan sat up straighter in the chair. Were those voices he heard in his imagination?

"...stay here! What will everyone think? Put me down, you big oaf!"

Nathan smiled. She was so temperamental. He hoped she would be just as hot in bed. He wanted her writhing, begging, needy. He wanted to fuck her in the ass while Gideon pounded his thick cock in her pussy. He wanted to watch the two of them come before he took his own pleasure. Nathan rubbed the palm of his hand over his crotch, then rose to his feet to meet them at the door.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine could barely breathe when Gideon tossed her over his shoulder. It dug into her stomach and made it difficult to expand her lungs. The thing that truly took her breath away, though, was his tight ass. Jesus Christ, she loved watching it press against the seat of his pants.

When Gideon walked up to the door, he kicked it open, walked into a dark room, and threw her on a heavily cushioned love seat.

"You asshole!" she snapped.

"Aww, cut the act, sugar. You know you loved it."

Katherine could see his smile in the darkness and it infuriated her. It had been a long evening. Not only did two drunken bastards attack her, but she jumped out of a window to escape a burning building, rode in front of Gideon on a horse while he fondled her breasts the entire time, and then he manhandled her to get her into the house. On top of that, she lost everything—her clothes, her shoes, her cash. God, it all seemed so hopeless now.

"What the hell are you smiling about?"

“Because you loved it.”

“Loved what, you big, burly idiot?”

Gideon leaned over her, his heavily muscled arms caging her in. “Being manhandled, Kat.”

“I did not!” Oh, God, she did. After he intimately familiarized himself with her body, all she wanted was for him to throw her down, lift her skirts and finish what he started. She felt her pussy throb at the thought of it.

“You didn’t what?” a voice asked through the darkness.

Gideon did not move. “She claims she didn’t like me manhandling her.”

Katherine heard a chuckle and realized it came from Nathan. Her temperature spiked. The man epitomized lean, hard perfection. She did not let his refined manners fool her. He possessed a feral quality, just like Gideon, but Nathan gave off a different energy. Rather than Gideon’s rough, untamed wildness, Nathan exuded the cool, collected, sleek grace of a mountain lion. He was just as deadly and just as beautiful, but in a different way.

“I don’t like it! I’ve got my own mind, you know, and I know how to use it. Now let me up, Gideon, before I ruin the upholstery.”

She saw the slow grin dance across his lips in the darkness. “I can think of other ways to ruin the upholstery, Kat. I think you would love it.” He lifted his hand from the side of her head and tracked it down her neck, over her chest, down the side of her hip. “You interested?”

Katherine wanted to grab his hand and stick it between her legs. She hitched her chin up. “No,” she lied.

“Why would you ruin the upholstery, Katherine?” Nathan’s voice broke the tension Gideon created. He backed away from her and let her sit up straight.

“Billy set fire to the Red Door,” Gideon answered. “We’re both covered in a little soot and dirt.”

Silence filled the room before Nathan responded. “You must be joking.”

“No, I’m really not, Nathan. Kat and I jumped out of her bedroom window. We were two floors up, too. She nearly killed me!”

Katherine shot to her feet. “I did not!”

“Kat, you jumped out of the window with your damn eyes closed!”

“Well, I’m terrified of heights. If I hadn’t gotten a running start and jumped before I could think, I wouldn’t have jumped at all.”

“I knew I should have thrown you out first.”

“And I would have taken you with me, you—”

“Enough! That’s enough from both of you,” Nathan yelled. Katherine quieted immediately, her retort drying on her lips. Nathan Harcker did not yell unless he meant business. “Katherine, if you would not mind, would you please tell me what happened?”

Katherine explained everything that happened at the Red Door that evening, starting with the poker game and Billy and Mr. Davis’s violent behavior and ending with Gideon complaining about having to catch her. She conveniently left out the details about her amorous activities with Gideon. Nathan lit a few candles in the room and listened attentively to her story while Gideon supplied a few extra details.

“So she shot him, did she?” Nathan’s mouth quirked.

“Right in the ass,” Gideon added. The men shared a look, then they both started laughing. “You should have seen him crawling, Nathan. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“I’m glad I didn’t. I would have shot him where it counted.” All of a sudden, the laughter left Nathan’s face. He looked at Katherine, then focused on Gideon. “I’m surprised you didn’t kill him after he laid his hands on her.”

Gideon looked at her, too. “She needed me more than I needed to kill him. Believe me, if I could have slit the bastard’s throat, I would have.”

“As I said, I’m surprised you didn’t.”

“I am, too, but I saw the look on her face, and I knew that killing him would make things worse. Wouldn’t it, Katherine?”

She watched the two men with deep interest. It amazed her that they spoke in their own way to each other, that they could interpret each other’s expressions and tones. They must be very close because the only other person she could do that with was her sister, Anna. How Katherine missed her. She snapped out of her thoughts when Gideon addressed her.

“Yes, it would have,” she answered truthfully. Looking at Gideon in the flickering light and at the dirt on his clothing and the dressings on his arm, her heart lurched. He did everything in his power to protect her. He shielded her body with his. She could not remember a time when she felt so safe, so protected as she did when he held her in his arms. She knew on an instinctual level he would never let anything bad happen to her if he could prevent it. The thought sobered her. “Thank you, Gideon. I don’t want to think about what would have happened had you not been there.”

“You’ll never have to find out.”

Before she could say anything else, Gideon rose to his feet, his big body rippling with checked power. “I’m going to put the horse up for the night. I’ll be back in a bit.” He walked out of the room, and Katherine’s eyes followed his every step. His concise movements, so exact, gave off the impression that he did not waste any energy on frivolous action. His awareness of his body made hers tingle. He had been completely aware of her body, too.

\* \* \* \*

Nathan watched Katherine as she stared at Gideon’s retreating form. Something transpired between them. The sly bastard! Nathan had to give him a little credit. She was obviously attracted to Gideon, whether she admitted it or not. He could not wait to get his hands on her, too.

“You must be thirsty,” he said.

She whipped her head around when he spoke to her, her big eyes wide as if she did not want to be caught staring. Interesting. She recovered quickly, smoothing her features and wiping them clean of any telling expression.

“I’m parched. With all the smoke and riding over here, I don’t know how I didn’t die of dehydration.”

Nathan smiled at her, then stood and held out his hand for hers. She looked up at him for a moment, her face angled so he could see the beautiful outline of her cheekbones and the fullness of her lips. Heaviness pooled in his groin. She smiled demurely, then reached up to take his hand. He noticed that her fingers were fine-boned and delicate, the skin there as soft and delicate as a child’s. A piano player’s hands. When she stood, the top of her head barely grazed the bottom of his chin. He was a little taller and leaner than Gideon, but he still felt as if he were twice her size.

“What would you like? I have tea, water, a little whiskey...” he let his voice trail off.

“After tonight, anything but whiskey would be wonderful.” She smiled, but her eyes clouded. She looked up and met his eyes. Her warmth seeped through his clothing and touched his skin. “Tea sounds perfect.”

“All right, then. Tea it is.” Nathan led her toward the kitchen, her arm tucked into his elbow. When they arrived in the kitchen, Nathan set some water to boil and turned to look at her, surprised when she stood right behind him.

“Pardon me,” she whispered, looking a little abashed. She tried to back away from him. Nathan reached out and caught her arm, drawing her to him.

“No, it’s fine. I don’t mind you being so close, but what were you doing?”

Even in the semi-darkness created by the fire, he could see the blush on her cheeks and the rapid beating of her pulse at her neck. He

wanted to suck on her flesh there and feel her heartbeat under his tongue. She was a little sooty. Perhaps he should bathe her...

“I, um,” she cleared her throat, “I, well, you smell very nice.”

“Do I?”

She nodded. “Yes, like your tea.”

“I never realized. Thank you.”

She liked the way he smelled? God, he wanted to throw her on the table and have his wicked way with her.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine could not take her eyes off of Nathan while he prepared their tea. The way the muscles in his back rippled under his shirt with every movement made her heart do strange things in her chest. All of a sudden, an image of him sweating, heaving, his lean body flexing and rippling as he fucked her senseless bombarded her mind. What in the hell was wrong with her? She and Gideon just became intimately familiar with each other earlier.

His face was so beautiful with its ovular shape, high cheekbones and deep blue eyes that never seemed to miss any details. She loved how his honey brown hair brushed the collar of his shirt, giving him the appearance of a barely tamed man in a costume of expensive clothes. His mouth, though not as full as Gideon's, was still beautiful, its contours so graceful and expressive.

Nathan turned toward her balancing two cups of steaming tea on expensive looking saucers. “Here. Take this one. It has a little sugar in it,” he said, holding one out to her.

“Thank you.” Katherine brought the cup to her face and inhaled.

“Would you like to sit?”

“Oh, no. I'm worried I'll get everything dirty.” She set her cup on the counter and faced him.

“So, you never did tell me how you came to Carson City, Kat.”

She did not know how she would tell him or Gideon about her reasons for being there. She did not want to seem helpless, nor did she want to make either of them feel as if they needed to help her. She reached for her tea and blew on it, then took a sip. She felt his eyes on her the entire time. "It's a long story."

"I'm a good listener."

"Yes, but it's a very long and involved story with lots of tears and such. I don't want to bore you."

"Long, involved stories are my favorites. Especially ones that involve beautiful women like you." He reached out and tucked a loose tendril behind her ear, his fingers lingering on her neck. Katherine was so aware of his touch that she swore she could feel the ridges on the pads of his fingers. She took another swallow of her tea, its heat scalding the back of her throat. She did not know which made her flesh hotter, Nathan's touch or her steaming tea.

"My father died a few years ago," she started. She looked closely at Nathan's face. It remained impassive. "My mother died a few years before him. All of a sudden, my sister and I found ourselves on our own. For a while, we thought everything was fine, but we didn't realize that our father left us with a few debts."

"I didn't realize you had a sister. That must have been a difficult time for the two of you."

"It was. You have no idea. I'm decent at making soaps and candles, and my sister is excellent at sewing, so we pooled our talents together and sold our crafts to the local mercantile for extra money, but it wasn't coming in as fast as we needed it to."

"Do you have other siblings?"

"No, it's just Anna and me. She's the prettier one of the two of us."

"I'm sure you're wrong about that." His blue eyes looked black in the fire's light, and they focused intently on her face. She continued, looking at the buttons on his coat, trying to avoid his gaze.

“No. Anna is beautiful and very regal. I look like the cat dragged me in compared to her.”

Nathan laughed at her.

“I’m serious! She’s beautiful, and there’s no way around it.”

“There are other things that are more important than having a beautiful face.”

Katherine crossed her arms over her chest and cocked a militant eyebrow, her eyes finally meeting his. “And I’m sure men notice more than a woman’s face.”

“Yes, we do, in fact.”

“Thing like what? How nicely her corset works?”

His eyes grew even blacker, the depths of them staring straight through her and into her secret fears and insecurities.

Nathan shook his head, set his tea on the counter, and moved toward her. In the semi-darkness, he looked like an avenging angel coming to take her soul. Suddenly, his shoulders were too wide, his frame too tall, his eyes saw too much. Katherine took a step back, but the small of her back bumped into the cool counter behind her.

“We notice a lot of things.” He bent over her, his face hovering over where her neck met her shoulders. She felt his breath on her skin. “The way a woman smells, the way a few loose strands brush over her neck.” His face grazed hers, and she could feel its roughness. “We notice the way her skin glows in the light.” He pulled back and looked down at her. “The way her eyes widen with pleasure.” He brought his hand to her face. “The way her lips part a little when she wants something more.”

Damn her blasted body, but her lips did just as he said. They opened a little for him, and before she knew what she was doing, she licked them a little, feeling deep in her body that he wanted to kiss her. She watched as his eyes widened a little, then grew hooded as he lowered his face toward hers.

Nathan kissed her tentatively at first, his lips barely brushing hers until Katherine could not take it anymore and reached into his hair,

tangling her fingers in it, and yanked him down toward her. His lips were softer than Gideon's and less bruising. Nathan let her set the pace, though she sensed his checked hunger in the stiffness of his arms.

Katherine parted her lips for him, inviting him to sample, to taste. Nathan moaned into her mouth and followed her lead, wrapping an arm around her waist and drawing her closer to him. She felt his hard body underneath all of his clothes, felt his thick length pushing against her hip. Heat spread through her body like wild fire, sending hot, radiant pulses through her body to her nipples and pussy. She wanted his hands and mouth all over her, everywhere.

She sucked on his tongue when it entered her mouth. His body tensed against hers, then he snarled as he pushed her back into the counter, leaning her over it as he pillaged her mouth. The edge of it dug into her back, and she could barely breathe, but she did not care. All she wanted to know at the moment was what Nathan would be like once he completely lost his control. This was just a sample, she knew, and the depth of his passion, his sensuality made her yearn to discover it.

Katherine kissed him back, meeting his demands with her own, but she soon realized she no longer controlled their kiss. Somehow, he let her think she was in control, let her think she held the reins, but as he pressed his lips against hers, then moved them to suck on her neck where her pulse beat like a tattoo against the skin, she knew she had never been in control at all.

\* \* \* \*

God, she tasted good. And her skin smelled like tuberose and a hint of lavender. It did not matter dirt and soot covered most of her dress. She was the hottest, most responsive thing he ever had under him. Her lips, soft and demanding under his, kissed him back with

sensual abandon, and Nathan could not help but be amazed at how hard she clung to him and how feverish her skin became.

He moved his lips to her neck and sucked on the skin under her jaw where her pulse raced. She let out a strangled sigh that went straight to his already hardened dick, making it jump in the confines of his pants. He wanted, needed her to be closer to him.

Nathan ran his hand from around her waist down the rise of her hip, then around to her perfectly rounded ass. He kneaded her flesh there, and he felt her legs widen just a fraction before she tried to rub herself against him.

“What do you want, Kat?” he whispered in her ear, taking the lobe between his teeth before gently sucking on it. She gasped, and her fingers went from his hair to jacket, yanking him more fully on top of her.

He heard himself grunt, then pulled her ass up toward his erection, wrapping her leg around his waist. He ground his pelvis against hers, making sure his hardness rubbed against her in just the right spot.

Nathan pulled away from her face and watched as her head fell back onto the counter and her mouth fell open. She pressed her breasts against his chest and pulled on the lapels of his coat. He was not about to give in to her. At least not right now. He wanted their first few times to be about her.

He slipped a hand under her back and pulled her up so their faces hovered inches apart. He felt her breath against his face and the heat emanating from her clothes. He kissed her once more, a hard, bruising kiss. She squeaked when he set her down right on the edge, her wide eyes meeting his in confusion. She tried to scoot back, but he pressed against her lower back, letting her know he did not want her to move.

He kissed the corner of her pouty, kiss-roughened lips, then moved to where her jaw met her neck, and finally to the sensitive patch of skin against her collar. His hands trailed up and down the sides of her body, memorizing her curves. She tensed when his fingers skimmed down to the hem of her dress and lifted it.

Nathan's eyes met hers as he lowered himself to his knees in front of her.

"Nathan," she whispered with her eyes wide and lust-filled, and her heavy bosom heaving.

"Yes?" He was eye level with her knees now, and the seams of his pants seemed to be having trouble with not breaking under the pressure his cock exerted. He lifted her dress with reverent care, exposing the sensual curves of her calves, her knees, her creamy thighs, her glistening pussy. His whole body clenched. She did not have any undergarments on.

"Wha...what are you...what are you doing?" Her voice sounded breathy.

"What does it look like I'm doing?" She tried to move her thighs closer together, but he slid his hands up her legs and pushed them apart. "Stay still, Kat," he said before he buried his face between her thighs.

Nathan lapped at her, licked her, sucked on her until she trembled and swayed above him. He felt her fingers weave into his hair and pull as her moans turned into whimpers and screams, but he did not care.

"Come for me, Kat," he commanded against her skin.

"I...I can't."

"Yes, you can."

"No. I'm going to f-fall." Her voice shook as badly as her legs.

"No, you won't. I'll catch you, Kat. Now come for me." He spread her labia farther apart and pulled back the hood covering her clit. Slowly, he slid another finger inside her wet pussy, bending it until he rubbed the tip of it against her sweet spot. Then he put his mouth to her again. Her body bucked against face.

"Nathan! Stop...I can't..."

He rasped his tongue against her exposed clit. She swayed above him, then held on to his shoulders, her fingers digging into the fabric, twisting.

“Oh, God. Oh, my God.” Her hips bucked to meet his tongue. “Nathan, oh my God, Nathan I’m—” She did not finish her sentence. Her whole body tensed, then shuddered, his name a shriek on her lips.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine screamed Nathan’s name as pleasure so sharp it bordered on pain pulsed between her legs, then burst through her entire body like a violent beam of light. She could not control her body’s tremors and spasms, could not stop her voice from screaming. Just when she knew her body was going to slump backward, Nathan’s powerful arms caught her and held her against his sinewy body. If these men kept doing this to her, she would die before she ever saw morning.

Her world tilted and spun around her, but she did not care. Her whole body was limp and spent. She opened her eyes and realized Nathan carried her out of the kitchen and into the dark hallway. She heard another pair of footsteps and tensed when she realized they belonged to Gideon. What would he think?

Katherine looked at Gideon in the darkness, saw the rugged plains of his face, the angular set of his jaw, and her body turned inside out with yearning for him. She yearned for him, for Nathan, for the two of them. She wanted to be with both of them. She wanted Gideon for his hard gruffness, for the raw way he dominated her body and her sexuality, for the way he protected and challenged her. She wanted Nathan and his sleek charm, his fallen angel beauty, and for the way he made her feel like a cherished, beautiful woman. Nathan coaxed rather than demanded, as Gideon did. She did not know which she preferred. She just knew she wanted, needed, them both.

“Can you walk?” Nathan asked in her ear.

She shook her head. Her knees felt too weak. A slow grin broke out on his face. “Well, then, we’ll just have to undress you ourselves.”

He transferred her to Gideon's arms, and Katherine felt like a small child rather than a grown woman.

"On second thought," she mumbled as she tried to disengage herself from Gideon's strong grip.

"Just a minute, sugar," Gideon whispered against her lips before he brushed them over hers. "The stairs might be a little difficult for you in this state." He winked devilishly at her before he turned on his heel and walked toward the stairs with Nathan right next to them.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine felt warm and light in Gideon's arms as he walked up the stairs with her. Her gorgeous ass rubbed against his hardened dick while he walked, and her body heat seeped into him even through all of her skirts.

When he walked into the house and heard her throaty moans, all he wanted to do was get his mouth on her while Nathan worked on her, too. If Nathan wanted to suck on that tight little clit of hers, then he would happily run his tongue over her sensitive nipples while his hands kneaded the soft flesh of her breasts. Fucking hell, his dick was harder than it had ever been just thinking about it.

Gideon kicked the first door he saw open and deposited Katherine on the bed. He heard Nathan close the door and walk to stand next to him, both of them staring at the woman lying in the middle of the large, plush bed. Gideon saw her eyes shift between the two of them. Saw her throat bob a little as she swallowed.

The corners of Gideon's mouth lifted as he reached to unbutton his shirt. Her eyes widened, and she started to scoot up toward the headboard.

"Don't move, Kat," he said, his voice low and dark. He finished unbuttoning his shirt, shrugged out of it, and let it fall to the floor in a soundless heap.

She watched him, her gaze following his every movement as he toed off his boots and unbuttoned the top button on his pants. He walked toward her and crawled up the bed. Katherine's eyes flicked over his shoulder to Nathan. Gideon turned his head to look, too, and saw Nathan with his tie hanging loose at his neck and his shirt tails pulled out of his pants. Gideon lowered his eyes to the other man's crotch and saw the sizeable bulge forming there. He looked back at Katherine.

"Excited, are you?" She met his gaze eyes, her own looking as if he were a giant beast hunting her.

"Wha...what are you talking about?"

"Well, you know what we're going to do, don't you?" Gideon reached out and snagged her ankles, guiding them out from under her skirt and pulling her toward him as if she weighed nothing.

Again, her eyes flicked to Nathan over his shoulder, then focused on Gideon. "Yes." She blushed.

"I'm giving you one chance, sugar. Tell us now if you don't want this, because the way things are looking, I don't know if we'll be able to stop once we get started." He put his hand between her breasts and pushed, lowering her onto the bed. He crawled up over her, nipped her ear lobe. "Tell us now."

Katherine took a moment to answer. "All right."

Gideon cupped her breast and kneaded it through her clothing. "All right what, Kat?" He felt the bed tip and saw Nathan out of the corner of his eye. He watched the other man pick Katherine's hand up and kiss her fingertips, her palm, the inside of her wrist. She whimpered under him. Gideon ripped the collar of her dress open and brought her closer to his mouth. "Answer me, Kat." He nipped on her collarbone, then ran his tongue over it, trying to torture a response out of her.

Instead of answering him, Gideon felt her nails sink into his shoulders and yank him up. Her mouth slanted toward his, and she kissed him, biting his bottom lip before her tongue asked entrance to

his mouth. Gideon let her control him, but just for a moment before he reached up to her face and cupped it in his hands, changing the angle of their kiss and letting her know who was really in charge. He pulled away before things got out of hand.

He looked over at Nathan, who took off his tie and held it between his hands. They shared a grin before Gideon crawled off Katherine's body and got into position behind her, letting her recline between his legs as Nathan kneeled in front of her.

Gideon saw Katherine's chest heaving. He leaned down and whispered, "Look at Nathan, sugar. He's got a treat for you." Her body tensed when she saw what Nathan held.

"What is that for?" Her voice shook with desire and fear.

Nathan smiled at her as he reached for her hands. He wrapped his necktie around her wrists. "We can't have you flailing around, now can we, Kat?"

"You do move around a lot when you're coming," Gideon added.

"Yes, you do. You almost fell off the counter a few minutes ago," Nathan said as he finished binding her wrists and put them in Gideon's hands.

\* \* \* \*

Nathan's hands went to the hem of Katherine's dress, and he grabbed handfuls of it and yanked it up to her hips, revealing her swollen, glistening pussy.

"Oh, God," she moaned.

Nathan's fingers wrapped around her ankles and slid up her legs, his thumbs massaging up her labia, separating them to reveal her tight clit. He went at her like a mad man, already starving for her taste even though he just feasted on her a few minutes ago. She gasped, and Nathan looked up her body to see Gideon holding her restrained hands back with one hand, the other slowly creeping under the collar of her dress and toward her tits.

Perfect.

Nathan bent his head and lapped at Katherine again, the pad of his tongue massaging, delving, licking until her body bowed up from the bed. The sound of her heaving breaths filled the room along with the sounds of fabric scraping cloth and the soft, wet sounds of Nathan going down on her. He felt her legs tighten around him before she cried out, her eyes wide and blind as she came, rocking herself against Nathan's tongue.

They did not give her any time to recover. The moment her body relaxed, Gideon ripped her bodice open, revealing her firm, milky white breasts to them. Her pink nipples puckered when the air hit them. Gideon groaned and bent over her, his tongue flashing out before taking a nipple into his mouth and sucking on it. Katherine moaned and struggled up toward him, but her restraints kept her in place.

"More," she pleaded. "Oh, please, please."

"Soon," Nathan said as he pulled her dress down over the flare of her hips, her thighs, her dainty ankles. "Gideon." He breathed. "Look."

Gideon looked up from Katherine's breasts, his mouth still working on her flesh. Nathan saw his gaze roam over her body and the heat grow to an inferno in his eyes and knew Gideon felt the same way he did, completely awed at Katherine's beauty.

Her curvy, feminine body was not too thin and had a lithe quality to it. Nathan watched, entranced, as Gideon's mouth left her heaving breasts and his fingers pinched her nipples once more before gently trailing over her ribs, down into the indentation of her waist, and over the flare of her hips before he kneaded her lush ass.

"You are so fucking perfect," Gideon whispered to her while he brushed a soft kiss over the rise in Katherine's lower belly. Then he got off the bed, reaching for his pants and undoing the buttons with his thick fingers.

Nathan tossed her dress on the floor and took off his own shirt, letting it fall. He felt his cock bulge with excitement. Katherine was going to be perfect. She was the only woman whose passion could match their own and, for a moment, he felt humbled. But the moment quickly passed when he looked at her writhing body.

Her legs sawed back and forth and revealed glimpses of her swollen, juicy cunt, and when his eyes flicked up higher on her body, he saw her heavy tits swaying as her body undulated. Nathan never felt such a strong urge to throw himself on a woman's body, bury his cock deep inside her hot pussy and fuck her until they were both spent. He undid the buttons on his pants and shoved them down his long, toned legs and took his dick in his hand, spreading the pre-cum around its bulbous head.

"Do you see what you do to me, Kat?" Nathan stalked toward the bed, still working his hand up and down his long, thick shaft. He watched as her eyes roamed over his body and landed on his cock. Her eyes widened and darkened. Her tongue flicked out over her lips. She nodded her head.

"Answer the question, Kat," Gideon growled as he came to stand next to Nathan, his heavily muscled form glowing in the dim light.

Nathan wondered what they looked like to her, two tall men with thick, heavy arousals standing in front of her like the feral animals they were when they were around her.

"Y-yes," she sputtered.

"Do you know what we want to do to you, Kat?" Gideon continued.

She shook her head. "I think so," she whispered.

"Give me your wrists," he commanded. When she presented them, Nathan went to her and untied the knots at her wrists, freeing them. Katherine pushed herself onto her elbows, eyeing them with wide, heavy-lidded eyes.

"Touch yourself, Katherine," Gideon said, his voice low and dripping with arousal.

Nathan's cock bobbed. Shit. He would come just looking at her delicate fingers brushing over her hot little clit.

Katherine's mouth slammed shut and her lips pursed together.

"I said touch yourself, Kat."

"I am not going to do it."

"Yes, you will. You'll love it. You'll see," Gideon coaxed.

"No, I—" She could not finish her sentence. Gideon leaned over her, grasped her wrists in his big hands, and pulled them up. Katherine fell backward onto the bed. Gideon took her lips in a bruising kiss, then pulled back. He guided her hands toward her feminine mound.

"I've never done this before," she whispered.

"It's all right. Nathan and I will guide you through it. Now touch yourself." Gideon's voice pierced through all of them, their anticipation rising to unexplored levels.

Nathan watched with bated breath as her fingers slowly floated toward her pussy.

"Dip your fingertips into your sweet juice," Gideon commanded, his voice rough and tight.

Nathan watched as Katherine widened the distance between her knees, revealing her soft curls, her glistening pussy, and her rosebud clit. He swayed as he felt the last of his blood leave his head and rush to his groin, making his dick pulse and bob.

Her fingers brushed over her cunt, bathing them in her slick, sweet pussy juice.

"Spread your lips," Gideon grunted.

Katherine let out a shaky breath, then her other hand moved to her crotch and her fingers parted her labia.

"Now touch your tight clit, Kat. Touch it now," Gideon demanded.

Katherine looked at the two of them for the space of a heartbeat, then her fingers went to her clit, barely flicking over it. She took in a high-pitched breath, her surprise and arousal evident in her shocked

eyes, in the perfect O of her lips. Her fingers pressed a little harder, rotated a little faster, and her head fell back on the bed. She looked so fucking beautiful laying there, her knees folded and set wide, her gorgeous cunt weeping while she played with herself, her face barely visible between the valley of her breasts.

Nathan almost fell to his knees when Gideon took Nathan's cock into his hand, squeezing tight and massaging slowly up and down his shaft. Nathan's head snapped back and he felt his hair tickling the skin at his shoulders.

"Fuck, Gideon." He groaned when he felt Gideon's thumb flick over the tip of his cock.

Gideon squeezed harder. "Watch," he commanded.

Nathan brought his head back up, his eyes focused on Katherine, who panted and writhed on the bed, her heels digging into the sheets, pushing them toward the foot of the bed. Her soft whimpers commanded the room.

"She's about to come," Gideon said, sounding hypnotized, his eyes riveted to Katherine's fingers as she rubbed and caressed herself.

Nathan watched, his senses torn between feeling Gideon's hand working between his thighs and watching as Katherine's hips started pumping against her hand and her breasts jutted up in the air, her back coming off the bed. She cried out as she climaxed, her body tightening and jerking at the same time. Just when Nathan thought he was about to come, Gideon's hand loosened its grip and left him on the edge of one of the biggest orgasms he would have ever felt.

"Goddamn it, Gideon."

A smile raked across Gideon's mouth and his eyes glinted with an erotic light. "Not yet, Nathan."

\* \* \* \*

Katherine's body collapsed against the sheets, her groin still pulsing after her orgasm. She felt deliciously sated. She ran her still

soaked fingertips along her rib cage, around the sensitive undersides of her breasts, and found her nipples. Whether they tightened because of the cool air whispering over them or because of her arousal she did not know. All she knew was that the center of her suddenly felt very empty, and she wanted it to be filled. As her eyes flicked up toward the two large men in front of her, she knew what she wanted.

She took them both in. Nathan with his sinfully beautiful features and his lean, hard body stared at her as if she were the most beautiful thing he ever laid eyes on. Her heart soared in her chest and threatened to break out of the confines of her ribs. She sucked her bottom lip into her mouth and chewed on it while her eyes took in the rest of his form. His muscled chest, his lean and flat torso, his...*oh, my...*his thick arousal pointed at her proudly, a tear beading at the end of it. Another rush of wet heat moistened the tops of her thighs. She swallowed heavily, then looked at Gideon.

Gideon stared back at her, not bothering to hide the raw, erotic glint in his eyes. When he looked at her, Katherine felt skewered with his gaze. She felt like he could see through her bluffs, through her clothing, through every artifice she put up right into the very core of her, and it scared the shit out of her. He knew what she wanted on an instinctual level, and she knew she would love every second of it. His body was heavily muscled and hard, without any scrap of extra fat on him. Veins wrapped around his powerful forearms, his jaw ticked while he looked at her, and his cock jutted out from his warrior's body, heavy and virile.

She could not wait for them to love her.

Gideon made his way toward her first, bending down and licking slowly, forcefully between her folds and around her clit before kissing the tops of her thighs, her belly button, her collar bone. He touched her with such tenderness, his lips soft as butterfly wings against her skin, that Katherine opened her eyes when he took her lips with his own to make sure it was truly him. Who knew a rough man like Gideon would be capable of such gentleness. He massaged her lips

with his own, his body undulating over hers, his hardness rubbing between her lower lips.

Katherine kissed him back, but when his cock brushed against her sensitized clit, she tore her lips from his, moaning. “Oh, God, Gideon.”

She felt him smile against her mouth. “I never claimed to be God, but it works for me, sugar.” He surged against her again, and she clutched at him, writhing, her nails scratching at the startlingly soft skin of his back.

“Please, Gideon, take me,” she begged.

He bent his head and kissed her where her ear met her neck. She shivered.

“I would love to, Kat, but I don’t think I can control myself. I want you so fucking bad.” He surged against her once more, then Kat felt something hard and blunt pressing against her entrance. Gideon bit gently at her neck, stifling a groan. He was hot and hard against her. She wanted him to thrust into her until he could not go any farther. She wanted him to fill her, to claim her. He pressed more of himself in, and she felt her body answering his demands with a rush of hot wetness between her legs.

Gideon released a heavy breath against her skin. “Jesus Christ, Kat. You’re so tight I can only get the head in, but it’s fucking amazing.” He groaned against her flesh and his weight, his heat sank into her. She never wanted anything more than she wanted him inside of her. She wrapped her ankle around his, but he pulled away, the head of his cock leaving with him, the absence of his weight making her feel oddly naked. He kissed her face, her cheeks, her eyelids, and her nose. He pressed his forehead against hers for a moment, the intimacy making her eyes burn with tears. Then he was gone, pulling her shoulders up so he could sit behind her.

Katherine’s eye locked with Nathan’s as he inched his way toward her.

“I don’t know how gentle I can be,” he breathed as he laid himself on top of her, his body warm against hers. He supported his weight on his elbows and he kissed her softly, reverently as he brushed his thumb against her clit.

Katherine writhed against him, her hips mimicking the rhythm his hand set. Nathan hooked an arm under her leg and stretched it up, her knee level with her chest, as he guided his throbbing cock toward her pussy, his thumb never leaving her clit. She watched, riveted, as the thick head of Nathan’s cock pressed against her most intimate flesh, her body both accepting his hardness and pushing it away, her untried cunt so tight he grimaced.

“You feel amazing, Kat,” he said between clenched teeth.

She watched as beads of sweat broke out across his hair line, but the erotic pressure of his cock against her entrance and the piercing pressure his thumb created against her clit left her breathless and limp. With one hand she grasped Nathan’s muscular arm, and with the other, she gripped Gideon’s thigh, her nails digging deep. She heard Gideon suck in a breath between his teeth, and his hand wrapped around her, just under her breasts, and pulled her firmly against him, his fingers rolling, kneading her breasts and playing with her tight nipples.

Sensation took over her body.

Katherine felt the pressure between her legs and knew it should be painful, but between Gideon’s ministrations on her breasts and Nathan’s delicious, continuous friction over her clit, she knew she was on the verge of coming again.

“Nathan,” she whimpered, her grip on his arm increasing.

“Yes, Kat?” He kissed her forehead, pushed into her another inch. Katherine’s head fell back into Gideon’s chest, and he dropped hard, wet kisses on her neck.

“Nathan, I’m so close.”

“Look at me, Kat,” Nathan demanded. When she raised her head, she saw his deep blue eyes turn black with barely controlled desire.

His thumb moved a little faster, pressed a little harder. She wiggled her hips, trying to get away from the intense pleasure billowing within her. It was going to be bigger than anything she ever felt, and with the added pressure of his cock seated half way within her, she knew her pleasure would be full, complete, over the top. The size of it scared her, intimidated her.

“Nathan—”

“Look at me when you come, Kat. Right in my eyes,” he commanded, and off she went, her mind going blank as her body shuddered and convulsed. Waves of heat and pleasure crashed through her, lighting her body up and making it feel weightless and heavy. She heard herself screaming, felt Nathan’s blunt hardness shove into her pussy, filling her.

Somehow her hands latched onto his shoulders, her mind needing something solid to hold before it flew into pieces. Still in the throes of her orgasm, she felt him withdraw, then press back in, the pressure bordering on pain and pleasure, her overly sensitized clit throbbing when his heavy cock brushed over it. Katherine felt her eyes roll back in her head and her body go limp.

It was too much.

“Open your eyes, Kat,” a voice said in her ear. Gideon. His tongue ran over the delicate edge of her ear, then over her ear lobe. She leaned back into him and felt his hard arousal digging into her back. “Watch, Kat.” His big fingers gently turned her head, bending it so her eyes took in the erotic sight of Nathan flexing his hips, his flat stomach constricting, the muscles there rippling as he pressed forward and pushed his thick cock into her body.

“Oh, my God,” she moaned. He felt delicious inside of her, the friction he created making her pussy wet. It tightened around him, clinging.

Nathan’s shoulders bulged with holding up his weight, and every muscle in his arms stood out under his skin. He was so beautiful. Katherine leaned toward him and kissed him, wanting to be closer to

him. He kissed her back roughly, moaning from the center of his chest. His strokes sped up and his hips pistoned into the hot space between her legs.

“Shit. I’m going to come.” Nathan shoved his cock into her. Hard. He threw his head back, the tendons in his neck popping out. His dick pulsated within her. Watching him while he came, while he trembled within her, was intimately erotic.

Nathan collapsed against her, and his breath heaved out of him. His broad back rose and fell quickly. His hands stroked up and down her sides while Gideon supported both of them before saying, “Now it’s my turn.”

Katherine’s head shot up off his shoulder. “What?”

Nathan’s love making had been beyond pleasurable, beyond intimate and erotic. He made sure to make her come, to be gentle. Gideon was different. Katherine did not know if she would be able to survive him.

“I thought we might be able to wait—”

“I’ve been waiting, sugar.” Gideon nipped the sensitive flesh of her neck. “And watching you come while Nathan rode you made me harder than I have ever been.”

Katherine gulped. Oh, God. She felt herself growing aroused all over again. Even as Nathan pulled himself out of her and she felt empty at the loss of his heat, she wanted Gideon to fill her, to brand her as their own. Her cunt clenched at the thought and she felt a hot, liquid rush between her legs.

\* \* \* \*

Gideon wrapped his fingers around Katherine’s ribcage and lifted her with the strength of his arms.

“Wha...what are you doing?”

“I told you, sugar. It’s my turn.”

He watched as Nathan made room for Katherine on the bed, and when their eyes met, Gideon said, "I think she's a little antsy, don't you think? Should we calm her down a little more?"

"I think that," Nathan glanced down at Katherine, "is a delicious idea."

"I thought you would agree. Up you go, sugar." Gideon lifted Katherine to her knees.

"But this—"

"This is going to be so fucking good, Kat. I promise," Gideon crooned. He lifted the thick tangle of hair from the back of her neck and kissed her there. "When we're done with you, you won't be able to move." He slid a hand from her rib cage up her back, following the gracefully delicate column of her spine. He fanned his fingers out between her shoulder blades and pushed.

"I don't understand," she whimpered. She tried to resist.

"You will." Gideon snaked his other hand down her front, over her belly, and to her wet pussy. He stroked and twirled, demanding pleasure from her.

"Gideon!" Her fingernails dug into his forearm.

"That's it, sugar." He kept at her, wanting her liquid and pliable. He felt her back loosen, and her legs lost their strength. He pushed harder against her back, and when he felt her leaning forward, he tightened his grip around her middle and leaned against her, his arm absorbing their weight when his hand hit the mattress.

He hovered behind her, a wild animal about to claim its mate. Gideon knees her legs farther apart to make more room for himself and straightened, wanting to look at her. *Jesus*. She was beautiful, her shoulders and ribcage narrowing into her waist, which flared wide at her hips. Her ass was the most beautiful thing he ever laid eyes on, all lush and fleshy and just for his and Nathan's eyes. His dick swelled even more.

Gideon ran his hands over Katherine's sides, starting at her ass and going toward her shoulders, watching as the distance between his

hands rose and fell along with her curves. The differences between their bodies amazed him. She felt breakable in his arms, and for a moment fear overcame him. What if he hurt her? But then she grabbed one of his hands and pulled until his face hovered next to hers, the stubble on his face grazing her porcelain skin.

“Stay close to me,” she whispered. “I can’t see you.”

Something expanded in his chest, something a little painful and big. “I’m right here. I can see everything from the freckles on the back of your neck, to the little bumps of your spine, to the indentation at your waist. I’m looking at you even if you can’t see me.” He kissed her between her shoulder blades, inhaling her warm scent as he put his hand between her legs again.

She arched into him, fusing their bodies together. Gideon stifled a groan when she rubbed against him, her hips bucking to the rhythm his fingers set between her legs. Out of the corner of his eye, Gideon saw her mouth pop open, heard her moan his name. He quickened the pace and pulled her closer to him. He glanced up at Nathan, signaling for him to get ready, but he tore his eyes away from Nathan’s when he felt Katherine’s body tense under his, heard her sharp intake of breath before her orgasm slammed into her. He yanked her up when her arms gave out, pulling her up onto her hands, supporting her body weight, making room for Nathan when he slid head first under Katherine’s body and grabbed her bucking hips, bringing them to his awaiting mouth.

Gideon could not wait any longer. Still holding on to Katherine, he positioned himself behind her, then thrust himself into her hot, glistening pussy. Her fleshy cunt grabbed on to him, sucked him in farther, refusing to let him go.

Coarse, foul words burst from his mouth when he heard Katherine cry out as she thrust her hips back onto his dick. Her juices coated his cock.

She gripped him so hard.

Gideon threw his head back in ecstatic bliss and let his hips swing back and forth freely. He gave up trying to control his pace when he entered her. Controlling himself did not seem to be an option with Katherine.

He looked over her shoulder. Katherine sucked Nathan's dick into her, her full lips gliding over the head of his engorged cock. Gideon felt his balls tighten at the sight. *Fuck*. He was about to come. He felt the pressure building in his balls and thrust harder into her tight pussy, eliciting a heavy moan from her.

Just a little longer, he thought to himself, but when he felt Nathan's hand come up from under Katherine's body to cup his balls and fondle them roughly, Gideon let out a harsh sound, something between a bark and a growl, and groaned out his release.

## Chapter Seven

Katherine closed her eyes and leaned her head back, letting the warm rush of water seep through her hair and down her shoulders. Nathan's hands squeezed the excess water out of her hair, then kneaded the flesh just above her shoulder blades.

"Oww!" she complained.

"It's a really big knot, Kat. I need to get it out," Nathan insisted, his thumb pressing deeper into her tender muscles. That is what she got for sleeping squeezed between two big men.

The strength in Nathan's hands never ceased to amaze her. She never would have thought his aristocratic fingers could generate such strength, such pleasure.

She felt heat rush to her face. They passed the last few days sleeping, waking, eating, fucking, and bathing. Nathan took a bath almost every day, and he insisted that she and Gideon join him.

Katherine opened her eyes and caught Gideon's hazel eyes. In the soft morning light he looked almost sweet. There was always something wild about him, especially in his eyes. She could not see his hands under all the bubbles and judging from that mischievous grin on his face, his hands were up to something.

"Gideon, what are you—" She broke her sentence off when his big hand slid up her calf, over her knee, and over the sensitive skin of her thigh to her aching clit. A soft moan left her throat, and her body tensed, then relaxed under Gideon's skillfully demanding fingers.

She felt a thick finger sink into her cunt and bend upward, swirling, finding the spot inside her passage that made her squirm and

buck. Her eyes fluttered closed of their own volition, and she leaned back into Nathan, his hard body absorbing her weight.

“More,” she whispered, taking her bottom lip between her teeth. *Oh, God*, it felt so good when Gideon went slowly. It would not last long, she knew. He only held his hunger for her in check for a short while, then the wildness came through. And she loved it.

He fed her pussy another finger, and the friction felt delicious as he stroked her clit and cunt at the same time. Heat pooled between her legs, and she heard the sound of their ragged breathing and the soft lapping sounds the water made against their shoulders.

Nathan’s hands moved from her shoulders, down her arms, and cupped her breasts. “Mmm. Harder, Nathan.” She pressed Nathan’s hands to her chest, urging him to give her what she wanted.

“You want it rough, Kat?” Gideon asked in an oddly low voice.

Katherine snapped her eyes open and regarded his hard, beautiful face. He stared back at her, his hazel eyes revealing nothing. Damn.

“Yes,” she said and left it at that.

“How rough, Kat?” he asked as he spread her nether lips, exposing her clit to his fingers. They pressed harder against her, rough, commanding, demanding both her answer and her pleasure.

She spread her legs wider and her knees poked out of the water.

“As rough as you’ll give me,” she panted.

Nathan’s fingers glided over her nipples. They beaded in response, begging for his attention. He pinched and rolled them between his fingers, sending jets of hot, luscious need to her cunt. She needed it to be filled, fucked. Now.

Nathan dipped his head toward hers and whispered in her ear, “You shouldn’t have said that.” Suddenly, Nathan’s hand shot out of the water and grabbed her legs under her knees, pulling them to her chest.

“Nathan! What are doing?” she screeched.

“We’re giving it to you as rough as we want, Kat.” Gideon’s eyes darkened dangerously with lust.

Katherine felt Gideon's hands grip her hips and bring them out of the water. Nathan's body braced hers, absorbing her weight as Gideon brought her exposed cunt to his mouth. *Oh, God.* If she thought she was turned on before, she had been delusional. Her pussy wept in anticipation of what Gideon planned for her while her mind shied from it, intimidated by their sexuality, their hunger.

"God, Kat, if you could just see your pussy right now, all swollen and glistening and fleshy." Gideon's voice sounded hoarse to her ears. His gaze went past her shoulder and straight to Nathan. Gideon licked his lips before giving her a feral grin, then dove at her clit.

Katherine's hands gripped the side of the copper tub until her fingers went numb. She felt nothing but Gideon's tongue dancing roughly over her clit while Nathan played with her tits, supporting her weight as she thrashed around, water spilling everywhere.

Just when she dangled on the edge of coming, she felt Nathan slip his hand down her lower back and into her ass cheeks, his fingers seeking her tight hole. She tensed, jerking her pussy out of Gideon's mouth. He shot an angry glance at her, tightened his grip on her hips, and went at her harder.

"Give it to me, Kat. I want to feel you come against my face," he demanded against her sensitive flesh.

"But, Nathan is—"

"Come, Kat. Now." Gideon lowered his head once more, the tip of his tongue shooting out to lap and lave at her until her body burst, released from its tension by the powerful orgasm rocking through her.

Even through her ecstasy, she felt Nathan's thick, blunt finger prying and stretching her back entrance, her bucking and undulating making it sink into her quick and easy. She felt invaded, the unusual pressure stretching and filling her.

She tried to breathe, but Gideon would not let her. He went at her again.

Gideon helped her ride it out. She felt him lower her back into the water, the palm of his hand swirling and pressing against her feminine flesh, pressing her ass back into Nathan's awaiting hands.

Katherine felt Nathan grip her waist and press another finger into her opening. The stretching sensation was painful, and she tried to jerk her body away from him, but Gideon started at her pussy again, delving two fingers between her lips and into her tight channel while his thumb stroked her swollen, sensitive clit. She gasped.

"I'm too sensitive, Gideon," she whimpered.

"No you're not, Kat. Trust me."

"No, Gideon, I—" She felt him ease away from her sensitive bud as he shoved another finger into her pussy. "Oh, Gideon," she moaned. "Like that."

"You like that, Kat?" he goaded, his voice low and seductive.

"Uh-huh."

"Your break is over then." His thumb worked over her distended clit once again. "You're going to come for us again."

Nathan's second finger entered her ass, and she flinched a little from the pain but opened her legs wider for Gideon's touch, starting to enjoy the feeling of the two of them working her from both sides.

Slowly, Nathan's fingers started to swirl around in her ass. She wiggled around, trying to get used to the feeling when he brushed against a spot in her untried channel. She took a sharp breath and said, "Right there."

"Right where?" Nathan asked in her ear, his breath barely brushing over her skin. He pinched her nipple, rolled his palm over it while his other hand found the spot in her ass again. Katherine tensed. "Right here?"

She nodded her head.

"Like this?" Nathan pressed harder against it.

"Oh, God, Nathan." She pushed her hips back toward him and he pressed again, slowly starting a rhythm in the back while Gideon worked on her clit. Together, they pushed her up toward coming

again, the unfamiliar sensations Nathan drew out of her body combining with the intense, demanding pleasure Gideon gave her. They sent her flying, coming apart, screaming.

They did not let her ride this orgasm out. The moment she felt the overwhelming pleasure pooling in her groin and erupt throughout her body, she felt herself being lifted from the water, her slippery, writing form supported by a strong set of arms. She struggled against Gideon. Her legs wrapping around his middle, she pressed her throbbing cunt against his lower belly and ground herself against it, needing something to help her ride it out, something to stabilize the throbbing, the pounding, the pulsating.

Vaguely, she heard him growl, felt the vibrations in his chest against her nipples. Then her world spun around her and she landed on top of Gideon. He lifted her up and rammed her down on his hard thickness, his hands on her hips as he pressed her crotch against his, rocking her back and forth almost violently. She threw her head back, her wet hair sticking in thick curly ropes against her back as she rode him. Hands against her back pushed her down toward Gideon's face and he reached up, grabbed one of her tits, and sucked her nipple in his mouth. Katherine cried out and held his head against her chest, demanding he suck her harder, faster.

She felt something pressing between her ass cheeks, gentle yet firm against her back hole. It was too big and broad to be Nathan's fingers. Her eyes flew wide when she realized it was his cock. She froze, but Gideon bucked under her, his pelvis arching up into hers and hitting all of her sweet spots. Katherine could not help but follow Gideon's hips, especially when he switched breasts, suckling on her other nipple, silently telling her that she would enjoy what they planned for her.

As Gideon continued to pump into her, she realized somewhere in the back of her mind that Nathan did not forge into her. Instead, he held his cock in place, letting her impale herself on it of her own accord when her hips bucked backward from Gideon's thrusts. With

Gideon inside her, though, the pressure from her ass intensified. And while it was not as painful as before, she knew that having the two of them inside her at the same time would fill her to bursting. She did not think she could handle that.

“Wait,” she protested, scared of what they demanded of her body. Gideon’s thrusts slowed, but he continued to push into her, making sure her clit dragged over him as much as possible. She put her hands on his chest and pushed away from him, keeping her back bent and the head of Nathan’s dick lodged in her ass. “I’m not sure about this.”

“About what?” Gideon said, his hazel eyes starting at the undersides of her tits.

“Damn it, Gideon!” She covered her breasts with an arm. “I’m being serious. I don’t know if I can handle this.”

“What? The two of us? Sure you can, sugar.” He wiggled his eyebrows when his dick jumped in her pussy, making her clench around him.

“No, I really—” She felt Nathan’s hands press against her back, kneading her.

“How about this, Kat?” Nathan pressed in a scant inch, then stopped. Katherine let out the breath she held so tightly in her chest. It hurt. There was no denying that. But she only felt pain when he pressed into her. After her untried muscles adjusted around him, she wanted more. “What if Gideon stays where he is, not moving, and we see how much of me you can take.”

Gideon stopped his gentle thrusting and looked up at her expectantly. She felt Nathan’s gaze boring into the back of her neck. Katherine knew they waited for her answer. If she said no, they would back off. She did not want them to.

“All right,” she conceded.

Gideon looked up at her, his eyes lighting up with the erotic glint she became so familiar with over the past few days. No matter how many times she saw it, it still affected her as if it were the first time. The depth of his hunger for her still astounded her. And Nathan’s

attentions always made her feel feminine, important, and desired. Together, they made her feel like a beautiful, sensual woman. Something she never thought she would be.

Nathan pushed into her again.

“Breathe,” Gideon whispered below her. He reached up and took her breast in his mouth. The gentle pressure sent rivulets of pleasure to her groin, pooling heavily there. She could not forget to breathe now. Her constant gasping made it impossible for her body not to loosen up, to try to accept Nathan’s thickness into her body.

Her fingers dug into the pillows and sweat broke out over her skin. She hung, suspended, between pleasure and pain, unknowing of which one controlled her.

Nathan groaned behind her, released a heavy breath that puffed over her skin in bursts. “I’m in. Christ, I’m in.”

Katherine felt full to bursting. The two men inside her were not small men by any means, and the same went for their cocks. She did not know how they fit inside of her, but as the pleasure bloomed within her, she started not to care.

Gideon moved first. Slowly, gently, with more restraint than Katherine thought he possessed, he pushed higher into her. She sucked in a breath and held it, afraid of the pressure amassing in her body.

“Breathe,” Gideon said. His fingers slid over her skin like delicate wings. He touched her hair, her face, her hands, wrapped his fingers around hers. He moved again, his pelvis grinding against her clit.

Katherine felt Nathan move, his hips countering Gideon’s soft thrusts. He pushed in while Gideon pulled out. She perched on top of Gideon, her thighs spread wide, and her back bent at her hips, exposing her ass to Nathan’s ministrations while Gideon sucked on her nipples.

Her body took them easier now, and she relished in feeling so full, of being so completely taken by these two men who took care of her own needs before their own. She knew in some deep recess of her

mind that they would never hurt her, would never push her toward something she did not want. In that moment, she trusted their intimate knowledge of her body and their desires for it.

She focused inward on the hot mass of bliss building in her body. She closed her eyes, feeling the heavy push and glide rhythm Gideon created, the friction so lusciously erotic she could not help the weeping rush of wetness in her cunt. Her breathing increased, her hips pumped tentatively, her fingers curled into the sheets.

They moved with her, letting her set the pace. She moved faster, the excitement building, their hips pistoning in and out of her, countering each other, never letting her experience a moment of emptiness. The friction they created inside of her built upon itself, growing, expanding, the sweet spots in her pussy and her ass throbbing and pulsing, begging for a little more.

Nathan's hand fanned out between her shoulder blades and pressed, bending her forward. He surged deeper within her, and she moaned something incomprehensible before Gideon cursed, sank his fingers hard into the flesh on her hips and fucked her harder, Nathan following suit.

The sounds coming out of her mouth were jumbled and passion-filled, her panting and raving filling the air with the heavy, wet sounds of them fucking her.

"Oh, God, oh, God," she chanted when the pleasure crested. The feeling ripped violently through her, making her shudder on top of Gideon before her orgasm started, her thighs squeezing his sides, trying to bring him closer to her, trying to find an anchor in the overwhelming wave crashing through her. Katherine's whole body shook with the force of it. She shrieked when she came, her uncontrollable cries reflecting the raging, erotic currents coursing through her.

Katherine heard rough grunts accompany her screams, dimly felt their control snap when she started bucking against them. She

collapsed on top of Gideon, her eyes closing when her cheek touched his chest.

\* \* \* \*

When Katherine peeked through the veil of her eyelashes, soft, delicate light filtered through the curtains. Gideon, his big body producing as much heat as a fire, lay next to her on his back, one arm thrown over his head while the other splayed over her leg. She smiled at the sight. He was territorial and possessive even when he slept.

She looked down over her body and saw the thin top sheet barely covered half of her. Heavy and sure-footed steps echoed in the hallway and stopped in front of the bedroom door. Katherine barely managed to yank the sheet up to her chin before the door swung open on its hinges and Nathan walked in holding a tray of food and coffee.

“You’re awake. I didn’t expect you would be.” He put the tray next to her. For some reason, she noticed his feet were bare and his pants and shirt had wrinkles. This had to be the first time she saw Nathan Harcker disheveled.

“I felt like I was burning up.” She blew the hair out of her eyes and sat up, keeping the sheet over her breasts.

“He does tend to radiate heat.” They both looked at Gideon’s sleeping form, imposing even when relaxed.

Katherine smiled, laughing quietly to herself while she straightened up and leaned against the bed’s headboard. “He really does. If I ever find myself trapped in the wilderness without a blanket, Gideon would suit just fine.”

“I’m sure there would be other things he would have in mind besides just keeping you warm, Kat.” Nathan’s eyes gleamed. She tried not to blush.

“How long have we been asleep?”

“Well,” Nathan took a china cup and asked, “cream and sugar?”

“Please.”

He prepared her coffee and handed it to her. “Well,” he continued, “Gideon has been asleep only for a few hours. He doesn’t really sleep the entire night through, but when he does, he sleeps well.” Nathan glanced at the other man. Katherine did, too, noticing how pretty Gideon’s features were when relaxed. “You can see what happens when he finally sleeps. You, however, have been sleeping since late afternoon yesterday.”

Katherine almost spilled her coffee. “Since yesterday?”

Nathan smiled, then lifted his cup to his lips. She smelled the citrusy scent of his bergamot infused tea. “You were quite,” he took a sip, “exhausted.” His eyes filled with heat, and Katherine felt her blood rushing faster through her veins. Yesterday’s experience branded itself on her mind. The memories would always be there, the images of Nathan and Gideon filling her completely, unleashing her passion. Her body heated up of its own accord and she felt some of it reach her cheeks. “There’s no need to be shy, Kat.”

She sipped at her coffee for a few moments, stalling. “I know. I’m just so,” she searched her brain for the right word, “I’m so shocked that it could be that way. That *I* could be that way.”

“What do you mean?”

“I always had an idea about what happened between men and women behind closed doors. But I never thought that what we did, I mean, I never...it’s just that I never thought of myself as a particularly passionate person, I suppose.” She could not meet Nathan’s gaze. She played with the ends of her hair, fretting her lip.

Nathan reached out and took her hand in his and turned her face toward his. His eyes glowed in the soft light. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of. You just found out the depths of your passion and caught a glimpse of our desire for you.”

Her mouth fell open. “A glimpse?”

“Yes, you heard correctly. However, what I’ve never heard was how you came to be here.”

Katherine wrapped her hands around her cup and twiddled her thumbs together. “What do you mean?”

“How did you get here? Why did you come? Not that I’m not glad you’re here, but I’m just curious.”

She pressed her lips together, thinking about how much to tell him about herself. She did not want him knowing everything about her. Some part of her wanted to keep some of her secrets to herself. After all he and Gideon discovered about her, after they stripped her naked more than just physically, there were some parts of her that she did not want to share. When she looked back up at him, however, and saw his fallen angel face looking at hers, she knew she could not lie to him.

Katherine sighed heavily and ran her fingers through her wavy, knotted hair. She leaned more of her weight against the headboard. “When my mother died, my father wound up with my sister and me. I don’t think he ever recovered after my mother’s death. I know for sure he didn’t know what to do with two little girls, especially my sister. He’s the one who taught me how to play cards.” She smiled to herself, remembering the first time she beat her father at poker. She saw the shocked look on his face, could see how the corners of his moustache twitched.

“Where is your sister now?” Nathan asked.

“I had to leave her behind in the Wyoming Territory to come here. I didn’t know what else to do. The debts started piling up and our creditors started visiting us once a month, demanding money. The visits turned into once a week, and I decided I had enough. They threatened to take our home. I had to do something, so I gathered what money we could spare and came here.”

“And you ran into Bessie.”

Katherine laughed. “I don’t think anyone just runs into Bessie. She has her own way about her, don’t you think? Anyway, yes, I found the Red Door, and Bessie gave me a place to stay. I started winning money, but when the saloon burned down, I didn’t think of

salvaging anything.” She covered her face with her hand and blew out a breath. She had been so stupid. Why in the hell did she not think to grab her tin box with her money? She could slap herself.

“So you lost everything?” Nathan asked, bringing her out of the self-hating reverie. She brought her coffee to her lips once more, not wanting to admit that she did not have anything to her name anymore other than the clothes she wore the night of the fire. “Kat?”

She pursed her lips together and clenched her jaw. “Yes,” she forced out, “but there are a few games I heard about from Bessie. I can earn everything back quickly. I have to.” Her sister depended on her, and just as important, she needed to prove to herself that she could make things work on her own, without anyone else’s help, including, and most importantly, without either Nathan’s or Gideon’s help. The thought of relying on a man, or men in her case, to solve all of her problems made her feel weak and inadequate. She and her sister survived this long without men. They could continue to do that.

“Katherine—” Nathan started.

“No.” She cut him off, her temper flaring and her voice hard. She knew what he wanted to offer, and she did not want any of it.

He looked taken aback, his blue eyes narrowing in suspicion. “No, what?”

“No, I don’t want any of your money. I can do this on my own.”

“Kat.” He put his tea cup down. His eyes met hers. “Kat, just hear me out—”

“No, Nathan, you listen to me. I don’t need your help.” Katherine could hear her blood swishing in her ears, and her hands trembled with anger. There was no way in hell she would let him spend what to him would be pennies on bailing her out of her family’s debt. She shoved her coffee cup into his hands so hard some of it sloshed over the rim and landed on Nathan’s pants. On any other day, she would have felt bad about her terrible manners. Today was not that day. Katherine threw the sheet off her body, crawled over Gideon, and

stomped, naked, to the closet where her dress hung. One of Nathan's servants washed it for her.

She heard him uncurl his body from the bed and walk over to her. Gideon stirred. She grabbed her dress and whirled around, pulling it over her breasts and covering her naked form. She felt vulnerable enough knowing this man could pay for her debts with an hour of work. She had no desire to be even more naked in front of him than she already was.

"Get away from me!" She nearly yelled when Nathan got too close. He backed two steps away from her, palms facing her.

"Kat, calm down. Where do you think you're going?" Looking at his face, Katherine knew he was pissed off, but he acted like a gentleman. "If you truly want to leave, then, please, let me provide transportation—"

"What the fuck is going on?"

*Shit.* Gideon woke up and he looked furious.

Katherine lifted her chin. "I'm leaving, that's what is going on."

Gideon jumped to his feet, his heavily muscled form stalking its way to her faster than she could yank her dress on over her hips. "What the hell do you mean you're leaving? Leaving where? To see Bessie?" His eyes looked her over, from where her dress covered her hips to her bared breasts.

"No." She turned around, giving them her back while she wiggled her arms into her sleeves and buttoned the front up. Silence surrounded all of them. She turned around and faced them, happy to have one piece of armor against them, even if it was only the dress covering her nakedness.

"Well?" Gideon pressed.

She brushed past them and sat on the bed, yanking her boots on her feet. They stood over her like two flesh eating giants. "I am leaving." She stood up, her back ramrod straight.

"No, you're fucking not!" Gideon's voice hardened when he was mad. He was not a man who yelled.

She looked him dead in his hard, angry eyes. “Yes, I am. I am a grown and independent woman.”

“The fuck you are! You need us as much as we need you.” He stepped toward her, towering over her, trying to intimidate her. His huge chest heaved.

She shoved at it but only managed to push herself back. “Don’t you fucking try to scare me, you big lout!” she screamed.

Nathan pushed his way between them, shoving Gideon back and stopping his approach with an arm. He looked at her, his eyes icy cold. “I don’t think this is a good idea. What do you need? Is it money? I have more than enough. Just take some and don’t ever leave.”

“I don’t want to be indebted to you, too. I set out to do this on my own, and I goddamn will do it that way! I don’t need either of you to help me,” she said, fuming.

Gideon stomped toward her, but Nathan shoved him back once more. “You’re not fucking leaving, Kat!” His voice was hard as steel and his eyes matched his tone. Nathan struggled to hold him back.

“You can’t tell me what to do. Just because I had sex with you doesn’t mean you own me!” That stopped them both dead. Gideon stopped shoving Nathan back and Nathan’s arms dropped, his face stunned.

“What did you just say?” Nathan broke the silence, his voice cold and brittle.

Katherine shoved her shoulders back and met their eyes. “You heard me.”

Gideon growled and shoved past Nathan, his hands curled into huge fists as he approached her, his steps landing heavily on the floor. His whole body shook with anger. “You belonged to us the moment I saw you,” he seethed between clenched teeth.

“I don’t belong to anyone!”

“You fucking do, Kat! Don’t you forget it!”

“Oh, please. Like you’re the only ones who are capable of doing that to me,” she goaded.

Katherine saw her barb struck deep. Gideon’s eyes flared wide and his jaw ticked. He took another step toward her, but Nathan’s hands landed on his shoulders and pulled him back.

“Calm down, Gideon.”

“She fucking—”

“I know what she said, Gideon, but don’t do or say anything you might regret.”

“No, she needs—”

“What *both* of you need is to simmer down and take a few minutes to calm down,” Nathan said, gripping Gideon’s shoulder and managing to plant him in one spot.

“What I need,” she said, interrupting their scuffle, “is something neither of you can give me.” The look in Nathan’s eye told her that he would not let Gideon follow her out in anger. At least one of them knew when to give a lady some space.

With that, she opened the door and snapped it shut behind her.

## Chapter Eight

“Where the hell is she?” Gideon yelled at Bessie while pacing back and forth. He felt as if he might explode and shoved his fist into the saloon’s charred wall to blow off some steam. Nathan looked at Gideon’s now blackened and battered hand and sighed. Gideon knew his mate grew accustomed to his bouts of violence against inanimate objects when angry, but that didn’t mean Nathan agreed with it. He didn’t know how Nathan could be so calm and collected during a time like this. He was so dignified and quietly beautiful. Their Katherine was gone and they had to get her back.

“Don’t you yell at me, Gideon.” Bessie glared at him. “You may be big and strong, but don’t think for one second I won’t pop you over my knee and spank you like a child. You’re certainly acting like one.” She exhaled deeply and went back to going through the rubble that was left of her saloon. Bessie planned to salvage what she could before moving on to do whatever else destiny planned for her. Gideon’s face flushed with embarrassment. He knew Bessie was right, and nobody but Bessie could put people in their place as bluntly and assertively as she did.

She put her hands on her hips and turned back to him. “You probably scared the poor girl off with all your huffin’ and puffin’. Kat’s a headstrong girl. Reminds me of myself when I was young. She wouldn’t take too well to someone bossin’ her around.”

Gideon didn’t respond to Bessie’s remarks because, again, he knew she was right. He wiped the soot off his knuckles and then crossed his arms over his chest.

“We have to find her, Nathan. She could be hurt or in trouble.” Gideon felt a knot forming in his throat as he feared the worst. He looked up at the sky to will the tears threatening to form from welling up in his eyes. He hated crying and always fought like hell to keep it from happening. “We’re supposed to protect her! Fuck!”

“We just have to think this through.” Nathan stood there with his hand rubbing his chin, deep in thought. “What was the last thing she said to you, Bess?”

“Like I said, she came by here a few hours ago and told me she was just here to say goodbye. She said she was leavin’ town, but didn’t say where she was goin’.”

“Shit, I hope she isn’t going back to the Wyoming Territory. She could be in another state by now.” Gideon put his face in his hands and took a deep breath.

“But she can’t go back to the Wyoming Territory. She lost all her money in the fire and she can’t go back without it. I just wish to hell she wasn’t so goddamn stubborn and would just accept some money from me.”

“Ha!” Bessie interjected. “Again, you should’ve known better. Katherine’s too headstrong to just take somethin’. Don’t tell me you tried to force it on her like some buffoon.”

For the first time that evening, Gideon saw Nathan drop his cool demeanor and he looked sheepish.

“It’s just money. I don’t understand what the big deal is.” Nathan shrugged his shoulders as if in defeat.

“The big deal is that Kat needs to feel like she can do things on her own. She don’t want no help. Not from you, not from anybody. I don’t know how you two fools can’t see this when I can see it plain as day.” Bessie sighed and went back to picking over what remained of her saloon.

“So where would she go to get money? It’s got to be a poker game, but where? Gideon, think. Have you heard of any poker games nearby?”

It panged Gideon to see his Nathan look so worried and tense. And then, it struck him. “Damn, it’s so obvious. I can’t believe my thick head didn’t think of this before.” Gideon threw his arms in the air. “There’s a big tournament in Reno tonight. She’s got to be there.”

“But that’s hours away.”

“Then you boys better get goin’. Reno’s a tough town. I know Kat can take care of herself, but it’s hard to stay out of trouble in a place like that.”

“Shit, let’s go.” Gideon and Nathan jumped onto their horses and took off. As Gideon headed toward Reno, he heard Bessie call out after them.

“And don’t forget. You can’t force that girl to do nothin’! Good luck!”

\* \* \* \*

This was it, Katherine thought to herself as she looked at the three other men at the table. She had slipped out of Carson City and headed to Reno for the region’s biggest poker tournament. She made it up the ranks and was playing the final round. If she could win the next two hands, she would win the entire tournament and have enough money to get out of this godforsaken place and leave Nevada altogether.

And Gideon and Nathan, too, she thought with a pang of sadness. But who was she kidding. As right as it felt, she didn’t have a life in Carson City and so couldn’t have a life with them. She put a large stack of chips onto the center of the table.

The other men at the table surely hated her guts right now. She was beating all of them, and nothing angered these brutes more than being beaten by a woman, especially one they took for a stupid ninny. In her head she smiled as she maintained the stony facade of her face.

“Hey, you know who you look like?” Carl, the man across from her, sneered. “You look like this titty dancer I seen before.”

Katherine looked at him and rolled her eyes. She ignored him, but he kept staring at her.

“No, I’m serious. Jim, you knows what I’m talking ’bout. You know that dancer we saw last night. She looks a lot like you, sweet thang. You been doin’ a little dancin’ on the side?” He slid his hand under the table and tried to grab her leg.

“What the hell are you doing? You nasty bastard, don’t you dare touch me!” All the men at the table let out hearty laughs.

She felt revolted and wished they would stop making up nonsense to rattle her. It wasn’t going to work. She would win this game and laugh at them all the way to the bank.

“So you wanna cootchie-cootchie dance with me? Shake those soft tits in my face?” With a lecherous grin on his face, Jim shimmied his shoulders while holding imaginary breasts in front of him as if weighing them back and forth.

*Wow, they sure think they’re hilarious.*

Katherine felt like she would puke.

“Shut the fuck up. You are such idiots. Just fucking keep your mouths shut and your eyes on your goddamn cards.” Katherine couldn’t believe how committed these guys were to this ruse.

Carl wouldn’t stop eyeing her. “No, it ain’t you. She’s prettier.”

Katherine kept her eyes on her cards.

“And you know, I think I remember her name. It was Amy, no...Ann...somethin’ like that. Anna. That’s it, it was Anna.”

“Did you say ‘Anna’?” Katherine stared intently into his eyes to gauge whether or not he told the truth.

Carl’s eyes perked up as if he knew he finally touched a nerve and made progress at distracting her. “Yep, that’s what I said. Why?” He sneered. “You know her or somethin’?”

Katherine looked away, hoping her obvious alarm hadn’t marred her stony poker face. “No, no I don’t. Just curious.” She let a few minutes pass by and then she asked, trying to sound as casual as possible, “So, where is this girl? What was her name again? Anna?”

“What’s it to you?”

“Well, if you say this girl looks like me, I’d like to see with my own eyes.” Katherine tried to look flirtatious and innocent and batted her eyelashes. She felt ridiculous but would be willing to burp *Amazing Grace* wearing nothing but a smile and a strategically placed cowboy hat if it would get her information that would help her baby sister out of trouble. “Maybe if this whole poker thing doesn’t work out, me and this floozy could make a good team?”

“Yeah, it’s good for a lady to have something to fall back on, like that round ass of yours.” Jim cackled with laughter as he bent back trying to eye Katherine’s behind. He finally wiped the tears from his eyes and took a few breaths to settle down from his *hilarious* joke before going on. “If you really do want to check her out and start a titty dancin’ team together, let me know. I sure would like to see that.” He eyed her lasciviously and his tongue ran over the stained nubs that were his teeth.

“Right, so the name of this place?” Katherine pressed in exasperation.

“I think it was Ruby’s Loose Caboose Bordello. Ruby’s got lots of nice lookin’ pieces of ass running ’round her place.” Carl let out a long whistle.

“Did you say ‘bordello’? As in where women go and get paid for...” Katherine could hardly think of what her sister had gotten into let alone say the words out loud.

“For bumpin’ uglies,” he finished, with a big shit-eating grin on his face. “Yeah, Ruby usually has her girls dance burlesque for a few days before to break ’em in.” He looked up as if counting days in his head. “I’d say, it’s any day now that that pretty little Anna stops the cootchie shakin’ and starts pushin’ it.”

“Maybe onto my fat dick,” Clyde interjected. All the men at the table laughed heartily. Katherine felt disgusted, appalled, and more than anything, afraid for her sister. She still had another hand to play before the tournament ended. If she left now, she’d lose all the money

she had played so hard to win. All the time spent with these repulsive men would be wasted. But if something happened to her sister, something that she could have prevented and she didn't, Katherine would never forgive herself. Katherine thought for a moment, but the choice was obvious. Either lose money or lose her sister. Losing her sister meant losing everything. If she couldn't save the house, at least they'd still have each other.

Katherine pushed herself away from the table and stood up.

"Hey, missy, where the hell do you think you're goin'?" You can't just leave in the middle of the round," Carl said, sounding bewildered at her sudden action.

*"Is the widdle lady scared of losin' to these big ole' men?"* Jim said in a high-pitched baby-talk voice.

"No, of course I'm not scared. I just realized I have someplace to go that's more important than hanging out with you filthy bastards!" she snapped.

"Ahh, forget it. She's a woman. What'd you expect? We all knew she didn't have a chance. Just dumb luck and she knows it. That's why she's leavin'. There's no way a woman could ever win at this game." Clyde looked her up and down, and then dismissed her with a grunt and went back to his cards.

Katherine leaned in and got right into his face, forcing the man to look up. She could smell the smoke and liquor coming off his skin. He was putrid. She jabbed a finger into his chest.

"You listen here, you nasty piece of trash. You know very well that I could have won this game." She stood up and pointed to the rest of the table. "And you all are the ones with the dumb luck that I have to leave. I challenge each and every one of you to another game some day, an open challenge. But right now, I have better things to do than take the money of unfortunate losers who aren't man enough to get their own ladies and instead have to pay for it. So, you keep your money 'cause having it is the only way any woman would come near your feeble excuses for dicks." She spat her words out instead of

spitting on each of their faces, which she would have preferred. As a lady, she was taught to avoid spitting in public at all costs, even if it was at trash.

The men sat there, mouths agape in shock. By the time their surprise turned into rage, Katherine was already long gone.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine walked into the bordello and scanned the room for her sister, keeping an eye out for Anna's head of lush, blonde curls. On the stage were three beautiful girls, dancing and shaking their "titties" just as the men at the poker table had described. She had to admit they were beautiful to watch, but she thought her sister could offer more to the world than just her body. When this was all over, she hoped Anna would see that too.

Across the room stood a tall woman with the most amazing cleavage Katherine had ever witnessed. Dressed all in dark red satin and crowned with a shock of glowing red hair that cascaded down her back like a waterfall. This must be Ruby. She was surrounded by a crowd of nice-looking and wealthy men. Every apparently witty thing the men said had Ruby throwing her head back in a singsongy laugh. She clearly mastered the art of flirting. Katherine eyed her and thought better than to attract her attention. Surely this woman would have qualms with someone coming here to take away one of her girls. Katherine knew that what she saw as rescuing, Ruby would likely consider to be stealing.

Katherine had to find her sister, but she had to ask questions without raising Ruby's suspicions. She spied a young girl sitting by herself in a corner throwing back shots. She must have just started working at the bordello and looked nervous and scared and obviously hoped the liquor would give her the courage to flaunt herself in front of these men's leering eyes.

“Hi, my name is Katherine. How are you?” She sat down beside her and tried to be as nonthreatening as possible.

“Listen, I don’t do girls, okay?” the girl slurred, exhaling a thick cloud of whiskey breath and then turned away from Katherine. Katherine put her hand on her shoulder and tried to get her attention again.

“No, that’s not what I’m after. I’m trying to find someone. Her name’s Anna. She probably just started here.”

“Yeah, I know her. She got here a few days before me. She’s really pretty and so nice. She has the best dresses, I hear, ’cause she designs and makes ’em herself. I wondered what a girl like her was doing in a place like this.” The girl’s head bobbed side to side. Katherine looked at the four empty shot glasses before her and realized the room was probably spinning for the young woman by now.

“Do you know where I can find her?” Katherine now held the girl by both shoulders and looked intently into her eyes, hoping she was just sober enough to give her the information she needed. The girl shut her eyes for a second and Katherine gently nudged her awake. “Please, I really need to find her. It’s very important.”

“Okay, okay.” The girl shrugged Katherine’s hands off of her. She pointed to a winding staircase. “I think she’s upstairs in one of the private rooms. Ruby promoted her from dancer to courtesan today.” Katherine’s stomach turned and then clenched in a tight knot. She might already be too late.

“Thanks.” Katherine quickly got up and crept up the stairs, keeping an eye on Ruby the entire time, praying that she wouldn’t turn away from the men she courted. Katherine swallowed hard as she steeled herself for the task before her and looked at the long hallway lined on both sides with closed doors. She really didn’t look forward to having to open door after door, disturbing whatever happened behind them. Before she had to suffer the embarrassment of barging in on a tawdry sex scene between some lecherous old man and a

young girl using the only thing she thought she had to get ahead in life, Katherine heard a scuffling sound. It came from the last room at the end of the hallway.

She walked over and put her ear against the door and heard arguing.

“Get away from me, you dirty old man. Don’t touch me! Don’t you dare lay a finger on me,” a girl’s voice said.

“Listen you whore, I already paid for this and I’m gonna get my money’s worth, whether you give it to me...or I take it.” Katherine heard a crash. “Goddamn it, Anna. You stupid bitch!”

*Anna.*

Katherine heard a crash and then a loud groan. Her blood went cold.

Before her mind could catch up with her reflexes, Katherine pushed open the door. It was then, staring into the stunned faces of her sister and this horrible lecher, she realized she had no plan for getting her sister out safely.

“Katherine!” Anna cried out. The room was in complete disarray, and a lamp lay broken on the floor in a heap of broken glass at the man’s feet. The sheets on the bed were crumpled and Anna and the man stood on either side of the bed.

“Who the fuck are you?” the man slurred as he grabbed a large glass shard from the floor and tottered toward Katherine. Of all the men in this town who Katherine had been unfortunate enough to meet, this one was particularly disgusting, fat, and greasy with a thick, crusty mustache and a face full of graying stubble. He looked as if he hadn’t bathed in days if not weeks and smelled like an ash tray dipped in booze and urine. Katherine nearly gagged just standing near him and she couldn’t imagine what her poor sister felt. She prayed that the man hadn’t gotten too close to Anna and by the looks of the shiner forming on his face and her sister’s rosy knuckles, he hadn’t.

Without saying a word, Katherine grabbed a chair by the door and lunged at the pervert who paid to deflower her sister.

*That is, if she hasn't been deflowered already.*

Katherine pushed back the awful thought and let her body act in pure, instinctual self-preservation. She forced him into a corner like a lion tamer pushing a filthy beast into submission. Already drunk, he was easily outmaneuvered. Meanwhile, Anna jumped onto the edge of the mattress while holding a half empty bottle of whiskey high over her head. At just the right moment, she sent it crashing down on him, bathing him in liquor and broken glass. The man instantly passed out.

Katherine dropped the chair to the floor and stood there breathing heavily. Her heart pounded, terror racing through her veins, and felt as if it threatened to explode. She looked at her sister who fell in a heap onto the bed. She looked exhausted and frazzled, her hair completely disheveled and her dress torn in several places. She had a few scrapes and minor bruises but otherwise looked unharmed.

“Did he—”

Anna shook her head no.

“Are you—”

She shook her head in the affirmative, but Katherine could see tears welling in her eyes. Katherine collapsed onto the bed beside her sister and smothered her in a warm and grateful embrace. Anna sobbed into Katherine's shoulder while she soothed her by caressing her blonde curls with her hand.

“Thank you,” Anna said between sobs. “I don't know how you knew, but thank God you found me.”

\* \* \* \*

Nathan and Gideon walked into Ruby's, and Nathan immediately felt assaulted with the smell of perfume, sweat, alcohol, and smoke. The room teemed with people. The women covered themselves in lace and satin and adorned themselves with sequins and big plumes of feathers. Their faces looked as if they had been garishly painted on, and Nathan appreciated that Katherine didn't dress like that and didn't

feel the need to cover her lovely face with such tacky artifice. The men were a sad lot, each one seedier than the next, and he shuddered at the thought of any of them laying a finger on his beloved Katherine.

“Shit, Nathan, look at this place. Just the thought of Kat being here fuckin’ kills me.” Gideon had a pained look on his face as he surveyed the room.

When they arrived at the tournament, they were shocked to hear that Katherine left before the game finished. They knew something terrible must have happened to pull her away. And only one thing could have been more important to her than winning that game and that was the safety of her sister. The men at the tournament hadn’t been forthcoming with information, that is, until Gideon threatened to pummel their faces in. Then they practically fell over themselves to tell Nathan and Gideon about their conversation with Katherine and her uncanny resemblance to a dancer named Anna and how strangely interested Katherine had been. It made him sick that Katherine even sat there at that table full of pricks.

And here they were.

*Where the hell could she be?*

The men said something about how Anna was probably about to be promoted to whore, and Nathan couldn’t help but roll his eyes at that.

*Promoted to whore?*

That didn’t seem like a step up to him, but then again, the West was a completely different world with different standards.

“Do you see her?” Nathan asked. Gideon clenched his jaw while glaring at the debauchery before him and shook his head. Then his face fell in what had to be fear and concern, probably thinking the exact same things Nathan thought. They never agreed on anything as much as their love and delight for Katherine. Even the sex between the two of them had been more loving and passionate than ever before. Somehow, as stubborn and nerve-wracking as she was at

times, she brought out the best in them. If anything happened to her...he couldn't even bear the thought.

"If Kat and Anna aren't here, I bet you they're up there." Gideon pointed to a stairway that led upstairs.

Nathan and Gideon headed swiftly up the stairs to the hallway where poor girls sold themselves to survive.

Nathan surveyed the hall of doors. "Jesus, look at all these rooms. How are we ever going to find her?"

"If we have to bust every goddamn door down, I will. Private pussy's as sacred to me as to any other man here, but we're talking about Kat here." Gideon punched his right fist into his left palm as if readying himself for a fight.

"Maybe the sanctity of private pussy will be preserved tonight. There's an open door at the end of the hall."

"Shit, do you hear cryin'?" Gideon and Nathan both looked at each other, and a cold shiver raced down his spine. They rushed over and Nathan prepared himself for the worst but hoped for the best.

"Katherine, thank God you're all right," Nathan said. He breathed an intense sigh of relief when he saw the two women on the bed, both in one piece.

"I'm fine. We're both fine." He rushed over and held his sweet Katherine in his arms. "How'd you know I was here?" She paused as Nathan looked her over and checked that she was completely unharmed. "I said I was fine. This is my sister, Anna." Nathan went to shake her hand, but instead Gideon practically trampled him as he raced over to Katherine and grabbed her arm.

"What the hell were you thinking? We were worried sick about you. You could've been hurt or, worse, killed!" Gideon looked furious, but Nathan knew he fumed out of devotion and fear. Katherine shot to her feet.

"Get your goddamn hands off me. I can take care of myself! Who the hell do you think you are, bossing me around!" Nathan stood

between them and cleared his throat loudly to stop his two loves from screaming at each other to death.

“Would you two just please stop for a moment and give the fighting a break for once? The point is that we’re all together and we’re all safe. What is there to fight about?” Nathan eyed Gideon hard, daring him to talk back, and then eyed Katherine, willing her to simmer down. He wasn’t about to have them all together only to have them fall apart. “Besides, you can spank her later.” Nathan glanced at Gideon and saw a glimmer of delight find its way back into his gorgeous hazel eyes.

Katherine started to argue again, but Nathan put a finger to her lips and then planted a soft kiss.

“You must be Nathan.” Anna held out her hand, and Nathan chastely kissed it. “Kat’s told me all about you. You’re the cool and collected charmer and,” she looked over at Gideon whose face still simmered with a hint of red, “you must be Gideon. He *is* passionate...and *muscular*.” Anna looked at her sister and smiled.

“Shut up, you,” Katherine teased.

“Kat’s told me all about you two. Well, almost all. I have a feeling there’s a lot more she’s kept mum about, but give me some time and I’ll get it out of her.” Anna smiled.

“Well, this chitchat is all fine and dandy, but why don’t we get the hell out of this place?” Gideon said impatiently. Katherine turned with Nathan and Gideon to leave, but Anna stopped her.

“Wait, I can’t go. I have a contract with Ruby. Oh, Kat, I’m so sorry. I’ve made such a mess of things.” Anna looked at her sister with pleading eyes.

“Don’t worry, sis, no point in apologizing now.” Katherine furrowed her brow in thought. “We’ll figure this out. Just let me think for a moment.”

“Everyone stay here. Gideon, keep an eye on the girls. I’ll be right back.” Nathan rushed out the door and headed down the stairs and went straight to the woman in red.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine felt relieved her sister was safe, but didn't have a clue how to get her out of this mess with Ruby. She remembered how imposing that woman looked and didn't look forward to any confrontation. Then Gideon caught her eye, and when he put his big, warm hand on her face, caressing her hair with the other, Katherine felt her entire body relax for the first time that day.

"Gideon, I'm sorry I ran off like that."

Gideon held her face and pushed his mouth onto hers in a long-awaited kiss. "Shh, don't say another word. I understand and I'm sorry for being so damn hard on you. But damn it, I love you and Nathan both so much. I guess I just get overprotective sometimes, but I promise I'll be better." He paused for a moment and looked deeply into her eyes. "Well, I promise to at least try." His devilish lips curled up on either side of his perfectly chiseled face.

"I'm sure you will." Katherine smiled back and kissed him again, this time savoring the flavor of his pleasure-inducing mouth. God, she loved this man and that other one who had disappeared. "Where did Nathan go? He left so suddenly."

Gideon looked around the room and shrugged his shoulders. Then his eyes fell on the man lying unconscious on the floor. "Who's that weasel on the floor?" Gideon walked over to the man and leaned into his face. "The fucker stinks. Did this guy piss on himself?"

"Don't ask," Katherine said as she watched Gideon lightly slap the man's face a few times.

"Well, he won't be waking up for a long time." Gideon stood back up and suddenly his face lit up. Nathan finally returned, a triumphant grin plastered onto his face.

"Okay, everybody, we're officially free to go. Anna, you'll have no more troubles with Ruby."

Anna's eyes brightened and she rushed over and hugged him. "Thank you so much." Anna pulled away and looked at him curiously. "What happened down there?"

"Let's just say, everyone has a price and I happen to have a very large pocketbook."

"Nathan, did you pay Ruby to let Anna go?" Katherine asked. Nathan paused for a moment and the smile that had reached his eyes slowly collapsed into a frown. His eyes darkened and his face tensed.

"Yes, Katherine, I did. There was no choice and this was the easiest and simplest solution." He looked over at Gideon as if to get his agreement and Gideon nodded back. Anger seemed to rise in Gideon's face as Katherine continued to argue. She hated when he looked at her that way, but they had to know, if they wanted to be with her, how things had to be. She would never need anybody to protect or help her. She couldn't afford to take the risk of dependence ever again. She exhaled deeply and put her hands firmly on her hips.

"You know I don't want a penny of your money, no matter what. That's not why I'm with you and I don't need anyone to bail me or my kin out."

"Kat, it's not like that." Nathan reached out for her, but she pushed him away, exasperated.

"I told you, I can take care of myself and I can figure a way out of this. This is none of your business. Not yours or Gideon's."

"What the hell is wrong with you woman! Why are you constantly fighting us? Can't you see, all me and Nathan are trying to do is help you for Christ's sake? It has nothing to do with your independence."

"It has everything to do with my independence. When my parents died, we were left with nothing. We were completely lost and we struggled for everything we had. When struggling couldn't do any more, I had to leave my little sister all by herself. Do you know how hard that was to do?" Her lips began to tremble and she fought hard to keep tears from welling in her eyes.

“Kat, please, what choice do we have? Maybe we should accept their help,” Anna said.

“No, Anna. We shouldn’t. What if something happens again? Then, where will we be?”

Anna stared at her sister, as if silently debating her words. She sighed and shrugged her shoulders. “I can see your point, but can’t we accept their help just this one time? I can’t go back to Ruby.”

Katherine looked at her sister and knew in her heart, it would be stupid to not let Nathan help them out.

Just this one time.

“Okay, Anna, just this once.” Katherine glanced at Nathan and then Gideon. “But just this once. If we depend on their help, what happens when...when...” Katherine looked at the ground. “What’s going to happen when this all ends?” Katherine couldn’t keep her emotions back any longer. First it was watching her sister cry, which always upset her, and then it was facing the fear she had harbored since she discovered she loved these two men and they loved her—the fear that it wouldn’t last.

“Now what nonsense are you talkin’ about, woman?” Katherine cringed as Gideon railed into her again. Nathan shot him an icy glare, shutting him up, and pulled Katherine into his arms.

“Sweetheart, what on earth would make you say such a thing? Why would this end? Now that we have you, we could never let you go.” He looked searchingly into her eyes as if for some sign of agreement. “And I think in your heart, you feel the same way.”

“Nothing lasts forever, no matter how good one’s intentions.” Katherine felt her heart harden at the thought of losing these men. She wouldn’t let it hurt her.

“Kat, you can’t mean that,” Anna interjected, putting her hand on her sister’s arm. “I know losing Ma and Pa was terribly painful, but you can’t just give up on love just ’cause you think it might not last.” Katherine realized her sister may be wiser than she thought.

“No, she’s scared. That’s all. Damn it, Kat. When are you gonna trust us that we love you. I mean, I’d fuckin’ risk my life for you if you’d give me the opportunity. Instead, you’ve gotta always be so damn tough, you don’t give either of us a chance to take care of you.” Katherine rolled her eyes at Gideon.

*What the hell is he talking about?*

“Oh, you think this is some kind of joke?” Gideon clearly didn’t like Katherine’s eye rolling. “Did you know that Nathan bought us all engagement rings, but he’s too worried about givin’ it to you ’cause he thinks you might reject us just so you don’t have to take anything from us?” Katherine’s breath hitched in her throat. Had she really been so hardheaded and foolish that this was what her men thought of her?

“Nathan, is this true?” Katherine searched Nathan’s face to ascertain the truth in Gideon’s words and saw by his pained look that Gideon had spoken honestly.

“It was a real big rock, too. Huge.” Gideon smiled and put up both his hands, assuring Katherine the diamond was the size of his head.

“Well, that’s just plain crazy, giving me a diamond—”

Katherine stopped midsentence and heard her sister gasp behind her as they both saw Nathan pull out a small, black velveteen box. Katherine put her hands to her mouth in shock as her eyes fell on the contents of the opened box. Inside were three rings, one diamond and two wedding bands made of iron.

“It’s not really as big as Gideon’s head, but she’s still a beaut, no?” Nathan said, extending the diminutive box toward her face.

“And he got our bands made out of the same iron used on the rails, since that’s where our relationship began and it’s what’ll take the three of us into our future together,” Gideon said, pointing to the rings. “Isn’t that right, babe?” He put his arm around Nathan and Katherine’s heart swelled at the way they looked at each other. Then when they looked at her the same way, she felt her entire body warm as if radiated by their love and devotion to her.

“So, what do you say, Kat, love? Will you marry us?” Nathan got down on one knee and Gideon followed suit. She looked down at the both of them and felt her resistance fall apart just as it had the first night she spent with them.

“I don’t know what to say.” She looked over at her sister for help and saw that her eyes were beginning to well up.

“Don’t be stupid, Kat. Say ‘yes.’ We all know you love them. Hell, I love them and we’ve only just met.” Anna playfully punched her in the arm. “And besides, you should jump at any man, let alone two, that would put up with your hardhead. Plus, they’re gorgeous and they *love* you.” Anna gritted her teeth in frustration as Katherine continued to stare at her, mouth agape and speechless. “I don’t know how else to convince you.” Anna threw her hands up in the air and then reached over and yanked a loose strand of her sister’s hair.

“Oww! That hurt. What the hell did you do that for?” Katherine rubbed her head where the hair touched her scalp.

“To startle some sense into you. Now look at those men.” She forced her sister to look at Gideon and Nathan. They looked at her with such patience, as if they would wait forever for her to respond and they would be content to wait on their knees until she answered them. Of course, she knew they wouldn’t and the soreness of her head proved that her sister certainly wouldn’t.

“Okay, fine. You’re right.”

“Well, sugar, what do you say?” Gideon drawled. Katherine felt her mouth pull into a smile. She knew her answer and she could tell by her men’s smiles that they realized it as well. Her mouth always gave her away.

“Of course, I’ll marry you two. Yes.” She fell into their arms and tears streamed down her cheeks as Nathan slipped her ring on her finger, then slipped on Gideon’s ring, and finally his own.

“Katherine, you’ve made us the happiest men alive.” Nathan kissed the top of her head. Then he grew stern. “I want you to know, sweetheart, that being married doesn’t mean you’re any less

independent. Part of the union is about accepting each other's help. I happen to have money and right now you need some and I'll be damned if my wife suffers because she stubbornly refuses to accept it." Katherine opened her mouth to protest but Gideon placed a firm finger across her lips, shutting them.

"Now, Kat, just listen to him for a sec before you go mouthin' off." Even though this was one of the happiest moments of her life, Gideon's bossy tone still annoyed her to no end. Clearly sensing her rising ire, Gideon quickly hedged. "Please?"

"That's better." Katherine's smile returned even as she poked Gideon playfully in the chest for being so domineering. But that was his way, and just as they were accepting her stubbornness, she had to accept his sometimes pushy demeanor. She turned back to Nathan.

"As I was saying, love, part of being with a woman is the luxury of lavishing her with anything she wants and especially anything she needs. Now, I'm not saying you need my help, but you do need to save your house and because I can easily help you, it would be..." Nathan struggled to find the right words. Katherine could tell he worried about accidentally offending her.

"It would be absolutely fool-headed and stupid not to accept it," Anna chimed in. "That's what you're trying to say, right?" Anna stood looking at her big sister, clearly not concerned with offending her. No, offending her never concerned her little sister. Then Anna's face grew serious. "Please, Kat. Just take the money." Anna threw Katherine her best sad, puppy-dog face.

"Fine, fine, fine," Katherine relented. How could she deny the wishes of the three people she loved the most? "Okay, I'll accept your help." Anna jumped with glee and embraced her sister tightly.

"Thank you so much, Kat." Katherine looked into her sister's still innocent eyes and felt happy she would be safe and taken care of. "Now, can we all go home? I can't stand being in this awful place another minute."

Katherine nodded in agreement. She couldn't wait to go home. Home with Gideon and Nathan.

## Chapter Nine

“Are you sure you’ll be all right by yourself?” Katherine asked her sister.

Anna smirked and rolled her eyes. “Yes, for the tenth time in five minutes, I will be fine. I got myself to Reno on my own, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did, but you also got yourself into a lot of trouble there.”

“Kat, would you come off it?” Anna asked, exasperated.

Katherine held her hands up, placating. “Fine. I’m just worried is all.” She tucked a thick curl behind her sister’s ear.

Anna smiled and pursed her lips at the same time. “And how do you think I felt when you left?”

“Fine. I give up.”

“I think the only person who can out-stubborn Kat is her sister,” Nathan said, coming up behind the sisters and putting a hand on the small of Katherine’s back.

Katherine’s shoulders shot to her ears when she heard the train’s whistle blow. She shrank back, only to bump into Gideon’s solid body. She let him wrap himself around her. She glanced at Anna, who pressed her hands into her ears. They laughed at themselves, knowing how ridiculous they looked, two full-grown women afraid of a little bit of noise.

The noise passed and Katherine took her sister’s hands in hers. She opened her mouth to say something, but Anna interrupted. “I’ll be fine, Kat. I promise.”

“I know. I just thought I’d try one more time.” She looked over Anna’s shoulder and saw the stagecoach stood waiting. “All right,

well, I suppose you're off, then." Katherine walked Anna to the end of the platform and pulled her into a tight embrace. "Be careful." Anna pulled away and smiled, but Katherine saw the sadness in her sister's eyes. "We'll be heading back home in the next month or so. Nathan just needs to check on a few things in California before we can go home. I'll be back as soon as I can. I promise."

Anna nodded. "I'll just give the creditors this, then." She lifted the bag in her hands.

"Yes, right when you get home."

Katherine watched her sister walk toward the stagecoach and wave one last time before disappearing into it. She waited until she could no longer see the horses before she turned around and faced her men.

"Are you all right?" Nathan asked.

She hugged her arms around her middle. "Yes, I am. I'm worried, that's all."

They walked to her. "She'll be fine. You were, right?" Nathan reassured her.

"I know. It's just that she's my little sister—"

Gideon laughed. "Your little sister who is taller than you."

Katherine faced him, her hands on her hips. "She's still my baby sister, height or not."

He wiped the smile off his face. "Of course she is." He brushed his lips over hers. "Now come on. We have a surprise for you."

That cheered her up a little. "What kind of surprise?"

"The big kind," Nathan answered. "But we have to blindfold you on our way there."

"You're joking, right?"

"Not at all." Gideon held up a black piece of cloth.

"I don't know about this."

"It'll be worth it, we promise," Nathan said.

"Don't make us have to tie your hands up," Gideon threatened.

“Fine. I give up.” Her palms flew up in front of her in a peacemaking gesture. Big hands on her shoulder turned her around, and she followed suit, letting them lead her. She felt Gideon’s big, warm body behind her as he tied the cloth around her eyes.

“Let’s go,” he whispered against the shell of her ear.

\* \* \* \*

Gideon put his hands around Katherine’s waist and led her toward the red caboose, Nathan following closely on their heels. He could not wait for her to see the surprise they made for her. Once they realized she wanted to come with them, they immediately wanted to do something special for her to show her how much they loved her, how much she meant to them.

When they reached the caboose, Nathan opened the door and stepped aside to let them walk through. The door shut behind them with a heavy click.

The air in the room was cooler than outside, the delicate shades and curtains over the window kept the area dimly lit and fresh. Gideon and Nathan furnished the room themselves and made the big bed the center of everything, with cushioned reading nooks and a dresser and love seats completing the ensemble.

Gideon pulled the blindfold from Katherine’s eyes and watched hungrily as her eyes lit up and a smile streaked across her face. “Oh, how beautiful,” she breathed, clasping her hands to her chest. She wandered around the room, her delicate fingertips touching everything. “When did you do all of this?” She turned to glance at them.

Gideon stuck his hands in his pockets and rocked back on his heels. “Well, sugar, don’t you remember those times we made sure you were tired?”

\* \* \* \*

“Yes, I remember.” She lowered her lashes and out of the corner of her eye noticed the cherry red armoire sitting in the corner of the room. “What’s that?” she asked as she walked toward it.

Nathan cleared his throat. “Well, we thought we would buy you a few extra gifts we could all use.”

She looked over her shoulder at the two of them, Nathan standing tall, his wide shoulders looking a little braced while Gideon stood next to him, hands still in his pockets.

*Hmm...* they obviously knew something she did not.

She reached for the armoire’s golden handles and pulled. She gasped. Her eyes fell upon thick pieces of silk, velvet, and leather whips, blindfolds, gags.

“What on earth?”

“Like Nathan said, they’re presents for all of us to enjoy.” Gideon’s long legs quickly ate the distance between them and backed her into the armoire with his big body.

“But what are they for?”

“Well, this one,” he reached past her and touched the silk with his fingers, “is meant to go around your wrists. The silk is strong enough to hold you when you’re writhing and thrashing around, but won’t leave marks or bruises.”

Katherine felt her body’s temperature spike when Gideon looked down at her with his intense, lust-filled eyes. She felt a slick rush of arousal between her legs and rubbed the tops of her thighs together in anticipation. She knew what happened when Gideon had that look in his eyes.

Nathan walked up to them and reached into the armoire, pulling out a blindfold. “And wearing this heightens every sensation in your body, making you more aware of every touch, every caress.”

She gulped air into her lungs. No matter how many times she had them, their raw sexuality floored her. Katherine wanted to undo them for once, to be the one in control for a few moments. Gathering all her

nerve, she pushed between them, her hands lingering on their well muscled chests before reaching for the deck of cards sitting on one of the nightstands.

“I’ll make a deal with you.” She unbuttoned the first buttons on her bodice, exposing the tops of her breasts sitting high in her corset. They watched her with wild, hungry eyes. “Let’s play a game. If one of you wins, you can have your way with me.” Gideon’s mouth curled into a feral grin. “But if I win...” She crossed the room and sat down at the table and pulled her skirts up over her knees and spread her legs. She saw Nathan’s eyes widen, his desire for her palpable. “I want to see the two of you together.”

“What do you mean together, Kat?” Gideon asked.

“Together. As in one of you fucks the other.” The idea turned her on so much she felt her clit throb between her legs.

“Uh, Kat, I don’t know—”

“You don’t know what, Gideon?”

He narrowed his eyes at her. “I don’t know if you would like it.”

She sank her teeth into her lower lips when images of the two of them together rushed before her eyes, their hard bodies surging together, their combined masculinity making their fucking hard and rough. “‘Like’ isn’t what I would describe when the thought comes to mind.”

“Then why—”

“Makes me wet is more accurate. The idea makes me want to touch myself.” Gideon’s mouth opened a fraction and his pupils widened. “And I will if you show me how the two of you are together.” She looked at his crotch and saw the tent in his pants grow thicker, harder.

“Kat,” Nathan said. “I don’t understand.”

“What’s not to understand? I love both of you, and you are the most beautiful men I have ever seen. Why wouldn’t I want to see you together?”

His throat bobbed. “I don’t want you to feel left out.”

“I won’t. Trust me. Besides, we made a bet. There’s a chance that I may lose.” She shrugged a shoulder, making her dress widen at the chest, exposing more of her cleavage. Nathan’s eyes glazed over. She shook the cards in her hand, waving them at the men in front of her.

“But, Kat, I’m terrible at poker.”

She grinned at Nathan, her heart beating hard against her ribs.

“That’s the point.”

\* \* \* \*

Nathan threw his cards on the table. “Damn it.” He looked up from his losing hand to Katherine, whose molten brown eyes glittered with heat. Her mouth curled into a seductive grin.

“I do believe that you need to take you pants off, Mr. Harcker,” she taunted, then bit the inside of her bottom lip.

He knew he would be the first one naked. Just damn knew it. He pushed his chair back and stood. His hands went down the waistband of his pants before he looked at her once more and *Holy Christ*, he got an eyeful of Katherine’s breasts, pushed up into perfect porcelain globes by her corset, the only thing she wore other than her undergarments. Blood rushed from his head and pooled in his groin, his cock growing heavier, longer, thicker.

Katherine’s eyes widened. She flicked her tongue over her full lips. “Take them off, Nathan.”

He met her eyes and held them in his gaze as he undid the front of his pants, then pushed them down his legs, his erection jutting out from between his hips, heavy and proud.

Nathan felt the heat in the room rise. He glanced down at Gideon, who still wore his pants and shoes. His hazel eyes darkened, and his cheekbones looked mottled with a slight flush. Gideon’s cock bulged, straining against its confines.

Katherine’s voice floated over them. “Touch yourself, Nathan. I want to see it.”

Nathan's hand went to his cock and pumped it slowly, feeling the thick vein running along his shaft's underside and the pearly drops of pre-cum at the tip. He faced Katherine, giving her a full view of his hand's heavy drag over his hard flesh. He saw the rise and fall of her chest, the way her eyes glazed over and knew she was aroused. He imagined her wet pussy and how it felt when he pushed himself into it.

He groaned and pumped his hand faster.

Nathan heard Gideon's chair push away from the table, heard him toe off his boots and step out of his pants. Then Gideon stood in front of him and reached to cup Nathan's balls. Nathan's head snapped back and he grunted, the pressure building in his groin. Just when he felt his release start, Gideon took his hand away and turned, swiping his big hand over the table and shoving everything, the cards, their clothes, onto the floor. Katherine's eyes went wide, her lips parted and her skin flushed.

Gideon whipped back around to face Nathan, tugging him at the elbows, silently demanding. He sank to his knees and sucked Gideon's long, thick cock into his mouth. Nathan heard the air rush out of Gideon in a whoosh.

He sucked, swirled his tongue, and angled his head. Above him, Gideon's body shook. Then all of a sudden, Gideon yanked Nathan away from his dick, bent him over the table, and shoved his cock, moistened with saliva, between Nathan's ass cheeks.

Nathan grunted, moaned when he felt Gideon's cock invade his body inch by inch. He pressed back against him, and Gideon snarled, then reared his hips back and fucked him. The table jostled back and forth, and the sound of Gideon's balls slapping against Nathan's ass and their grunts, snarls, and moans drenched the air.

But another sound accompanied the sounds of their rough fucking. Nathan looked up at Katherine and almost came. She sat watching them, one of her feet propped on the seat of her chair, her fingers

between her legs, rubbing her swollen, exposed clit. Her mouth hung slightly open, her eyes fastened on them, her moans matching theirs.

“Jesus Christ,” he moaned. “Gideon.” Nathan felt him still behind him.

“Fuck,” Gideon cursed in an animalistic tone.

Nathan felt Gideon pull out of him, and he straightened from his bent position and followed Gideon to stand in front of Katherine. His gaze could not leave the sight of her finger fucking herself. When she saw them standing in front of her, she stilled her fingers, but Gideon barked out. “Don’t fucking stop, Kat.”

“But—”

Gideon cursed and yanked her up, threw her over his shoulder, and carried her to the bed, tossing her on it.

Nathan watched her breasts bounce when her body landed. Nathan walked to the bed and crawled over it and on top of Katherine, spread her legs with his knees, and plunged into her. She gasped, the sound strangled and erotic. Her pussy gripped him in its slick heat, enveloping him. Katherine surged under him and wrapped an ankle around his leg, the other around his hips. She pressed her cunt against him, increasing the delicious friction.

Nathan reached down and yanked on her corset, freeing her breasts as they spilled out of their confines, exposing her tightly beaded nipples. The sight made him fuck her harder. His hips drove into hers, and he took a nipple in his mouth. Her head fell back, and she bucked against him, her nails digging into his shoulders and his back.

He felt Gideon behind him, felt his big hands grip his flanks as Gideon shoved his dick into Nathan’s ass once more. Nathan let out a guttural moan. The sensations of Katherine’s tight pussy surrounding him while Gideon’s dick filled his ass overwhelmed him.

\* \* \* \*

Katherine clawed at Nathan's arms, trying to ground herself in deeper. Sensation inundated her body and disoriented her. In all the times she made love with Gideon and Nathan, she could not remember being this aroused. Seeing them together and the rough, animalistic way they went at each other made the desire pool between her legs and her skin feverish.

Nathan pumped himself in and out of her, and he made sure to drag himself against her sensitive spots every time. Already, her body wound itself up again for another release, and she knew this one would leave her breathless and liquid.

She heard a harsh grunt somewhere above her and she glanced up to see Gideon staring at her over Nathan's shoulder. His eyes were wild with raw, uninhibited lust, and his breath sawed out between his lips as he fucked Nathan's ass. Katherine watched the muscles in his neck and chest tense and knew he was about to come.

She felt Nathan gather her closer, felt his strokes harden as he widened her legs, opening her up even more. He flicked his tongue over one of her nipples, and her orgasm spiked through her body. Katherine pumped her hips against Nathan's, silently demanding him to help her ride her orgasm out, but he slammed into her and shuddered, his body quivering above hers. Still, she writhed against him, screaming, her pussy throbbing, her nipples aching, her body shaking.

Katherine locked her eyes on Gideon's and saw the moment his orgasm crashed over him. His eyes looked blindly at her before his head snapped back and he groaned out his release. The sound of Gideon's balls slapping against Nathan's ass joined that of their labored breathing.

Gideon threw himself on the bed next to Katherine, one arm lying across his forehead, the other splayed over his belly. Her eyes looked down the expanse of this large body to the place where his still thick erection lay against his abdomen. She licked her lips.

"Not enough for you, Kat?" Gideon asked.

“I don’t know if it ever will be.”

“We’ve created a monster.” Nathan laughed and she felt him moving inside of her before he pulled out.

She hissed at the empty feeling. “Oh, please. You knew what you bargained for.”

Gideon’s heated gaze landed on her breasts. “We did, but what we got was beyond our wildest dreams.”

Katherine covered her bare breasts with her hands. “Stop staring so hard!”

“Sorry, sugar, but I get to look whenever I want.” Gideon plucked her hands off her chest and kissed them before he licked the nipple closest to his mouth.

She looked down at herself. Her breasts slightly jiggled. “Why am I vibrating?”

Nathan’s hand smoothed up her belly. “The train is moving.”

“It is? Already?”

“To California. Are you ready, Kat?” Gideon asked.

“With the two of you with me? You can bet on it.”

## **Epilogue**

Anna sat and looked out the window of Nathan's stagecoach. She ran her hand along its plush velvet interior and pushed the drapes' heavy fabric back so she could look out the window. She had already traveled for days from the harsh deserts of Nevada, through the Rocky Mountains, and finally crossed into the lush and vibrant landscape of the Wyoming Territory. She stuck her face out the window and inhaled the crisp air while admiring the crystal blue waters of the rivers she'd passed, all against a magnificent mountainous backdrop. The sun just began to rise above the horizon, spreading glorious pink and gold hues across the azure sky.

If it hadn't been for her sister and the help of her wonderful men, she may not have been able to see this beautiful land again. She had been so foolish in Reno and was grateful she had people close to her who could foresee the terrible mistake she was making and helped her get out of it. She felt sorry for all the girls she left behind who didn't have anybody to look out for them or give them a hand when they were in need. Most of the women were incredibly kind and bright, but they thought they had no other options but to sell their bodies. She wished she could've helped show them they were wrong, that they all had something better to offer, and that they were worth so much more than they gave themselves credit for.

In the past week, Anna recognized that she could do more than that, that she wasn't just a pretty face with a knack for fashion. She didn't know what she would do when she got back home, but for the first time in her life, the choices seemed endless. She could do anything.

Anna looked down at the little purse she clutched between her hands. Even though it was small, it held great riches. Nathan gave her enough money to buy her parents' home outright and he even gave her a bit of money to get her back on her feet until she figured out what she'd do next. Katherine was so lucky to have found such great men. Anna knew her sister certainly deserved it. She wondered if she'd ever find a man, or perhaps *men*, who could treat her as well as Nathan and Gideon treated Katherine.

She was suddenly jolted from her thoughts when the carriage came to an abrupt stop. She looked back out the window to see if anything was wrong when she heard the door open behind her and felt knobby fingers gripping her arms, forcing her to turn around.

"I'm sorry, but I can't wait any longer, pretty thang. You just look so sweet." The driver forced his way inside and thrust himself on top of her.

"Get off me, you disgusting pig!" Anna tried to push him away and twisted around to keep his face away from hers. She got a horrible flashback of her time at the bordello and fought like hell to free herself from this trash's nasty clutches. She had fought then to protect herself and this time would be no different.

*Except Katherine isn't around to help me.*

"Pretty thang, why ya strugglin' so much? Out here all by ourselves, ain't no one gonna hear your screams." He laughed as he pushed his knees between her legs, trying to spread them open.

Fear washed over her at the realization that the filth on top of her may be right. She just may not be strong enough to fight him off on her own and no one could help her. Tears streamed down her face as she continued to fight and scream her lungs out.

*If I can't overpower him, at least I won't make it easy.*

A shot fired in the distance and the driver froze on top of her.

"What the—" As the driver poked his head out of the window, Anna saw a fist slam into his face. That one punch knocked him out cold.

Her savior peeked inside, and Anna quickly realized the state of undress she was in. The driver had ripped her clothes, almost exposing one of her breasts.

“Was that man tryin’ to force himself on you?” The man’s voice was kind, and he had the most beautiful dark brown eyes she’d ever seen. But all she could see were his eyes. A bandana covered his nose and mouth.

“Y–y–yes.” Anna sat up and started to button her blouse. She was lucky only a few of the buttons had popped off and she could still easily cover her nakedness in front of this stranger.

“Are you all right?” The man looked her over and Anna’s body seemed to tingle wherever his gaze went. She couldn’t help but notice him linger a moment on her breasts. Her face reddened and warmed as she worked faster on getting her blouse closed.

“I think so.” She briefly considered ignoring a couple of the buttons that remained. His next statement changed her mind.

“Good. Now, ma’am, please give me all your money and jewelry.” The man got into the carriage and started to go through the driver’s pockets. “This here’s a robbery.”

“But, you just saved my life,” Anna protested, not moving. Her savior turned robber brushed against her as he moved around the small stagecoach. His firm body smelled rugged and heavenly. Anna felt appalled that she was attracted to this man. “This is ridiculous.”

“We’re bandits, ma’am, not murderers or rapists. We’re not plannin’ on hurtin’ you, so just do as we say.”

“We?”

“Yep, me and my partner.”

“Partner?”

“That would be me.” Another man drawled at the entrance, appearing as if out of nowhere. He, too, wore a bandana over the lower part of his face, but his eyes, shaded by golden-blond brows, also captivated her. “Sorry about the inconvenience, but I’ll be takin’ that lil’ purse you’re holdin’.” His minty green eyes sparkled as he

spoke to her. He held her gaze for a moment longer than he needed to and it made Anna uncomfortable yet she longed for more. Her heart pounded in her chest.

“But, that’s my money. I *need* that money. You don’t know what I’ve been through to get it.” Anna sat stunned as the man gripped the pouch she clutched in her lap and slipped it out of her hand, their fingers briefly touching. The roughness of his skin sent a shiver through Anna’s body and she gasped, out of shock or arousal, she couldn’t be sure. He turned to leave but looked back again, eyeing her entire form. It made Anna feel naked and more vulnerable than she’d ever felt in her life. And then, he was gone. The second bandit looked up from stuffing his pockets with her things and laughed.

“Heh! *You* need the money? By the looks of this fancy carriage, there’s plenty more where that came from.”

“But—”

“No buts, sweetheart. I reckon we need this money a lot more than you.” He took his hat off and bowed deeply as he exited the stagecoach after his partner. “I apologize for the inconvenience. You try to have a good evenin’.” He had the nerve to kiss her hand just before he left. Even through his bandana, Anna could make out the outline of his lips against the back of her hand and she felt her pussy clench at the contact.

For a brief moment, Anna sat stunned before her surprise turned to livid anger.

*How dare they! And leaving me with nothing except this passed out lecher of a driver and this fancy stagecoach that I have no earthly idea how to drive or even how to get back home.*

Anna reached for the gun in the driver’s holster, unsure of what she would do next. She ignored her body’s cries for attention from these heinous outlaws and channeled those unwarranted feelings into the task at hand.

*It’s time to get my money back.*

She got out of the stagecoach and firmly gripped the gun's handle and pressed her finger against the trigger. She saw the two bandits riding off on their horses.

Her eyes focused.

She aimed and fired.

**THE END**



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