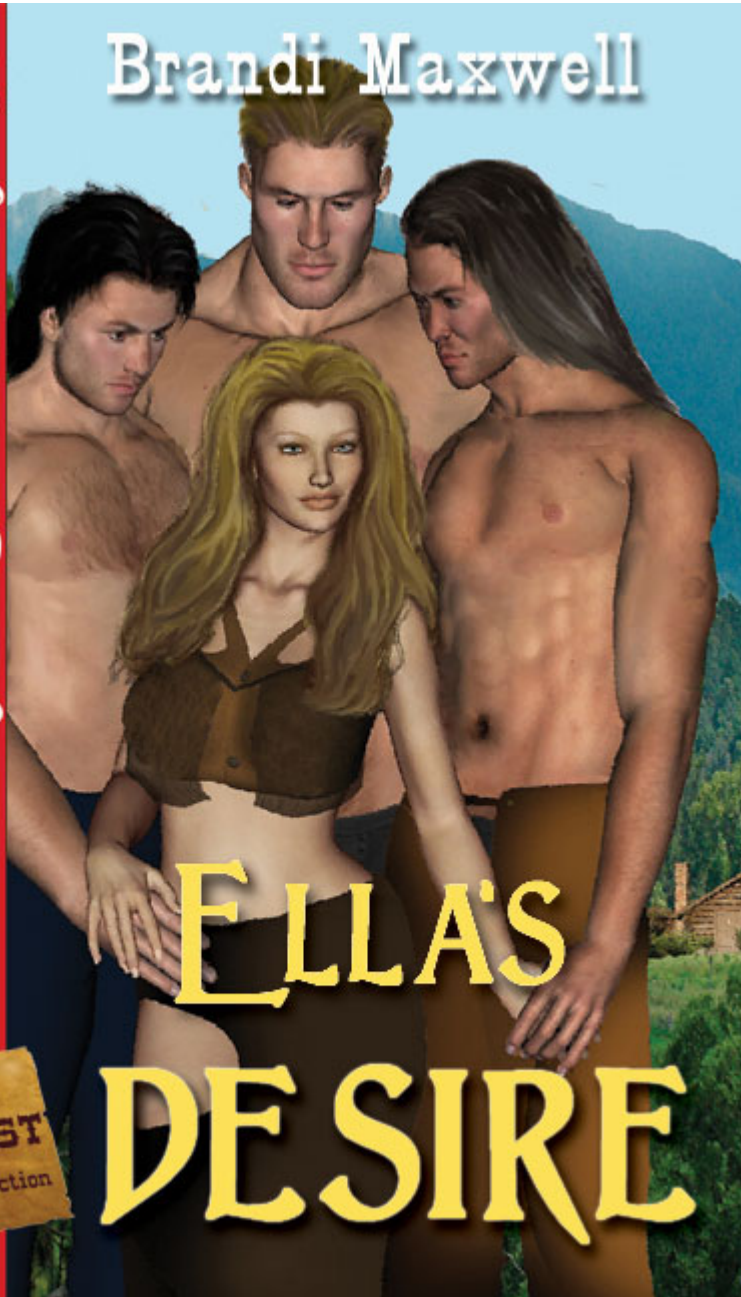


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The  
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Brandi Maxwell



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# **ELLA'S DESIRE**

*The Lost Collection*

**Brandi Maxwell**

**MENAGE EVERLASTING**



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# **ELLA'S DESIRE**

**BRANDI MAXWELL**

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## **Chapter One**

“It was a good meeting, don’t you think?” Ella Thompson Murphy asked Gunnar van Gild and Antonio Stenacci, distinguished cattlemen who had been good friends with her father. Each man held a brandy snifter in one hand and a cigar in the other. The men were smiling with pride, as though Ella was their own daughter and not just the daughter of a deceased friend.

The official meeting of the Livestock Association had ended fifteen minutes earlier. Now it was time for brandy and cigars, and after that, the wives and daughters would be allowed into the ballroom, and the dance would begin. As a woman, alcohol and tobacco were forbidden to Ella. At least in public. Civilization was advancing westward in the Dakota territory, and so a certain decorum was expected, at least of the upper classes.

Ella was the only female member of the Livestock Association. With the death of her father, Arno, when she was nineteen, Ella’s husband of three months, Richard, became the official representative of the ranch at the meetings. Richard’s untimely death put the control of the ranch in Ella’s delicate but competent hands at the age of twenty-two.

She knew some of the members had bitterly opposed the inclusion of a woman into their masculine ranks. But Arno Thompson created the organization to lobby on their behalf in Washington, and even

though he passed away, his friends argued that his daughter should be allowed to join. Some now thought that they should bring in Ella's fiancé, Tim Cutler, to be the official voice for the T-3 Ranch. Condescendingly, they suggested that perhaps they would allow Ella a proxy vote. But since some of the more astute members of the Association realized that Tim Cutler was far more interested in spending money than in making it. Since the gap between the announcement of the engagement and the setting of a wedding date continued to get longer and longer, the lone female with full voting privileges *remained* the lone female.

Arno cut a wide swath when he was alive, and even in death, men didn't want to be on his bad side.

"What about the rustling? Have they hit you again?" Gunnar, a Dutch immigrant, asked with his typical bluntness.

Ella's lips pursed tight momentarily before softening. She liked these men who had been such good friends to her father, and she knew they were protective of her. But she was embarrassed at being so ineffectual in stopping the rustling and wary that these men might think her a disappointment at running the vast ranch their friend created.

"Sometime last week I lost another hundred head from the herd over near the bend in Darnow Springs. That makes it a total of six hundred since last winter."

Antonio, always the more emotive of the two old men, waved his arms, sending cigar smoke swirling and more than just a little of his brandy sloshing over the rim of his glass. "We've got to find those rotten scoundrels!" he said, his Italian accent made more prominent with his heightened emotions. "We've got to string them all up. What's your fiancé doing about this?"

At the mention of Tim, Ella glanced away. It was never easy talking about the man she was supposed to marry. At the time of their engagement, it seemed to everyone that Tim would be the ideal man to run the T-3 Ranch in place of Richard Murphy. But it was soon



apparent that Tim vastly preferred drinking and gambling to overseeing one of the largest spreads west of the Mississippi. In the backroom of saloons, men wondered just how much of Tim's profligacy Ella was actually aware of.

"He's been sending out men armed to the teeth every night, looking for the rustlers," Ella explained after a moment. She looked up into Antonio's eyes and squared her shoulders. "He's had the worst of all possible luck. If he sends men to watch the Blue Meadow range, the rustlers go riding through our spread near Danbury Pass. The next night he sends riders to the Danbury Pass, and the rustlers either don't touch us at all, or they're stealing our cattle at Darnow Springs. I know he means well, and that he's trying to help me run the ranch, but it seems the rustlers know what Tim's going to do even before he does."

Antonio's mouth pulled up on one side. His dark eyes twinkled with sudden amusement. In a low voice that wouldn't carry to anyone but Ella and Gunnar, he said, "That's tough to do, considering how little the man does."

Ella smiled and blushed a little. "You're a naughty old man for saying such a thing," she said in a conspiratorial whisper, "and I absolutely love you to pieces because of it."

Gunnar said, "Antonio, how about we send our eldest out to see what they can find out? Not to confront the rustlers, mind you, just to look at the problem with different eyes. Your spread and mine haven't been hit yet by these rascals, but it is only a matter of time before we are."

"The perfect solution, my friend!" Antonio patted Gunnar's arm, and in the process, knocked cigar ash onto the big man's black gabardine suit coat. "Damn! I make such a mess no matter what I do!" A moment later, seeing his son, Ben, on the other side of the room, Antonio called out in a loud voice, "*Benvenuto*, I must talk to you! Come see me, and bring Dirk with you!"

Wherever Antonio went, people could always hear him. He was

by no means a big or tall man, and Ella wondered if he thought he could make up for his lack of height with the volume of his voice.

Ella watched as the two men approached. In their mid-twenties, they were only a few years older than her. Having grown up in proximity to the men, she had watched the young princes of the prairie become the darlings of the wealthy and not-so-wealthy women in the territory. Their sexual dalliances were a favored topic of whispered conversation in the salons of the wives of the cattle barons, railroad magnates, and mining executives. Handsome, affluent, innately intelligent, and classically educated, Dirk and Ben had every possible advantage given to them at birth, and they carried their vaunted social position with the confident *savoir-faire* of men who objectively understood their place in the world.

Ella knew Ben and Dirk were insatiable rakes, men who merely played at love rather than taking it seriously. But she had heard enough rumors to know that the women who were “entertained” by either Ben or Dirk never regretted their indiscretion. Ella’s own friend Marian Ludgaard confessed to having succumbed to Dirk’s charms, blushing pink as she whispered of how she experienced a “fire in the blood” she’d never experienced before or since.

When Ben and Dirk approached, they both gave Ella a polite smile and a slight nod of the head and said in unison, “Evening, Mrs. Ella.”

“Good evening. But, please, just ‘Ella.’”

When they smiled, Ella felt her heart do a little flip-flop in her chest, and she immediately reminded herself that she was engaged to be married, and she was not foolish enough to succumb to seductive charm. Not like her good friend Marian Ludgaard, who let good looks and ostentatious virility strip away sound feminine judgment.

\* \* \* \*

At just over six-foot-three, Dirk van Gild towered over most men,

but he'd never before found his height to be quite such an advantage as he did just then at the Livestock Association meeting. He had known Ella Murphy most of his life, and though he always thought of her as a lovely woman, she was a young widow engaged to be married, and by all accounts, she did not engage in frivolous sexual activities. That significantly muted his interest in her. But while standing at his father's side, Dirk watched as Ella bent to pick up a liquor decanter on a nearby table. Ella's emerald-green velvet gown was trimmed in white lace at the U-shaped bodice and along the cuffs. The gown showed only a modest amount of cleavage, but since she was quite short and extremely voluptuous, when she bent for the decanter, her feminine charms were unintentionally put on display for Dirk's enjoyment. It was enough to cause an immediate stirring in that part of his anatomy that was always primed for sexual conquest.

As Ella refilled the glasses of the four men, Dirk looked at her with an emotional mindset that was profoundly different from what it had been only seconds earlier. Dirk now realized that Ella Murphy wasn't just the proprietress of the largest ranch in the territory, she was also one of its most beautiful women. Standing barely over five feet tall, she was all lush curves and feminine extremes, her breasts full and round to the point of extravagance, her waist narrowing significantly before her curving hips swelled outward. Dirk could not see the shape of her legs beneath her green velvet skirt, but his imagination conjured an image of tapering thighs sheathed in silk stockings held in place with lace garters. He wondered what her drawers were like. Would they be cotton or silk? Did she wear bloomers that went below her knees, or were they less cumbersome, coming down only to mid-thigh? The European flare for feminine undergarments, which were intended to be seen as well as being worn, had made its way to New York and was advancing westward steadily.

But there was one other thing to think about. Gunnar van Gild had several years earlier told his son, in a tone indicating there was no room for equivocation, that Ella Thompson Murphy was a widow

who was most definitely *not* to be considered a potential bedmate. Period. End of discussion. When his father spoke like that, Dirk knew he'd better listen.

"Son, where's your head? Is it still on your shoulders?"

His father's stern voice shattered Dirk's reverie. "Sorry, Pa. I was just thinking about the troubles we've had with the artesian well near McPherson's hunting lodge. We really do have to look more closely into that." Even Dirk realized how inadequate his excuse was. The glimpse of Ella's bosom, though very fleeting, discombobulated Dirk more than he was willing to admit. "We were talking about the rustlers hitting the T-3 Ranch and where Mrs. Ella thought the rustlers might strike next, right?"

"That's right." Gunnar's tone was a little warmer than it had been moments earlier. He had never shown any ability to stay angry with his son for more than a few seconds. "Now Ella is saying that her fiancé is sending men to her pastures by Buffalo Creek, so I think you boys should head out at dawn to see what you can find out at one of her other ranges." He nodded to an eight-by-ten foot map of the territory spanning millions of acres. "Let's see what kind of options we've got."

As the men stepped closer to the map covering a large portion of the wall, Ella stated nonchalantly, "I'll be going along with you, of course."

Dirk chuckled. He knew he shouldn't laugh, but the notion of riding after cattle rustlers with a woman along stretched the boundaries of credulity.

All four men stopped walking and turned in unison toward the curvaceous but diminutive woman.

"Ella, my dear," Antonio said, his eyes alight with endearing protectiveness, putting a hand lightly on her shoulder, "let our boys take care of this matter. These men you seek have no regard for the law. Ben and Dirk have been raised to understand such men."

"I have no doubt all of that is true. Just the same, I'll be going

with them.” When Ella characteristically squared her shoulders, the move caused her breasts to push a bit more firmly against the bodice of her gown, which did disastrous things to Dirk’s rapidly faltering self-control. “I can ride as well as any man. You know that, Mr. Stenacci. My father taught me to ride almost before I could walk.” She smiled warmly. “Remember that gentle pinto you gave me for my fifth birthday present?”

Even though his better judgment screamed for him to remain silent, Dirk said, “All childhood presents aside, you’re still *not* going.”

He looked directly into her navy blue eyes for the specific reason that it prevented him from ogling her cleavage. Though her gown was perfectly fashionable and quite modest, Dirk found her bosom profoundly distracting. His cock, not coincidentally, found her charms magnetic.

“Those are my cattle being rustled.” Her words came out clipped, precise, and more than just a little imperious. Ella had been born into wealth, and Dirk knew she wasn’t in the least bit accustomed to men outside her family telling her what she could or could not do. America was a land of wealthy princesses who had all the privileges of class but lacked the official title. “I think that gives me the right to have a say in this.”

Dirk grinned. “You have the right to say whatever you wish. You just don’t have the right to ride with Ben and me.” He looked over at his good friend, pleased to see he wasn’t the only one finding Ella’s statement without merit. “The odds are that we won’t actually find the rustlers. It’s a very big territory, and if men want to disappear, there are a thousand places to do just that. But in the event that we do find the rustlers, there could be gunplay. Only a very foolish woman would willingly get involved in something like that.”

Ella’s dark blue eyes widened. “Dirk van Gild, are you calling me a fool?” She squared up on him testily.

Dirk raised hands, turning his broad palms defensively toward

Ella. “That isn’t what I said, and you know it. You’re twisting my words.” The amused glint in his eyes didn’t elicit particularly benevolent emotions from the feminine scion of one of the territory’s largest fortunes.

He watched as a muscle clenched in her jaw.

*I never realized she was so feisty. In bed she’d be the type to leave claw marks down a fella’s back and bite marks on his neck and shoulders.*

The thought did absolutely nothing to stop the slow, relentless swelling of the cock trapped inside the trousers of his tuxedo. Dirk knew that if he didn’t soon get his mind on something other than the luscious Mrs. Murphy, he’d have to make a hasty exit from the Association’s meeting even before the dance got started. His erection wasn’t something easily hidden nor comfortably contained inside trousers.

“Ella, my dear,” Gunnar said paternally, getting her attention. “We can hammer out the details later. Let’s all work together to figure out where those damned rustlers will ride next. Doesn’t that make the most sense?”

Quietly, and after one last scathing look at the annoyingly placid Dirk and the smirking Ben, Ella said, “Yes, I suppose you’re right.”

\* \* \* \*

Ella was dancing a waltz with Gunnar. She had been dancing with him since the days when she would stand on the toes of his boots as he moved to the orchestra’s rhythm. She was pleased to note that though he was now in his sixties, he was still nimble footed.

Earlier, she’d said only a few words with her fiancé before he excused himself. It wasn’t until later that she realized he extracted five additional twenty dollar gold coins from her purse when she wasn’t looking. After that, he settled into the card room for a round of five card draw poker. Though Ella had broken the gender barrier by

becoming a member of the Livestock Association, it would take an act of God for her to be admitted to the poker room, that impregnable bastion of male dominance. Being excluded didn't annoy Ella. Her father was a lousy poker player, and all he ever taught her about card games was that playing poker was a good way to lose the ranch. Besides, she loved dancing. She looked upon Gunnar and Antonio as wonderfully attentive uncles, and she could dance with them without causing vicious tongues to wag. Nasty rumors were a constant source of consternation and amusement among the well-heeled folks of the territory.

As she twirled with Gunnar slowly around the dance floor, Ella saw Dirk and Ben standing near the punch bowl. Hovering around the two young men were a half dozen of the region's wealthiest debutantes, along with their mothers. Not only were Ben and Dirk handsome enough to warrant such unblinking feminine attention, but mothers with marriage-age daughters viewed the Stenacci and Van Gild family fortunes the same way mountain lions viewed defenseless fawns.

"You seem distracted, my dear," Gunnar commented, his voice barely rising above the orchestra. "You're not still angry with my son, are you?"

Ella shook her head, sending curled ringlets of honey-blond hair dancing at her temples. "No, I'm not still angry with Dirk."

"He means well. He's just being protective, that's all."

"I can take care of myself," Ella replied automatically. After a moment of consideration, she blushed a little. "That's pretty bold talk, isn't it? I shouldn't be arrogant. There've been Indian uprisings and gunfights among the hired hands, and Lord knows what all else in the territory. Men born with a gun in their hand who think themselves invincible find themselves shot to pieces in the middle of Main Street. It must have sounded a little silly for me to be speaking like I'd know what to do if I came face-to-face with the cattle rustlers."

"That's all right," Gunnar said in an avuncular tone that implied

endless forgiveness. “Anyone who knew Arno Thompson would understand his little girl being spirited. God knows Arno never took a step backward for anyone.” He smiled and gave his head a shake. “He could be a very stubborn man when he got his hackles up.”

“He was a good man, wasn’t he?”

“One of the best. And with you being his only child, you’re very much like he was, my dear. Just like your father in so many ways.”

Ella glanced in the direction of the punch bowl once more and was a bit disheartened when she saw Marian Ludgaard place her palm on Ben’s chest as she spoke to him. The contact of feminine hand to masculine chest was fleeting, but Ella knew it wasn’t at all innocent. Not even a *little* innocent.

She felt a lightning bolt of jealousy go through her, and for an instant, she squeezed her eyes tightly shut, fighting against an emotion that was not characteristic. What difference did it make who her friend slept with? Marian had already discovered the orgasmic pleasures that Dirk van Gild had to offer, so why not find out whether Ben Stenacci was similarly gifted in the sensual arts?

Ella told herself that it made no difference if Marian seduced Ben. But what did make a difference was whether or not she was lying to herself, and this was a question she couldn’t readily answer.

The waltz ended. And though there were several young men hovering around, Ella made it clear to anyone watching that she wasn’t interested in young men by taking Gunnar’s proffered arm. She seldom had the opportunity to spend much time with him and Antonio, so she appreciated every minute when they were together.

“Let’s get some punch, and then I’ll turn you over to Antonio.” Gunnar smiled down at Ella and patted the back of her hand. “He’ll get cranky with me if I get to dance more with you than he does.” His pupils suggested he was not entirely sober but still in complete control of his faculties.

Penny Peterson, a young woman with the delicate features of the high-born and a tongue as poisonous as rattlesnake venom, was at the



punch bowl, smiling fetchingly at Ben as he filled her crystal cup. Standing behind Penny was her mother, Madeline. Ella had heard rumors that Madeline didn't think much of any woman who rode astride a horse instead of properly riding sidesaddle. Everyone knew the jab was directed at Ella.

"Can I get you a glass?" Ben asked Ella as she approached, his teeth glimmering white in a smiling, suntanned face. She could understand why so many women found themselves vulnerable to his potent charms.

Penny's smile vanished instantly. Madeline's dark eyes took on a glittery hardness, and the hatred in them was only thinly disguised. Though Ella tried to tell herself it probably meant nothing, she enjoyed the fact that she'd received a much more enthusiastic smile from Ben than he'd given to either Penny or Madeline.

"I'd appreciate that very much," Ella replied, letting her gaze linger on Ben's for a moment longer than necessary. If Madeline thought she could intimidate Ella with a nasty look, she was foolishly underestimating her opponent. To twist the knife a little, she added, "You're always so thoughtful, Ben."

As Ben picked up a crystal cup and began filling it, Gunnar said, "I'll go see where Antonio is. You'll be fine here with Ben."

Afterward, Ella couldn't say why she had done it. Perhaps it was just the nastiness she saw in Madeline's eyes. But for whatever reason, when Ben handed Ella her glass, she let her fingertips brush lightly over the back of his hand. When their eyes met, it was he who looked away first.

"It seems I congratulated you so long ago on your engagement," Madeline said, causing all eyes to turn toward her. "What is it, do you suppose, that keeps that Tim of yours from nailing down a date for the wedding?"

*Vicious bitch, you know damn well that I'm the one who won't set a wedding date!* Ella thought, though she wisely kept such words to herself.

Penny's eyes widened as though a thought had surprised her. "But you really *are* engaged, aren't you?"

"Yes," Ella replied, forcing a smile to her lips and a lightness to her tone that she did not feel. "It's just that Tim and I are both very busy people, and sometimes it's difficult to arrange things."

"Yes. I'm sure he loves you very much. But still, being a widow, I wonder if that gives him reason to pause." Her words came out almost without inflection, and her expression suggested there was something distasteful about a woman unable to get her fiancé to walk down the aisle.

Ella wished now that she'd never taken up Madeline's unspoken challenge. After all, Penny was young and single, and there was no reason in the world that her mother shouldn't try to get her married to a young man like Ben Stenacci.

Forcing herself to appear calm, Ella took a swallow of punch and realized instantly that it was spiked with alcohol. She wasn't usually one for liquor, but tonight it seemed heaven-sent.

"Engaged to be married?" Ben said quietly, his chocolaty gaze narrowing on Ella. "Until the dreaded day there's a ring on your finger, you give hope to miserable romantics like myself that we might win your heart."

Ella inhaled deeply and was just about to ask if everyone would kindly change the topic of discussion when Ben spoke and nearly dropped her to her knees in surprise.

"How about that? In a ballroom crowded with the loveliest ladies in the land, here you are, a widow at twenty-two, and *the* most beautiful woman in the room."

Penny gasped before showing limited self-control by holding her breath. Madeline dropped her crystal cup. It smashed to pieces on the floor of Italian marble, spraying red, vodka-laced punch in every direction under the compass, staining her white muslin gown as well as her daughter's.

Turning her icy gaze on Ella, Madeline said, "Come on, Penny.

Let's get a damp cloth on these stains before they set." To Ben, in a tone colored with flirtation, she said, "We'll see you again in just a few minutes."

When left in comparative solitude with Ben, Ella said, "Thank you for the compliment. And thank you even more for coming to my rescue. It wouldn't have surprised me if they'd pulled a knife."

"Madeline Peterson is a bitch," Ben replied under his breath. "Don't give her a second thought. She's not worth it."

Ella caught something in Ben's tone, an undercurrent of animosity that had been there long before this day. On a hunch, she asked, "Tell me the truth. Did you sleep with Madeline Peterson?"

It was clear that Ben wasn't inclined to speak of his sexual successes, even if his lovers rather obviously made no effort to keep secrets. Ben's reticence surprised Ella because she thought he, like so many men, would want to brag about conquests. Apparently, Ben wasn't quite as callow as she first suspected, and this pleased her more than she would admit.

"Be honest with me," Ella prodded. "After all, I'm just a widow engaged to be married for a second time, so I get very little entertainment these days."

Ben grinned. "The way you look, you should have *plenty* of entertainment. But to answer your question, yes, I have slept with Madeline. Not with Penny, though." A shudder went through him as though the very thought of sex with Penny was abhorrent. "One day, some young man with more money than sense is going to marry Penny, never for a second realizing that part of his husbandly duties will include satisfying his new mother-in-law as well as his bride."

Ella put a hand to her mouth as her eyes widened in shock. "You can't be serious!"

"Oh, believe me, I'm quite serious." He bent low so that his lips were an inch from Ella's ear. She was intensely aware of his masculinity and his nearness. "It all happened last summer. Madeline made it very clear that she was going to test for herself every beau she

thought might make a good husband for her daughter. And those tests would continue after the marriage ceremony.” He straightened and looked down into Ella’s eyes. “Penny doesn’t know, of course. And I believe Madeline thought she was sweetening the pot by including herself in the deal. When she said that, I realized I had to get the hell away from both mother and daughter and stay away. Permanently.”

What would it be like, Ella asked herself, to be in such extreme demand as a lover? It had been more than a year since Tim touched her. Sometimes she wondered if it was her fault that he’d stopped trying to seduce her, and she felt guilty in a vague, unsettling way. Most of the time, whenever her thoughts began drifting toward such unpleasant topics, she went to the office, opened her ledger, and concentrated on all that was necessary to profitably run the T-3 Ranch.

“I wasn’t lying, Ella,” Ben said quietly. “You really are the loveliest woman in the room. Without exception.”

Ella looked away. She was unaccustomed to receiving compliments from men so to receive them now from Ben was embarrassing. Her body, however, reacted quite differently. Ella felt a distinct tingling in her clitoris that she had not experienced in more months than she cared to count, and her nipples tightened.

“Think about what I’ve said, Ella. Every word of it’s true.”

Ben walked away without a backward glance, but the sound of his words echoed long afterward in Ella’s mind.

## Chapter Two

It was an hour before dawn when Ella was saddling up her favorite mare. Queenie was a strong, spirited, extremely intelligent four-year-old Appaloosa that Ella trained herself. In her saddlebags she had several cans of pork and beans, extra cartridges for her Winchester rifle, one complete change of clothing, two apples for Queenie, one hundred dollars in gold coin, her father's brass telescoping spyglass, and a map of the surrounding countryside detailing the land and buildings owned by the T-3 Ranch.

Ella overheard Dirk say that he'd meet Ben at his ranch at sunrise. If she hurried, she would be there by the time Ben arrived. She wouldn't confront them, just follow from a safe distance.

Before mounting, Ella went through a mental checklist. Did she lock up the ranch ledgers in the safe? Yes, she was certain of it. What about the bank draft book? It had gone in the safe, right on top of the ledger. Along with the letter she'd left on her desk, ambiguously stating she had to go to Fargo on a business matter that couldn't be avoided, she left two bank drafts, each for one hundred dollars, for Tim and Rosamond. Considering that one hundred dollars was more than two months' salary for the hard-working men who tended to the herds of T-3 cattle and horses, the sum seemed sufficient to hold her fiancé and mother over for a couple days. Besides, it wasn't like she'd ever *asked* Tim to help her run the ranch. Once he became her fiancé, pretty much at her mother's instance, he simply usurped certain duties, and Ella had never said he couldn't.

But if the money wasn't enough, and Ella knew she would get grief from both of them the minute she returned to the ranch, she

really didn't give a damn.

\* \* \* \*

Dirk eased back on the reins, and his gelding stopped. It had been a long day, and both horse and rider were looking forward to making camp for the night.

"Going to be dark soon," Ben said, coming up beside Dirk. "Sundown in an hour. Maybe a few minutes more."

"Look here." Dirk pointed toward a muddy spot on the grassy banks of the Crooked Crow Creek. "That's where one hundred head of prime Hereford cattle crossed the river."

"Yeah. So?"

"But the rest of the herd went south, staying west of the river."

"So this is where the rustlers cut the herd." He whistled softly. "Damned impressive, my friend."

He pushed his flat-crowned black Stetson back on his head, then reached into his saddlebags. "It's too dark to follow them tonight. Let's get into some trees and set up camp, and tomorrow we'll see where those tracks lead." He pulled a bottle of whiskey from his bag, removed the cork, and took a swallow before handing the bottle over to Ben. "You know who we need for this? Blue, that's who."

Blue Sun Rising was a half-breed Blackfoot who worked at various times as a hunter for the Army and Cavalry, as a hunting guide for wealthy businessmen from the East who wanted trophy-sized elk and mule deer heads to send to their taxidermists, and as a tracker for posses in search of killers. Having been shunned by both his mother's tribe and white society, Blue lived by himself in a lodge near the wild, mountainous western edge of the territory. At twenty-eight, he was only a few years older than Ben and Dirk, who had known him since his middle teen years, when their fathers first hired him to track down a man who thought killing the wife he no longer loved was more humane than simply abandoning her.

Ben handed the bottle back, and when their gazes met, Ben winked. "Look at the tracks on the riverbank again," Ben said quietly. "Keep looking and don't look away."

"Where are they?" A chill went through Dirk.

"Behind us and to the right. I've had the feeling that we were being followed for a while now, but I never had anything more than just a hunch."

Dirk sighed, and his shoulders slumped. "I thought you seemed kind of distracted."

"You were so busy tracking, I figured I'd better watch our backs."

"How many?" Dirk asked. The fact that he hadn't an inkling he was being followed rankled his nerves mightily. His best friend never failed to impress him.

"Hard to say."

Dirk took another sip of whiskey, fighting hard to not look around. He tucked the bottle back into his saddlebags and asked, "This seems to be your play. Where do you want to spring it?"

"Not out here in the open. About a quarter mile down there's a copse of trees. A great place to set up camp and an even better place to set a trap."

"Lead the way, my friend. At least one of us has a head on his shoulders."

Ben chuckled softly. "Bothers the hell out of you whenever I figure out something before you, doesn't it?"

"Right down to my socks."

"Glad to hear it because that's just the way I feel whenever you've got the answer that I don't."

Dirk felt better after that. Not a lot better but a little better.

\* \* \* \*

Ben chose his position carefully. He was on the low limb of a tree overlooking the one trail that lead through the copse of trees near the

Crooked Crow Creek. His back was pressed tightly to the trunk of the tree to prevent a silhouette. Whoever was following him had little choice but to take the trail if they were to get closer to where Dirk had already made the campfire and was slowly and rather noisily setting up camp. Dirk's noisiness was intentional. For the trap to work, Ben needed it to appear as though they weren't alerted to having been followed. The hunted had become the hunter. Every nerve in Ben's body was alert.

Darkness descended swiftly. With sketchy clouds blocking a half-moon, only slivers of pale light made it through the leaves.

Ben waited silently, but he didn't wait patiently. The logical part of his brain told him that inaction was more often than not just as important as taking action, but the emotional part of him screamed to take action *now*.

He started to test, yet again, the knife in the sheath on his gun belt at his left hip. Ben stopped himself. He'd already tested the razor-sharp bone-handled knife four times, and he knew it wouldn't get stuck if he needed to pull it. The knife slipped out of the tooled leather sheath as smoothly as if it were greased. The Colt in the holster on his right hip still had the leather thong security loop over the hammer, so when he made his jump he wouldn't find himself reaching for his revolver only to discover it had fallen out. Still, he itched to silently draw his sensitive fingertips over the holster's loop, just to make sure one more time.

"My Bonny lies over the ocean...my Bonny..."

Ben smiled. Dirk was a terrible singer, but he was a good actor. His words, drifting through the trees, had a distinct slur to them. Ben knew his friend was completely sober, but pretending he was getting drunk might fool whoever was following them into being less wary.

It was the whinny of a horse that first warned Ben. The twisting trail made it impossible to see more than twenty yards, but the horse sounded quite close.

Then he heard another sound, a soft *pat, pat, pat*. Only a man



who'd spent much of his life on horseback would have recognized the sound. It was the sound of a rider patting a horse's neck in reassurance, wanting to prevent any further noise from the animal.

He heard the creak of saddle leather then saw movement in shadows. A moment later, he saw the outline of the rider. He was slump-shouldered, apparently exhausted from a long day in the saddle. Ben nearly smiled. All day long, he wondered whether or not he was actually being followed, and now he knew beyond question that his instincts were dead on the mark. The rider moved closer, almost within striking distance.

"My Bonny lies over the ocean..." sang Dirk with the enthusiasm and tone-deaf quality of a drunken sot.

The rider's horse lifted its head and whinnied again. Perhaps it caught his scent. Ben couldn't tell and didn't have time to find out. Though the rider was farther away than he would have liked, he launched himself, kicking off from the tree, his lean body streaking downward and sideways like a pouncing panther.

Ben's shoulder hit the rider high in the chest. Toppling backward over the rump of the horse, Ben landed on his prey and heard a reassuring "Uh!" as air rushed from constricted lungs.

"Bastard!" he hissed through clenched teeth, simultaneously putting a hand on the man's chest to keep him pinned to the ground as he cocked his right arm, determined to put an end to the fight with one devilishly decisive punch to the face.

But something was wrong. In a split-second of time, Ben's brain screamed that something was terribly, terribly wrong. His right arm quivered, but the signal from his brain to release the punch never came. His left hand flexed, his strong fingers burying into the rather extravagant mound of a very feminine breast. He squeezed again, and there could be no doubt. He moved his hand to the side and found another breast, equally as plump and firm and enticing.

She was groaning now, trying to catch her breath. Ben remained above her, straddling her body with his thighs, his mind in a whirl. He

unclenched his fist and lowered his arm. Angrily, he knocked the woman's hat aside and for the first time had enough moonlight to see clearly.

He looked down into the pain-constricted face of Ella Murphy.

"You stupid fool!" he spat.

Before he took his left hand from her breast, he squeezed one last time.

\* \* \* \*

"I didn't say it before, but I'll say it now," Dirk said to Ella as he massaged her neck and shoulders, "you're a damned fool."

Ella wanted very much to tell Dirk that he was being a jackass, but she didn't. She didn't because, at heart, she knew that he was right. She slipped away from the T-3 Ranch without saying a word to anyone, not a word to her mother, not a note to her fiancé, or to any of the servants, because she wanted to be directly involved in catching the cattle rustlers. But when she was honest with herself, she had just been looking for an excuse to get away from her meddlesome mother and the greedy and dissolute man her mother insisted she marry.

But there was something else that compelled Ella to saddle up Queenie so early in the morning and ride away from all the creature comforts her ranch provided. That reason was Ben and Dirk. As annoying as they could be with their insistence upon taking masculine prerogatives, and as frustrating as it was to be aware that they'd had sex with quite a number of women Ella knew personally, their charm was infectious. When Ben flattered her at the Livestock Association dance, speaking so flirtatiously in front of two women who would undoubtedly tell everyone they knew what he said, Ella felt attractive and sexually appealing for the first time in months.

Sitting in the grass near the small campfire with Dirk seated behind her, Ella rolled her head on her shoulders. She landed hard on the ground with Ben on top of her, so now the muscles were knotted

in her neck and right shoulder. Dirk's slowly moving thumbs were massaging the tension away, and though she was still in pain, it felt heavenly to be touched with strong, masculine hands.

"You're right, and I'm wrong. I *am* a damn fool," she said, her voice low. "There. I've said it now. Are you happy?"

Dirk just chuckled.

Ben said, "You're damned lucky I didn't shoot first and ask questions later."

"Yes, I am lucky," Ella said, her eyes barely open as she looked at the dark, handsome man lounging on the opposite side of the campfire. "But if I was really lucky, I would have landed on you instead of you landing on me. You nearly broke my neck."

Even though she had the breath knocked out of her at the time, Ella remembered what it had been like to have Ben's long-fingered hand squeezing her breast. She had been too stunned to push his hand from her, but that didn't stop her from being intensely aware of his hand going from her right breast to her left, squeezing firmly, a little experimentally. Under other circumstances, his touch would have given her pleasure.

Ella watched as Ben rose to his feet, and a nebulous emotion went through her. He moved, she decided, with catlike fluidity. When he picked up the bottle of whiskey, Ella raised her blue enameled tin cup and let him add a little more, even though her cup wasn't empty.

"I know as a lady I'm not supposed to drink spirits, but I have to be honest with you. Right now, this whiskey, even though it burns on the way down, tastes wonderful." She smiled dreamily and took a small sip. "I can already feel it. It makes me feel warm." But she knew that Dirk's hands massaging her aching neck and shoulders were adding to that heat. "It also makes my neck hurt less."

"Drink up. It's good for you. It'll keep your muscles from cramping," Dirk prodded.

"If you're trying to get me drunk," Ella said then paused to take two small sips of whiskey, "I should let you know that you're

succeeding. I...I seem to feel the liquor in my cheekbones and in the backs of my eyes.” She sighed wearily and rolled her head on her shoulders once again. “Dirk, would it be very unladylike of me to say that your hands feel wonderful?”

“How can feeling wonderful be unladylike?”

Ella smiled dreamily. Ben, who was still standing, poured a little more whiskey into her cup then knelt on the riverbank in front of her.

“You know, if I wasn’t engaged, I’d be completely smitten with you men.” Ella closed her eyes to more completely enjoy the warmth of the liquor going through her veins and the deeply sensual heat that was caused by Dirk’s massaging fingers. “One of the last things my father ever said to me was to obey my mother. Such a pity she thinks it best to marry me off to...” Her words trailed away. She didn’t want to taste Tim’s name on her tongue or hear it in her ears. Not when she was with Dirk and Ben. “Well, to that man my mother said I should get engaged to before some other woman ‘snaps’ him up.”

Ben asked, “Do you always do everything your mother tells you to?”

“I used to without fail but not so much anymore.” The flickering flames of the campfire illuminated Ben in profile. Ella wondered why she had never realized just how handsome he was. “Can I ask you an intimate question?” When Ben’s gaze met hers, she queried, “What’s it like to have slept with so many women?” Her eyes suddenly opened wide. “Oh, my! Did I really just ask that? Now I *know* I’ve had too much to drink.”

Feeling her cheeks turning pink with embarrassment, Ella pushed Dirk’s hands off her shoulders and started to rise, but he quickly pulled her down so that she sat in the grass with her back pressed against his chest and his long legs surrounding her hips.

“Don’t go.” Dirk’s tone was low, seductive. It touched Ella like a physical caress.

“When I start asking questions like that,” Ella replied, feeling more embarrassed by the second, “then it’s obviously time for me to

take a long walk.”

She started to get up again, but Dirk stopped her quickly. He pulled her until she was once again seated in front of him on the grass, his back propped against the trunk of an elm tree. As she struggled, he pulled her arms behind her, the fingers of his right hand easily surrounding both of her wrists. His left hand slipped over her shoulder to cup her chin.

“What are you—,” Ella began as Dirk forcibly angled her face up and to the side.

She would have said more, but Dirk slanted his mouth down over hers in a kiss that was nearly harsh. The kiss was heated and commanding but closed-mouthed. The hand on her face held her securely. The awareness that she was with two strong, dominating men was shockingly erotic. The sensation of having her wrists held together behind her back affected her in intimate, forbidden ways, and she experienced a spontaneous tingling in her clitoris she hadn't felt in years.

Ella squirmed as Dirk feasted on her mouth. She knew she should scream, or at least struggle harder against these men, but that voice of reason was drowned out by the roar of her racing heart.

When the kiss finally ended and Dirk took his hand from Ella's chin, she twisted around so that her back pressed against his thickly-muscled chest. Her breasts rose and fell with her rapid breathing, the mounds thrusting forward against her shirtfront because of the position of her hands.

“Oh, my!” she whispered, batting her eyes as though needing to clear her vision. “Gentlemen, I think things are going a little too far.”

Ben moved so that he straddled Ella's legs with his knees. He took her face in his hands and said, “My turn.”

“No!” Ella gasped, squeezing her eyes tightly shut. “Wait! I can't think.”

Ben's voice was husky with rising passion as he said, “Don't think. Just feel.”

Ella tried to pull her hands free. It was a futile effort. Dirk was far too strong for her to wrench her wrists from his grasp. An instant later, when Ben's lips, warm and moist, sealed over hers, she uttered a soft moan. She stopped squirming. Ben's lips might just as well have been laudanum for the narcotizing effect they had on her senses. A liquid heat flowed through her veins.

Prior to her marriage to Richard, Ella had been courted by two men, both of whom she allowed kisses and a few chaste caresses over her clothing, but nothing more intimate than that. She had been a virgin on her wedding night not so many years earlier. Though she succumbed to Tim's advances, the occasions were few and far from memorable. So there was nothing in her personal background to prepare her for the experience of kissing, one after the other, two wickedly arousing, sensually-talented, handsome men. Their kisses were as intoxicating as the whiskey but much more dangerous than any distilled beverage.

Ben's tongue eased between her lips, and Ella shocked herself by opening her mouth to allow his deeper exploration. She heard a soft, sultry moan of pleasure, and it shocked her to realize she made the sound herself. Her head spun, and Ella knew the liquor caused only a small amount of her disorientation. She was drunk with escalating passion, not with liquor. Her intoxicant had the names Dirk and Ben.

As her tongue danced with Ben's, Ella thought, My God, this man can kiss!

It was not a comforting thought for Ella to have. She long ago resigned herself to living a life of little or no passion. Even her husband during their brief marriage hadn't inspired heated desire.

When the kiss ended and Ben lifted his head, Ella breathed deeply, her heart pounding. She experienced versions of passion before, but her personal experience only hinted at possibilities. With Ben and Dirk, a thirty-second kiss stimulated more than intimate caresses from Tim.

To Dirk, Ben said, "I don't supposed you'd be willing to take a

walk for the next hour or so, would you?"

"Funny thing, you asking that. You see, I was kind of hoping you'd do the honorable thing and give your legs a good, long stretch."

## Chapter Three

Ben leaned back, sitting lightly on Ella's knees. Like a fever that had gone instantaneously into his blood, his desire for the blue-eyed woman flamed to life when he watched Dirk kiss her. It was wildly irrational, he knew, to be either jealous or competitive with Dirk, but Ben couldn't deny he felt those nasty emotions. He shifted his hips a little, trying to make it less uncomfortable for the formidable erection trapped inside trousers that bulged portentously.

"I told you last night that you're the most beautiful woman in the territory," he said in a husky tone, his gaze moving slowly up and down over Ella, lingering long on her breasts before settling on her eyes. "I meant it then, and I mean it now. You're too damned beautiful to be ignored. Why in hell haven't I ever kissed you before tonight?"

"Because I would have scratched your eyes out."

Ben laughed softly, doubting her sincerity. The blatantly aroused, elongated nipples denting her blouse were a testament to desires she undoubtedly felt but was trying to ignore. "Keep a good hold on her, Dirk. This isn't the time to find out if this she-cat will blind me if she gets the chance." He put his palms lightly on Ella's stomach, touching her through the blouse and camisole. "It seems to me she needs some more kissing."

He saw it then, hidden in the depths of her blue eyes. Fear and desire. But it didn't seem to Ben that Ella's fear was the type one felt when faced with imminent physical danger. So what was she afraid of? Dirk and him? Or her reaction to what they were doing to her? With self-serving logic, he decided the best way to get the answer was



to kiss her some more.

She struggled a little, squirming as she was forced to lean back against the hard-muscled expanse of Dirk's chest. The movement caused her breasts to sway erotically from side to side. Ben noted, with a connoisseur's eye for such details, that her nipples had become more erect in the past couple seconds. Had they hardened with passion, or was it fear that turned them into blunt pebbles? When he sucked on them, would they tighten with lust? The thought added even greater solidity to his throbbing erection.

Ben smiled. He had a lot of questions regarding Ella, and he intended to get the answers.

He took her face between his palms. Ella tried to turn away, but Ben held her tightly as he slanted his mouth over hers. He tried to ease his tongue between her lips, but she refused to open her mouth. It was a small, futile act of resistance. Ben traced the circumference of her mouth with the moist tip of his tongue, and Ella moaned softly, though she kept her jaws clamped shut.

Pulling away only scant inches, Ben looked into Ella's eyes. This time he recognized the unspoken emotion he saw. In an epiphany, Ben realized Ella was aroused by his domination. Her husband had been kind but milquetoast. He lacked the strength to harness a strong spirit like Ella's. She was a woman in control of one of the largest horse and cattle ranches between Texas and Canada, but when she was with a man, she didn't want to be the decision-maker. Ben understood it all in an instant, though he doubted Ella had the self-awareness to understand her own chaotic emotions.

"Damn, just look at you," Ben whispered, his fingertips trailing slowly downward from Ella's face. "So damned beautiful but you've been put up on a shelf and ignored like some priceless porcelain doll everybody's too afraid to touch." He looked at Dirk. "She needs more kisses, my friend. A lot more."

Dirk again cupped Ella's chin in his hand, forcibly turning her face to the side and upward so he could kiss her. Despite the

considerable number of women Dirk and Ben had both been intimate with, Ben had never before watched his friend behaving wantonly at such close distance. He found it unsettling. On a warm evening on the banks of a slow-moving stream, Dirk and Ben traveled into sexual territory that was completely new for them and for the woman sharing their journey.

Seconds passed as Ben watched Dirk kissing Ella. His groin ached, drawing his attention. Earlier, his erection had been uncomfortably trapped. Now it was painfully imprisoned. He moved a little further down Ella's legs until he was sitting lightly on her ankles, then he unbuckled his gun belt and set his holster aside but within easy reach. He hastily unbuttoned the fly of his trousers. His erection, quite long and fiercely erect, sprang away from his body, angling sharply upward. He groaned with relief when his cock was freed.

Ella had on knee-high, square-toed black riding boots. Noting they were brightly polished, Ben wondered caustically which of her numerous servants had the responsibility for seeing that her boots were never scuffed.

"These fancy boots have got to go."

At his words, Ella started fighting against Dirk. Though a powerful man himself, Ben knew Dirk was much stronger still, so the idea that a short, curvaceous woman like Ella might wrestle her way free of his grasp was not to be taken seriously. She couldn't even turn her face enough to end the hot kisses that Dirk was pressing to her lips.

While remaining seated on one ankle, Ben pulled off Ella's opposite boot. She started kicking her feet, but her efforts accomplished little, and in just seconds he was again seated on her knees.

"What kind of a person wears English style riding trousers while on the trail for rustlers?" Ben asked in mock disgust, his fingers already working open the polished brass buckle of her slender belt. "I

know you can ride a horse as well as any man, maybe even better than most, but when it comes to picking clothes to wear on a trail, you don't know a damned thing."

As her belt buckle came unfastened, Ella managed to wrench her chin free from Dirk's palm, while Ben concentrated on unbuttoning her fly.

"How dare you?" Ella hissed.

Both Ben and Dirk chuckled softly at the insult. "Dare? Dirk and I dare to do quite a lot." His smile added spice to the statement. "But then, you know that. You've heard the stories of our...um...excesses. You said so yourself." He curled his fingers into the waistband of her riding trousers and began pulling them down past the curve of her hips.

Ella's struggles became more heated, but her actions were at cross-purposes with her intentions. As she writhed on the grass, her efforts to free her wrists from Dirk's steely grasp only made it easier for Ben to pull her cotton and leather riding trousers completely off her right leg, leaving the garment bunched at the top of her left boot.

"Ben...Dirk...stop and think now. This is insane." The tip of Ella's tongue moistened her lips. Her breathing had become quite ragged. "What do you want with a dried-up widow like me?"

A strange, spontaneous fury broke over Ben then. He didn't like hearing Ella degrading herself. He had long suspected she had been sensually neglected by her husband, but he highly doubted she was, as she claimed, dried up. He leaned forward and touched her through the sheer white silk of her drawers. The heat and moisture of her passion were instantly evident to his sensitive touch. When he rubbed her gently, pressing silk against her moist labia and erect clitoris, Ella's eyelashes tapped against her cheeks, and she uttered the softest of moans. He knew she was a woman surrendering to passion but not without an inner fight with her insecurities and inhibitions.

"No, definitely not dried up." Ben's tone was deep, husky. "Neglected. Emotionally bruised and battered, I suppose. But not

dried up.”

He unknotted the drawstring to Ella’s drawers, and when he put his fingers inside the loosened waistband, she raised her hips an inch off the ground for a moment. Then, as though realizing she was assisting rather than resisting, she dropped down on the grass and made yet another failing effort at pulling her wrists free from Dirk’s enormous hand. A moment later, her underpants were bunched along with her fancy riding trousers at the top of the one boot she still had on.

Ben grabbed Ella’s bare ankle and pulled her leg to the side, giving himself more room as he wedged his shoulders between her naked thighs.

“Beautiful,” Ben whispered, wrapping his arms completely around Ella’s thighs from the underside so that his fingertips were close to the pink lips of her pussy. “There’s nothing about you that isn’t beautiful.”

He leaned forward, pressing his lips against Ella. When his tongue separated her folds and then immediately began a slow journey upward until he licked her clitoris, she uttered a high-pitched moan, and in a most unladylike fashion, spoke a word she’d never said aloud.

She gasped, “Oh, fuck!”

\* \* \* \*

Ella had heard about cunnilingus. She even knew the name for it. Marian, her one friend with a propensity to be both promiscuous and overly loquacious, filled her in on the details of what lovemaking was like with the dark-haired scion of the GWR Ranch. What she didn’t know, until the age of twenty-two, was what cunnilingus, administered by Ben, or anyone else, actually felt like.

Until now, that is.

In her ears the word “fuck” rang as clearly as a bell. Ella could not

remember ever before using such a coarse and vulgar term. Under the circumstances, it seemed to be the only suitable word.

She closed her eyes and stopped struggling against Dirk. A tiny, logical voice in her brain whispered that he was enormously powerful, and even though he only used one hand to keep her wrists pinned behind her back, she was bound as securely as if she had manacles on.

Each swipe of Ben's tantalizing tongue brought new shivers of passion to Ella. Though she felt it most intensely when he licked and sucked on her clitoris, he did not give that button of flesh his sole concentration. With a leisurely approach, he dragged the stiffened tip of his tongue through the cleavage of her lips, from the bottom to the top, where he then toyed with her clitoris before starting the journey all over again. Instinctively, Ella knew Ben was *extremely* skilled at what he was doing.

"Oh, yes!" Ella purred when she felt two fingers invading her body while Ben's lips and tongue paid very special attention to her clitoris.

*I must remain silent. It's bad enough I'm responding with such inhibition to these men. The least I can do is pretend it doesn't feel so good.*

She caught her lower lip between her teeth to keep from moaning and amended her earlier thoughts.

*So fucking good!*

Her back was pressed against Dirk's chest, her head on his shoulder. She felt his racing heart. The hand surrounding her wrists shifted slightly, and that was when Ella realized something else, something very interesting. Something growing! Though Dirk continued to hold her wrists, one over the other, securely at the small of her back, somewhere during her struggles, Dirk had moved so that now, right beneath her palms, she felt the swollen bulge of an erection straining against the fabric of his tan trail trousers.

Ella's first instinct was to try to pull her hands away. It would be bad enough to touch a man there when he wasn't aroused, so it must

surely be an awful breach of deportment to touch him when he had an erection. With her eyes closed, she used her fingers to measure the length and girth of Dirk's arousal. A shiver went through her when she realized his size. His erection was in keeping with the rest of the man's physique: thick, solid, intimidating. She squeezed him, her fingers and thumb pressing into the shaft. It was like testing the hardness of a piece of steel. Warm, living, lusting steel.

She squeezed him again, and this time the groan of pleasure Ella heard came from Dirk. He cupped her chin in his palm, and she didn't have to be forced to angle her face toward him. When his warm lips captured hers, it was Ella who opened her mouth to invite a more intimate exploration. Releasing her chin as he continued to kiss her, Dirk's fingers trailed over her taut throat then down to her white silk shirtfront. The small pearl buttons came unfastened with a swiftness and ease that suggested extensive experience.

*I'll feel so guilty about this.*

The silent, weak inner voice of reason wouldn't remain silent but was completely with influence against the onslaught of passionate emotions evoked by being the center of sensual attention by Ben and Dirk.

As Ben's fingers continued their seesaw action between the lips of her pussy, and his lips and tongue concentrated solely on her clitoris, Ella felt the tightening within herself that warned a powerful orgasm was fast approaching. She decided, then and there, that living with a secret wasn't necessarily such a bad thing. If she had to feel guilty about something, there couldn't be anything she'd rather be guilty about than this.

And with the conclusion of this rather self-serving thought, Ella, with her legs over Ben's shoulders and his mouth pressed tight to her pussy, began to climax. Pulses of pure energy went through her. Her body trembled through spasms so powerful they were painful. Three harsh contractions were followed by four others of lesser intensity before she finally started to descend from her orgasmic heights.

And when it was finally over, Ella opened her eyes, blinking them several times to clear her vision. She looked at Ben as he rose to his knees. His lips, cheeks, and chin were shiny in the flickering light of the campfire with the slippery evidence of her passion's fulfillment.

"Hold her, Dirk," he said in a low growl. "Hold her tight. She's delicious, and she's had her fun, but I'm a long way from finished."

Ben opened his trousers and unbuttoned his fly. His dusky hued erection angled upward from his loins. The skin over the crown was stretched so tautly it seemed to Ella that it would surely split. Even in the dim moonlight, she could see a thick vein pulsing as it ran a squiggly path along underside of his cock's shaft.

"Hold her tight," Ben repeated as he took Ella by the ankles. He pulled her toward him a couple inches so she didn't lean quite so upright against Dirk, then spread her ankles wide apart. He moved over Ella, his chest touching the mounds of her breasts at exactly the same time the crest of his arousal touched the wet entrance to her pussy. He looked into Ella's eyes and whispered, "You'll be coming again soon. I promise it."

A thousand conflicting emotions went through Ella. A thousand different sensations, each stimulating in its own way, slithered through her body. Dirk continued to hold her wrists, but since she had slumped down in front of him, her wrists were now much higher up her back than earlier. She was aware of a twinge of pain in her shoulders, as well as how her breasts pressed against Ben's chest. She felt the heat of his erection against her tingling entrance, and though she thought it must surely be a terrible sin, she waited with anticipation to feel his virility piercing her most intimate flesh. A moment later, as Ben's lean hips lowered and the unyielding column of his erection forced her delicate, feminine tissue to separate further than ever had before, Ella issued a warbling moan of desire then bit her lip to silence any further sounds of passion.

"So beautiful," Ben said as he began rocking his hips back and forth, working his erection into Ella. He pulled his knees beneath him.

“The most beautiful woman from Billings to Minneapolis to Kansas City. Without question.”

Ella closed her eyes. She was afraid that if she allowed Ben to see into her eyes he'd see into her soul, and then he'd know just how desperately she needed this evening, though she didn't know it herself until she was trapped in the middle of it.

Her nerve endings seemed heightened to sensation. Everything stimulated her. She was glad Dirk held her wrists. It gave her a sense of bondage, of being involuntarily involved in taboo lust. And Ben's words, softly but deeply spoken, no doubt well-practiced in countless boudoirs, touched her nearly as intimately as his hands. As a widow of twenty-two, Ella stopped thinking of herself as either young or pretty. She realized the men were awakening in her a new woman, a vital woman of passion.

She felt Ben opening her blouse. The only way to take her camisole off was to lift it over her head. That meant releasing her wrists and shattering the fragile but wickedly erotic mood of bondage.

“Look at these,” Ben purred, his hips continuing to rock slowly as he placed his palm over the heavy, rolling mounds of Ella's breasts, pinching her nipples through the thin cotton lingerie.

Ella felt a distinct pang of regret that fashion and modesty dictated that she wear a camisole beneath her blouse and jacket. This regret turned into an erotic experience when Ben, with a growl, grabbed the camisole between her breasts and pulled it apart, ripping the garment in half.

She gasped, shocked at his savagery and immeasurably aroused by his boldness. When he bent over her and captured her left nipple between his lips, she cried out. And when he used his sharp teeth to bite her nipple with just enough force to cause discomfort, Ella groaned, lifted one leg and pointed her toes toward the moon and shuddered through her second climax of the evening as Ben's big, tireless cock continued its erotic undulations.

Her eyes were closed when warm lips sealed over hers. Through



touch alone, Ella knew it was Ben kissing her this time, not Dirk. The notion that she had her option of men to kiss was surreal enough to very nearly make her climax yet again.

He pumped his long cock into her with greater force, driving into her until his pelvis slapped moistly against hers. Ella could tell when a man was soon to have his orgasm, and the rational part of her brain knew she should warn him to not climax inside her.

It was a sobering, sane, logical thought for Ella to have. If she got pregnant, Tim would never marry her. Would he be cruel enough to shame Ella by revealing to the community her promiscuity? Until they were married, she would never let him into her bed. That was understood. But that did not explain her reaction on this evening. And even with her great wealth and her father's reputation, Ella would be banished from polite circles with an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Behind her back, people would gossip, and bets would be taken as to who was the father.

These disquieting thoughts took Ella away from her post-orgasmic pleasure and even away from Ben. But when he speared into her with even greater vigor, thrusting his hips downward to embed his cock more deeply than before, she cast aside unsettling thoughts and concerned herself only with Ben.

He made a sound then, like that of a leonine roar getting choked off somehow, and after that very last, final plunge, he withdrew completely. His climax was powerful. Hot rivers of cum erupted from him, splattering Ella's stomach and striking the undersides of her breasts. At the end, only a weak trickle of white cream oozed from his satisfied body.

"Oh, my!" Ella exclaimed weakly, feeling the semen, warm and slippery, on her skin. She had never seen so much semen in her life. What Ben released was many times what came out of her husband, and she immediately wondered if that was how she managed to remain childless during her marriage.

Ben leaned away from Ella, sitting on the backs of his boots. His

cock glistened with a combination of his juices and hers. He breathed deeply. Perspiration beaded on his forehead and temples.

Ella felt Dirk's fingers loosen around her wrist. Very slowly, she brought her hands to her hips. For all practical purposes, she was completely naked with two men she had known for years but men she had never known with any degree of intimacy. And now she lay on the grass between them, what few articles of clothing she had either unbuttoned, ripped to shreds, or wrapped around one leg. She had cum cooling from her stomach to her breasts. Surprisingly, she wasn't even a little bit embarrassed that the men were looking at her.

"My God, do you always come this much?" Ella asked softly, running a fingertip over her stomach. Cum pooled in her navel.

"Sorry. Let me get a towel."

Ben rose to his feet, and Ella was once again impressed with his feline grace. "Don't be sorry," she said. "I'm just impressed. Impressed and grateful that you didn't climax inside me."

Ben's usual roguish smile returned as he pulled a towel from the mule's pack. "No gentlemen would ever come inside a lady. It just isn't done." Ella reached for the towel, but Ben kept it from her. "No, I made the mess, so I'll clean it up."

"Clean up's going to have to wait," Dirk said, his tone jagged edged with repressed sensuality. "I've been about as patient as I'm ever going to be."

Grabbing Ella forcefully, he twisted her so that she was on her hands and knees. Pulling at her clothing, he removed her jacket and blouse and the tattered remains of what had been a very pretty chemise. Ella still had her drawers and riding trousers wrapped around her left leg where the knee-high boot created a barrier. It wasn't a significant obstacle to Dirk's pleasure.

As she felt herself yielding to accept his solid manhood, Ella shivered and whispered, "Make me come." She licked her lips and added, "Again!"

\* \* \* \*

Kneeling on the riverbank behind Ella, Dirk put one hand on the sweetly rounded curve of her hip and used his other hand to guide the flaring crown of his erection to her pussy. Kissing her, fondling her, watching her take Ben's cock into her pussy time and time again played unholy hell with Dirk's lusts. When Ella first squeezed his erection through his trousers, he hadn't been sure it was intentional. He held her hands behind her back, after all, so her palms would naturally be very near his crotch. But when she squeezed him a second time and then measured the length of his cock with her fingers, Dirk's passion for her rose to a fever pitch.

Aware that it wasn't typical of him to feel so frenzied, Dirk was vaguely annoyed with Ella for her having such a powerful influence over him, for having enchanted him so completely. Despite his great physical strength, her allure made him feel weak in ways he'd rather not consider.

He paused only a moment to make sure he was properly aligned then placed both hands on Ella's hips and made a measured invasion. His girth was such that he knew he couldn't just spear himself inside her without hurting her. The head and several inches of his shaft buried itself within her slick, feminine warmth. She let out a short cry and tossed her head back on her shoulders, sending blond hair flying over her back.

Dirk groaned low in his throat. It was a rumbling, primitive sound. For all of his expensive schooling, Viking blood still flowed in his veins, and the ancient barbarian warriors whispered instructions in voices only he could hear.

It took three revolutions of his hips before Dirk buried all of his erection inside Ella. When he reached full insertion, his fingers buried into the flesh of her hips, holding her tightly, his torso pressed against the rounded curves of her ass.

Seconds passed. Dirk stared down at the voluptuous blonde

woman on her knees before him, visually drinking in her beauty. Then, slowly, he began a long retreat. A shiver worked up his spine as he watched the shaft of his cock spreading Ella's buns as he withdrew from her slick pussy.

"Oh, God!" Ella sighed softly, her arms shaking beneath her, threatening to collapse at any moment. "You're just so *thick*!"

There was something utterly wanton in the way she whispered the word "thick." Dirk felt a tingling in his testicles, and he knew then he wouldn't have his usual sexual stamina. When he retreated until only the very tip of his crown still separated her lips, he paused a moment, waiting, watching, wondering what Ella's next move would be.

And then he got his answer.

She looked over her shoulder up at him and then rocked backward, impaling herself on his unyielding cock. Her moan was an aphrodisiac that went straight into his blood.

It was all the acquiescence Dirk needed. He grabbed her by the hips again, retreated swiftly, and drove forward with great force. He didn't stop until the pink lips of her cunt were a tight ring around the shaft of his cock, and his balls were moistened by the slick juices seeping from her.

Centuries of Viking blood flowed hot and true in Dirk's veins. He grabbed a handful of Ella's luxurious blonde hair at the base of her neck and pulled. She gasped when her head snapped up. As he did this, he raised his right hand high and then brought it down hard upon Ella's naked ass. The sound of his broad palm striking her perspiration-moistened skin echoed through the night air. She gasped again, and it fueled barbarian desires. He pulled her hair and spanked her bottom while his own torso pistoned with machine-like efficiency and fury.

"Come!" Dirk growled, punctuating the word by thrusting full-length into Ella then giving her hair a firm tug. "Come around my cock!"

The next time he thrust into Ella, her overheated body responded

exactly as he wanted it to. He spanked her hard, and the sound of his palm brightening her buttocks mingled with Ella's garbled, keening cry of orgasmic ecstasy.

Dirk thrust into her one more time, then withdrew. With the thick shaft of his cock wedged in the cleavage of Ella's buns and pressed against his own torso, he released a deluge of semen, the thick streams arching through the night air to leave gooey lines from her shoulder blades to buttocks.

When Dirk released his tight hold on Ella's hips and hair, she groaned and collapsed onto her stomach in the grass, cradling her head in her arms.

"Are you all right?" Dirk asked with quiet sincerity. It was easy being rational after an extremely satisfying orgasm but significantly less so *prior* to the orgasm. He was aware of his own potential for brutish behavior and of his limited ability to control it.

Her words came out muffled as she replied, "I didn't know...getting fucked and spanked...could feel that good." While remaining on her stomach in the grass, she put a hand to the small of her back and groaned. "Thank you for not coming inside me." She sighed. "I can't believe I'm using language like that." She chuckled softly. "I'm going to hell for this."

"You're welcome." Dirk grinned, relieved he hadn't hurt Ella or disappointed her in any way. "And you're not going to hell."

"You men released enough sperm to impregnate every woman west of the Mississippi."

Ben smiled. "Sorry about that."

"Don't be." Ella pushed herself up onto her side, propping an elbow beneath her. She touched a spot of cum on her breast and rubbed it slowly between forefinger and thumb. "I don't suppose either of you men happened to pack along with you a nice, hot bath?"

"No hot bath but we have a stream that's very convenient," Dirk replied.

"And icy cold. I know the creek. It is spring fed, crystal clear, and

cold even in the height of summer.” She touched the cum on her stomach. “Ugh! What choice do I have?”

\* \* \* \*

Rosamond leaned back in her chair, took a small sip of very sweet tea, stared up at the ceiling, and considered having another cookie. Her awakening sense of passion seemed to have aroused her sweet tooth, as well. She was feeling quite content, which was a reasonably new sensation for her. Ella was away from the T-3 Ranch doing something. Rosamond didn’t know what, and didn’t care, so long as it kept her daughter in Fargo. There was always less tension for Rosamond whenever Ella was away from the house. And Rosamond disliked tension.

Best of all, Tim would be riding over the following afternoon. With luck, Ella would stay away from the ranch, allowing Rosamond an afternoon of passion with her daughter’s fiancé.

When she was married, Rosamond had not enjoyed sex at all. Her husband was a big, powerful man. Additionally, his penis was large and did not give her much pleasure.

But with Tim, the act of sex felt much better. He wasn’t nearly so well-endowed. At the age of forty-two, Rosamond was eighteen years his senior. When she was young, she accepted as irrefutable fact that there was nothing particularly flattering about a man her own age lusting after her. Now, having matured, to have a young man desiring her appealed greatly to Rosamond’s sense of self-worth. And it was particularly exciting to know she was being seduced by her daughter’s fiancé. Though Tim hadn’t been able to inspire her to climax yet, the three times he crawled between her thighs and put his erection into her inspired the most excitement Rosamond had ever known.

A smile touched her lips. She looked out the window. Night had fallen, and only the thinnest sliver of moonlight showed. The only

time she enjoyed the prairie was at night when darkness made the vast expanse invisible.

How entertaining it was to be seduced by her daughter's fiancé.

## Chapter Four

It was the crackle of a campfire and the low murmur of masculine voices courteously kept low that greeted Ella as she awoke in the morning. Without moving, she blinked her eyes several times to clear her vision and reorient herself with her surroundings. The sun was up, but it hadn't been for long.

Were the events of the previous evening nothing more than a very evocative dream? Had she really surrendered herself completely to the passionate, forbidden advances of *two* of the territory's most notorious Lotharios?

She was fully dressed but without her boots and wrapped snugly in her bedroll. Turning her head just enough to look toward the campfire, she found Dirk and Ben seated beside it. A coffee pot and a small cast iron pan were in the flames. Both men held tin cups, and while they spoke quietly, watched the pot carefully.

Ella smiled. Her men obviously held a deep affection for their morning coffee, one that probably bordered on an addiction. So did she, but judging by the way they looked at the blue enameled coffee pot, she suspected she didn't have the same devotion as Ben and Dirk. But then, they probably went without sleep a lot more nights than she, so their mornings more often required heavy doses of caffeine.

When Ben glanced in her direction, their eyes met. His spontaneous smile was beatific and unguarded. Ella felt heated embarrassment instantly rush through her system. Her intemperate sexual response to their passion only hours earlier was an act of complete irrationality, and she wasn't at all certain what to say to them in the cold, bright light of morning.



“Good morning, Ella,” Ben said, his chocolaty eyes alive with *bonhomie*. “We were wondering how long you were going to sleep.”

Ella pushed herself to a sitting position. She ran fingers through her sleep-mussed, honey-blond hair, and the move caused her unbound breasts to sway slightly beneath her blouse. Both Ben and Dirk took notice of her bosom, their eyes instantly taking on a covetous quality.

Memories of being in their arms, and most significantly of Ben ripping her camisole in two, came rushing back to the forefront of her consciousness. Though she could never openly admit it, the act of Ben tearing her clothes to get to her naked breasts excited her nearly to climax. She had never felt so overwhelmed by masculine force, nor so desired.

“I’m sorry,” Ella said after several seconds when the silence was worse than fumbling for words. “I’m delaying you, aren’t I?”

Dirk said, “No need to be sorry. I never start my work day without having my coffee first.” His pale blue eyes caressed Ella with a familiar intimacy that was simultaneously exciting and uncomfortable. “I’ve got to let you know it’s damn nice setting eyes on you first thing in the morning.”

“Damn nice, indeed,” Ben chimed in.

Ella slipped her knees beneath her. She was finding it distinctly uncomfortable to look either man in the eyes. While resisting the urge to cross her arms over her breasts, she looked at her saddle on the ground beside her tethered Appaloosa mare. Inside her saddle bags she had a spare camisole.

She asked, “Do I have time to get freshened up?”

“Of course.” Dirk pulled on a leather glove and moved the coffee pot a little further to the flames. “Don’t take too long. Coffee’s almost ready.”

Ella discreetly recovered her spare camisole before walking swiftly to the creek. If she thought putting some distance between herself and the men would cool her feverish thoughts, she was sorely

mistaken. She went to the stream in the exact spot she'd gone the night before when she'd needed the clear water to bathe her heated body as she washed away the passion of multiple male orgasms.

Kneeling at the edge of the stream, Ella cupped water in her hands and splashed her face. The chill of the water made her shiver, but it wasn't temperature alone that shocked her. With her eyes closed, memories of washing semen from her stomach and breasts, from her back and buttocks, returned with such vivid sexual clarity that for Ella it was as though she was cleansing herself from her licentious labors all over again.

Would the men want to talk about what the three of them had done the previous evening?

Part of Ella wanted nothing more than to banish all memories of last night's behavior from her thoughts forever. But another part of Ella wanted to once again experience the unalloyed, teeth-rattling excitement she felt when Ben and Dirk collectively unleashed all their considerable charm and sensual skill upon her.

Ella's conflicted emotional state was as unsettled by the time she returned to the campfire as when she left. Her fear that the men would tell jokes about what they'd done, or in some way belittle either her or their collective behavior of the night before turned out to be entirely unwarranted. After handing her a steaming cup of coffee, the men returned to their conversation, only occasionally giving her friendly but not salacious smiles.

These were serious men who had a job to do, and their dedication heightened her appreciation of them.

"Blue's the best tracker in the territory. No one else is close," Ben said, cutting a line in the air with his hand as though to ward off any dispute. "I know he's on the expensive side, but he's our best bet at finding the rustlers, and he's a hell of a lot cheaper than letting the rustling continue."

"Easy, my friend," Dirk replied, his grin disarming. "I'm agreeing with you." He turned toward Ella. "You know Blue, don't you? Best

tracker in the territory.”

“Yes. My father hired him several times and had nothing but praise for both the man and his abilities.”

“It’s settled then,” Ben said, handing a coffee cup to Dirk. There were only two cups, and Ella had one, which forced the men to share. “We’ll break camp and head out for Blue’s homestead. His place is too far to reach today unless we push it way too hard, but we’ll get there by noon tomorrow.” He looked at Ella. “Those plans work for you?”

“You men seem to know a lot more about certain things than I do,” Ella replied, her voice just a little softer than she planned. Though she had not intended the ambiguity, she realized her words could be misconstrued. The awareness that she had at least one more night alone with these two men was not without elements of both unease and anticipation. “I guess until we find the rustlers, I’m in your hands.”

“Interesting,” Ben said.

“Very interesting,” Dirk added.

Ella was quite interested, too, though she hoped to keep this information to herself.

\* \* \* \*

Gunnar van Gild looked at the attractive, young woman seated in his spacious living room and wondered whether his son was in trouble. Though he allowed his son quite a bit of freedom and didn’t inquire too deeply into his romantic affairs, he was quite certain that Dirk and Marian Ludgaard were lovers. At least they *had* been lovers the previous winter. Gunnar wasn’t blind to the nature of his son’s peripatetic love interests.

“You’re looking lovely, Miss Ludgaard,” Gunnar said as he entered the room. “Can I get you a libation?”

“Are you having anything?”

"I don't think it's too early for some red wine, do you?"

She smiled sweetly. "I've heard you have a wonderfully well-stocked cellar."

Gunnar took a chair facing Marian, who sat on the long, leather sofa that faced the fireplace. He gave the bell pull a yank, and a servant instantly stepped into the room. "Two glasses of the red wine that was opened for last night's supper."

The butler disappeared without making a sound.

"I hope you don't mind that I've come without notice," Marian said. She had a smile that opened most doors. "I was hoping to speak with Dirk."

"My son's away from the ranch for a couple days." Gunnar considered just how much information he should give Marian. "Perhaps there's something that I can do for you?"

The butler reentered the room. Gunnar noted that Marian stopped talking as the wine glasses were set before them. Whatever brought her to the ranch, she didn't want to speak of it in front of the servants.

When they were again alone, Marian said, "You said that Dirk had some business away from the ranch for a few days. Did he go alone?"

"Actually, he's with Ben." There were secrets hidden in Marian's lovely eyes. Gunnar could see they were there, though he couldn't glean the specifics. "They're looking for clue as to who has been rustling cattle from the T-3 Ranch."

Marian's smile was subtle. "Rather generous of you to volunteer the services of your son to help Ella of the T-3, isn't it?" She looked away for a moment. "With Tim Cutler taking on more duties at the T-3, it's no wonder she needs help from Ben and Dirk."

Gunnar was silent for several seconds before he replied, "I don't know what she sees in that man."

"From what I've heard, Rosamond arranged everything. Ella just sort of did what she was told to do." Her gaze leveled on Gunnar's. "So, it's just Ben and Dirk, then?"

"To the best of my knowledge, yes. Why do you ask?"

"Yesterday, three riders cut through Daddy's land in Southridge Valley. It was two men. One a big blond man sounding an awful lot like Dirk and one a man not quite so big with rather long, dark hair."

"That would be Ben."

"Yes. But they were riding with a woman." She took a sip of wine as though to fortify her courage. "A blonde woman riding an Appaloosa. I've just been to the T-3 Ranch, and Rosamond told me that Ella has been gone for several days. Some errand she had to do in Fargo, or something like that."

In a guarded tone, Gunnar asked, "And you think Ella's riding with Dirk and Ben?"

Marian shrugged, feigning nonchalance that didn't fool Gunnar. "I was just wondering how much time Ella's been spending with your son, that's all."

"Not much. At least, not much that I know of." He wondered if Marian was carrying his grandchild. "Why do you ask?"

"Your son and I are...um...very good friends." She looked away. "I understand that Dirk has quite a number of women who could be considered very good friends." She cleared her throat, made eye contact for the briefest of moments before looking away, then took another sip of wine. "You see, I'm quite aware that I'm not your son's only *good friend*," the inflection she used left no room for misunderstanding, "but I'd rather his other good friends weren't my personal friends." She inhaled deeply, held her breath for several seconds, then exhaled slowly. Turning her head slowly, she looked Gunnar directly in the eyes. "May I speak bluntly?"

"I think it would be best if you did."

"You see, your son is in considerable demand among women seeking...masculine entertainments. I've never felt that I had claim to Dirk's exclusive attention. Having said that, the notion that your son would be *entertaining* personal friends of mine, and perhaps talking about me to those very same friends, is distinctly unsettling."

Gunnar fought the urge to smile with relief. He said, "Let me ask

you a question. In all the time that you and my son have been, as you say, good friends...has he ever betrayed a confidence or spoken in an intimate fashion of his other ladies?"

Marian paused for a moment, staring off into space. After several seconds she replied, "Ladies? You're a forgiving man, sir. But you know, now that I think about it, when he's been with me, he's never spoken of any woman but me."

"And I'm sure he maintains that decorum with his other good friends."

Gunnar kept the sigh of relief relatively silent. Understanding that all Marian was worried about was being sexually compared to her good friend Ella was eons easier to accept than learning he was about to become a grandfather. What was now of significant concern to Gunnar was that his son, apparently, could be in some sort of a relationship with Ella Murphy, after Dirk had been specifically ordered to not consider the young widow as a potential sexual conquest.

Marian asked, "You're sure?" Her eyes were bright with hope.

"My son may be intemperate, but he is not insensitive."

"It's just that Ella is such a very good friend and..." Her words drifted away.

"And there's no reason she shouldn't remain a good friend."

\* \* \* \*

"Don't come any closer," Ben said in that quietly commanding way of his. "I want to be able to look at you."

"To see all of you," Dirk added, his tone laced through with lascivious intent, "when you touch yourself."

The men reclined in indolent sprawls near the campfire, each leaning back against his saddle. In the half light of dusk, cast in the flickering glow of the campfire, Ella thought they looked exactly like what they were: princes of America's new frontier, handsome men of

wealth who were as experienced with sitting in boardrooms as they were sitting around campfires. In town, the men enjoyed their whiskeys in crystal goblets, but around the campfire, they drank them from tin coffee cups.

She smiled at the men and took another step closer, wanting them as much as they obviously wanted her. Ella was surprised when Dirk raised his hand, motioning for her to stop.

"If you don't do as you're told, I'll put you over my knee and spank that sweetly rounded ass of yours."

Ella almost said that such a punishment wouldn't be much of a deterrent, since she'd probably climax stretched out over his lap with her pants down around her knees and her naked ass up and exposed. Getting a spanking created as much ecstasy as agony.

"I noticed you sneaking away this morning to put on your chemise," Ben said, unbuckling his gun belt and setting it on the ground within quick reach. "I was disappointed you put it on. I like watching the way you move beneath your blouse."

The breath caught momentarily in Ella's throat. Her breasts were a constant source of low-level anxiety. "I move too much." A light blush crept up her cheeks. "And riding a horse can be uncomfortable without support." In an accusatory tone, she added, "After all, you ripped off my lingerie." Insecurities over her weight and the size of her breasts came rushing to the surface of her consciousness. She could feel the men looking at her, and the urge to cross her arms over her breasts was very powerful. "Tim tells me I'm too big...only that's not really the word he uses. He calls me—"

"Forget him!" Dirk snapped, cutting off Ella's sentence before she spoke the damning word. "Tim's a goddamned fool, and he doesn't deserve you." His gaze went up and down over Ella, touching her. He loosened his belt and released the brass waist snap of his trousers. There was a different type of heat in his voice when he added, "Take your blouse off, Ella. No more delays or I'll paddle your ass." Several seconds passed before he added, "It pisses me off just thinking about

the injustice in the simple fact of that worthless bastard even knowing your name.”

If Tim ever issued such a command to her, Ella would have been livid. But Ben and Dirk weren’t *anything* like Tim. Almost despite herself, Ella’s hands crept slowly up her sides to the blouse button just beneath her throat. She wished she’d never spoken her fiancé’s name because it instantly put a chill on the heated, sensual, dominating ambience the men were so adept at creating. As she unfastened the buttons of her blouse, she stared hungrily at Dirk’s hands as he released brass buttons. When he opened his trousers, freeing his cock, and she saw its length and thickness filling his hand, her clitoris tightened in response. She dropped her blouse to the ground. When she looked down at her bosom, she saw that her nipples made blunt dents in the fabric. Her excitement was irrefutable. These were men who inspired sensual intemperance.

“Now the rest,” Ben said as he opened his trousers, exposing his own fully-formed erection. In a more reverential voice he added, “That’s one hell of a body.”

Ella pulled the undergarment over her head and heard the sharp intake of breath from both Ben and Dirk. An uncharacteristic surge of sexual confidence went through her. Even though they had seen her breasts before, their fine-tuned virility reacted sharply when exposed to her nudity. Perhaps with men not in such high demand sexually, their desire for her wouldn’t have been so flattering. With Ben and Dirk—men long accustomed to having their choice of willing women—to have them now so feverish for her was the ultimate compliment to her femininity.

“Put your hands beneath your breasts,” Ben said. His right hand traveled slowly up and down over the length of his arousal. “Lift them high. Can you lick your own nipples? I want to see you lick your nipple.”

“Why am I so powerless against you two?” Ella asked as she cupped her breasts from the underside, lifting the twin orbs. “I do



everything you command of me. Everything.”

Dirk's voice was a low, lusty growl as he instructed, “Don't just lick your nipples. I want to see you suck on them. And bite them. Bite them so hard it hurts.”

Ella raised her left breast and dipped her head. When her tongue, warm and wet, touched her nipple, a shiver went up her spine. It seemed particularly lewd to be pleasuring herself in such a manner and even more lurid to be doing it while two men watched her.

She licked the erect nipple three times before capturing it between her lips. When she sucked on the nipple, heated lust slithered from her breast. The nectar of her passion flowed freely to the lips of her pussy. Because of the wickedly erotic ambience her lovers created, Ella had little doubt that she could climax just from sucking on her nipples but only if Ben and Dirk continued to talk to her. They caressed her intimately with their wanton words and exquisitely satisfying demands. There was nothing they could ask of her that she would deny them.

Dirk's voice was like a gunshot when he said, “Bite, goddamn it! I want to see it!”

A soft whimper came from Ella as she pulled her lips back before theatrically biting her nipple. Pleasure and pain were indistinguishable from one another as her sharp, white teeth sank into her nerve-laden, feminine tissue. Even as she whimpered in pain, her clitoris throbbed with wanton acceptance of the demands made of her. The part of Ella that was a slave to the passion these men inspired teetered on the brink of ecstasy.

“So...fucking...sexy,” Ben said with a low groan, his right hand pumping with slightly greater speed now that Ella was nibbling on her own nipple. “There isn't a man worth his salt who wouldn't sell his soul to slide his hard cock between those tits!”

Not waiting to be given the command, Ella took her left breast in both hands to lift the pliant mound to her mouth. She licked her nipple, flicking her tongue against the erect nub. Opening her mouth

wide, she sucked much of her nipple and areola between her lips as she could, then sank her teeth deeply into her own breast.

Seconds ticked by. Her nipple throbbed in lust and pain as she sucked on it, the self-administered stimulation heightened by the awareness that she had two handsome men watching her with unblinking interest. Exhibitionism was a forbidden temptation Ella quickly learned to embrace.

“Take off those fancy, English riding breeches.” Ben’s words were a command that couldn’t be confronted. “Do it now.”

With a sigh, Ella released her nipple with a moist, slurping sound. She looked into Ben’s eyes then down at the fierce erection he stroked. Seeing his hard cock filling his fist made another tremor of escalating lust go through her. When she reached for her belt to unbuckle it, her hands trembled visibly.

“Boots, Ella. Get rid of them.”

Before she dealt with her trousers, she removed her knee-high, blunt-toed and highly polished boots, dragging them off her feet as though their very presence offended her greatly. Her cotton and leather riding breeches were next, unbuttoned quickly and discarded with a haste that suggested disdain.

“And the underpants. Get rid of them. Now.”

If Ben’s tongue had been on her clitoris, it wouldn’t have pleased her as much as it had while speaking those commanding words. Ella unknotted the drawstring of her unadorned, white cotton underpants, and with a shake of her hips, let the garment slither down her tapering thighs.

Ella stepped out of her underpants, and the urge to cover her most private area was too powerful to resist. When she hid her pussy, her lovers laughed softly. Ben and Dirk acted like men accustomed to being looked at, men familiar and comfortable with being ogled when they were in an aroused state. Each man stroked himself, running his fist slowly up and down over the length of his formidable arousal.

“One impressive fucking body,” Dirk whispered, the intimidating

size of his fist traveling along the length of his equally oversized cock. Despite the coarseness of his language, his tone held something akin to reverence for Ella's physical charms. "Stunning. Absolutely amazing." His gaze met Ella's. "Finger yourself. I want to see it going inside. I want to see everything." His smile transformed into something utterly wicked and tempting. "And then taste yourself on your finger. Show me you're not afraid to taste your own lusty pussy."

The middle finger of Ella's right hand slid smoothly between the lips of her cunt, grazing against her clitoris. Her long lashes tapped against her pale cheeks as the sensation of having her body penetrated inundated her consciousness. She pushed the finger in until her palm pressed tightly against her clitoris. The fact that Ben and Dirk were watching her added exponentially to her feverish excitement.

"Oh!" she sighed.

Though her eyes were closed, she could feel the intense heat of her lovers' eyes as they stared at her, devouring her visually as she performed for their voyeuristic entertainment. As her right hand slowly retreated and the slender finger eased between the lips of her cunt, Ella cupped a breast in her hand and pinched her saliva-moistened nipple very firmly between her forefinger and thumb.

"Suck it!" Dirk commanded, the words clipped and precise. "Bite your nipple!"

Ella did as ordered, and her body's reaction couldn't have been more swift, nor more of an indictment of her own susceptibility to wanton commands given by her lovers. Hardly had she felt the sharp stab of pain with the simultaneous friction of her finger sliding over her clitoris when her orgasm began.

"Fuck!" she gasped, releasing her nipple as fierce contractions pulsed through her naked, voluptuous body.

Her right hand instantly became a blur of motion between her widespread thighs. She tossed her head back on her shoulders, shocked and ashamed at her own wantonness yet awestruck at the

force of the orgasm that pulsed through her senses. As the last of the spasms shuddered through her, she dropped to her knees in the grass, continuing to finger herself, though with less intensity.

Opening her eyes, she saw the looks of sensual confidence on the faces of the men who seemingly had demonic power over her. With post-orgasmic rational thinking returning like a tsunami, she lowered her face and withdrew the single digit from her pussy. Embarrassment and shame battled with ecstasy and anticipation of future delights.

Ella was beginning to understand anything was possible when Ben and Dirk were involved.

“Come to me.” Dirk was the first to find his voice. “Come to me,” he said again, fully clothed with his trousers open, stroking an erection that pulsed with virility. “I think we’ve all got a long night ahead of us.”

## Chapter Five

Ella looked him in the eyes then down at the rigid penis he stroked. Her gaze drifted to the side, looking first at Ben's erection filling his fist then up into his eyes. She wondered how these men could ever respect her after she succumbed to their lascivious demands. But how could she not surrender to them totally and completely when they electrified every nerve in her body and inspired orgasms that left her weak and satiated?

"You want to suck his cock, don't you?"

It was a statement from Ben, not a question. The answer, she knew, was in the affirmative, and a sob caught in Ella's throat. Could she ever admit to such intemperance? And if she did, what would her lovers think of her? She hated Ben, at least a little, for understanding what she *really* wanted, even when she didn't know herself.

"And what about mine?" Ben released his cock so she had an unobstructed view. "I realize that it's not the bludgeoning club that Dirk's got, but it still gives you pleasure, doesn't it? And you still want to suck it, don't you?"

Ella closed her eyes, looking inside herself for the courage and willpower to resist these men. Her eyes weren't closed long. The voyeuristic delight she took in watching her lovers masturbating, seeing their solid cocks pulsing with hunger for her, was too tempting to resist.

"Tell me you want to suck my cock."

Ben's tone was colored by the raw, jagged edge emotion of a dominating man coming dangerously close to losing self-control. Ella opened her eyes, saw the glistening drop of pre-cum forming at the

slitted tip, and nodded her head with more enthusiasm than she intended. No matter how completely she surrendered to Ben and Dirk, there was still the proud and defiant woman within Ella that insisted she resist.

“Take my boots off.” Ben smiled and lifted his booted foot. “Maybe then I’ll let you suck my cock.”

Ella stepped forward, reaching for Ben’s boot. His sudden scowl stopped her instantly. The feigned anger, she noted, twisted his mouth but didn’t reach all the way up to his chocolaty eyes. He lifted his hand, raising his index finger, and made a swirling motion in the air with it. Her cheeks turned crimson when she realized what was demanded of her, but embarrassment didn’t stop Ella from stepping over his upraised leg to straddle it, simultaneously turning her bottom toward him as she grabbed his boot.

When Ben put his opposite boot on her naked ass, Ella wasn’t certain whether his boot represented the ultimate humiliation or the most erotic caress she’d ever experienced. She shivered when the other boot pushed against her buttocks, stumbling a bit when Ben forced her to remove his boot. Though she was horrifically embarrassed at her own subservient behavior with these men, their unalloyed domination over her made her pussy cream. The crystalline certainty that numerous climaxes awaited her at the end of this little game added to her anticipation.

Without facing Ben, she spread her feet, allowed him to put his other foot between her legs, and removed his final boot.

She turned around and saw Dirk stroking himself slowly, his hand twisting around his cock at the same time it pumped up and down over the steelish length. Looking at his enormous erection, Ella was amazed at her own desire to taste him, to feel her lover pulsing with life as he filled her mouth. Behaviors she never before considered pleasurable now danced along the edges of her consciousness, tickling and enticing her libido in ways she could sense but not entirely comprehend.

Now that she understood precisely what was expected of her, she removed Dirk's boots quickly. The socks came off next, with Ella kneeling in the grass and removing them leisurely as she worked her way, foot to foot, down the line. She attended to sock duty with the admirable studiousness of a woman of her "station" while the men stripped off their own shirts with alacrity.

Their eagerness was palpable. This was a game where all participants *focused* on their duties. Ella had the nebulous awareness of being a sex slave, and the invisible chains that held her in bondage made her clitoris ache with anticipation.

Lastly, it was their trousers and underwear that came off. Ella tugged at their trouser legs when they lifted their bottoms off the ground and resisted the urge to giggle, since it was universally accepted as irrefutable fact that no man could remove his trousers without looking at least a little bit silly in the process. Besides, a giggle would have completely ruined the erotic tension that all three were enjoying, and the absolute *last* thing Ella wanted to do was put cold water on the fire she hoped would soon be a conflagration.

She stripped them completely naked, and throughout the entire process, kept her eyes diverted from that part of their anatomy that so thoroughly tantalized her fantasies. It wasn't easy, but she kept her gaze averted. Her mouth, by the time the men were naked, literally watered in anticipation.

"Well done, my dear," Ben said in that practiced, cultured tone that was the imprimatur of old men of wealth and young men of education. His *dégagé* demeanor suggested he might well be complimenting a steakhouse waitress clearing a dinner table with efficacy for cattle barons. "And now you can have your treat." He released his cock, which was even more fiercely erect than it had been earlier. A blue vein, running a serpentine path along the length of his shaft, pulsed visibly. "Consider it your reward for a job well done."

"You're too confident for your own good," Ella said sotto voce, part of her fearful she would be punished with a nasty spanking and

part of her wanting nothing more than to receive such a “punishment.” She shrugged and her naked breasts wobbled. There wasn’t a nerve in her body that wasn’t vibrantly alive and ready for stimulation. “In any event, you’re too confident for *my* own good.”

“Perhaps. But am I wrong in my estimation? You really *do* want to suck my cock, don’t you?” Ben moved to the side just enough so that his naked hip was against Dirk’s. “I’m willing to bet you want to take turns with Dirk and I, don’t you?” He chuckled softly. “Never in a thousand years did you ever think you’d be pleasuring two men at the same time. That’s what makes you want to do it so much, isn’t it?”

Ella looked him in the eyes, and in a soft voice that held with it much more honesty than she would have liked for Ben to know, she replied, “I could so easily hate a man like you. You’re much too aware of your world and of your vaunted place in it.”

Ben hesitated for a moment. It wasn’t a lot of time, but it was enough to let Ella know he understood *precisely* what she said.

“My place in the world isn’t relevant to this,” he said, nodding toward his arousal. He leaned back against his saddle, naked and supremely confident, his up thrusting phallus saying everything else that needed to be said. “All that matters now is your obedience, my acceptance, and our collective understanding that Dirk and I can take you to places, both physical and corporeal, that will open your eyes to the possibilities of pleasure that right now you barely understand.”

The notion that there was more these men could teach her about sexuality and sensation, about ecstasy and complete bliss, caused a fresh surge of cream to lubricate the lips of her cunt. She was achingly ready for their penetration.

Ella moved slowly, sensually, positioning herself so she knelt on the grass, straddling Dirk’s right leg and Ben’s left. She weaved her shoulders from side to side, sliding her breasts across masculine thighs that were solid with muscle honed from a thousand hours in the saddle. Her nipples, pebble-hard and fiercely aroused, sent heat



emanating outward to her toes and fingertips. A soft, kittenish purr came from her throat. She filled her hands with cocks that possessed all the flexibility strength of steel.

"So much," she whispered huskily, speaking in a tone that suggested the words were meant only for herself. In a covetous and distinctly selfish tone, she added, "And *just* for me." Ella's gaze drifted upward. She looked into their eyes, and a shiver went through her. "*Only* me." The final sentence was directed toward Ben and Dirk.

The possessiveness of the statement shocked Ella. Even with disorienting lust going through her, she was lucid enough to understand that she was hardly in a position to make demands of the men, and considering their history with women, it was foolhardy to think they'd be faithful to her. But still....

Ella knew she couldn't give herself too much time to think about what she'd just said. More importantly, she couldn't give the *men* too much time to consider all the ramifications of what *only* carried with it.

She leaned forward and delivered a smacking kiss to the crown of Ben's cock, then pushed her lips over it, taking him into her mouth until he threatened to enter her throat. The low-pitched, rumbling groan she heard from above told her that whatever Ben was thinking, it wasn't about anything she said.

She understood now why Ben moved so his naked hip was against Dirk's. It made it easier for her to suck on both of them. Though she suspected her inexperience was obvious, she hoped that enthusiasm and effort would make up for any lack of skill. Though Ella was learning more almost hourly when she was with Dirk and Ben, she was aware these men had infinitely more experience in sexual matters than she did. She was eager to learn the skills they were so enthusiastic to teach her, though they learned those skills with other women. And that was something that didn't sit well comfortably with Ella.

She bobbed slowly over Dirk, nibbling gently and erotically with

her lips on his rigid penis, loving how she could feel him pulsing, throbbing with life against her tongue. As she sucked on the big Dutchman, her hand was busy with Ben's saliva-moistened erection, running from the rim of the head of his cock all the way down to the base of his shaft, then making its way slowly upward once again. Ben flinched when she rubbed the pad of her thumb against his slit, and Ella knew she was tantalizing all the right nerve endings.

As she took turns pleasing Ben and Dirk, Ella was cognizant that everything she did she was doing for the very first time in her life. She was sailing in uncharted waters, headed for a destination she could hardly fathom, but one that unquestionably frightened her. And yet, despite her fear, she felt compelled to move forward in her journey with a power she could feel but not understand. The only thing she was absolutely certain of was that these men—*her* men—would see to it that when the evening's passion was concluded and the journey had come to an end with final orgasmic spasm, and the last keening cry of ecstasy had echoed through the prairie night, she would have climaxed repeatedly. There wouldn't be a single nerve in her body that hadn't been stimulated, nor one that remained unsatisfied.

"That goddamned mouth of yours," Dirk groaned, pushing his fingers into Ella's blonde tresses, "is hot enough to make a man melt."

Ella nibbled slowly down the pulsing shaft of his cock, tried briefly to take him deeper than she had previously. She stopped her efforts when she sputtered, nearly choking. Resuming, she sucked on Dirk, Ben reached beneath her body to squeeze her nearest breast, his fingers pressing deep into the low hanging mound. When he pinched her nipple, Ella moaned loudly, letting him know she loved his firm, commanding caresses.

It had always been an arguable point whether Dirk was more impatient than Ben or vice versa. This question was answered when Dirk, despite having his cock buried as deeply into Ella's mouth as

was physically possible, grabbed her by the hair and jerked her head up with such force that she cried out sharply as several golden blonde strands were pulled from her scalp.

“That’s not enough!” His voice was a low growl, raw and agonized, his hunger for Ella frighteningly real. “I need you! All of you! Your heart, your soul, and that goddamned sweet pussy!”

Ella put forward no resistance. Even if she made some effort to defend herself, there was nothing that she could have done to thwart her muscular lover’s ardent demands. He was both unstoppable and insatiable.

Ella was on her knees at one moment, holding Ben’s cock in one hand while she lavished Dirk’s erection with the pleasures she could provide with her lips and tongue. In the next moment, she was on her back in the grass by the campfire with Dirk’s broad, heavily muscled chest compressing the mounds of her breasts. His hands were everywhere.

She felt the plump, conical head of his erection searching for the entrance to her feminine temple. A moment later, when the head of Dirk’s heated arousal pressed against the moist lips of her cunt, Ella squeezed her eyes tightly shut because she knew what was about to happen. She’d been through this before with Dirk, and the initial experience literally stole the breath from her lungs.

Raw lust stripped the big Dutchman of all his sophistication, all his *savoir faire*. Only Ella’s intense arousal, with its concomitant lubrication, prevented her from being hurt when she was impaled by the big man’s penetrating thrust.

“Dirk!” Ella cried out as she felt herself being forced to expand to accept his masculinity. “Big! You’re just so big!” She raised her legs, whipping them around his thighs as her arms locked around his neck. She felt the full length of his arousal filling her, pulsing deep within her, connecting the two of them in a way that was shockingly intimate. “Wait!” She stroked his hair, her breath coming in uneven little gulps. “Just wait a moment.” She kissed his cheek and was

intensely aware of his impatience, his feverish desire to pummel her, to possess her, to drive into her again and again until his ungovernable lust was sated. In a whisper she added, “I love the way you love me, but I’m not unbreakable.” She felt him tense up and sensed the apology he was about to give for the raw lust she inspired. It was the apology she did *not* want to hear. Reacting swiftly, she bit his earlobe hard enough to cause pain, and then saucily declared, “But I’m not delicate china. Fuck me, Dirk. Fuck me like you love me.”

Ella knew she was playing with fire by challenging Dirk in such a manner. Playing with the inferno that was Dirk’s libido meant there was more than an even chance she would get burned. So it wasn’t altogether surprising for Ella when, not much later, she wondered whether or not her skin wouldn’t suddenly burst into flame. Every nerve in her body seemed hypersensitive, capable of eking out the most minute sensation from everything Dirk was doing to her. His body was above her, crushing her to the ground as his torso churned, driving his cock hard and deep into her.

Ella’s climax hit her with almost savage intensity. She had her arms wrapped tightly around his neck, her lips close to his ear, as she screamed of her orgasmic release, the sound released as a warbling cry, coming out only between bone-jarring thrusts.

She expected Dirk to withdraw from her embrace, groan with satisfaction, and then deluge her with his sperm. That’s what he’d done in the past, but the man was nothing if not surprising, especially in matters sexual. Rather than continuing to make love to her tingling pussy until he reached his own orgasmic level of satisfaction, Dirk pulled his legs up beneath him and, sitting on his haunches, his slipped his arms beneath Ella’s legs.

“I love feeling your pussy contract around me when you come,” he said. Perspiration now beaded on his forehead and trickled down his cheeks from his temples. He positioned Ella’s legs so that the backs of her knees were in the crook of his arms and began gently but commandingly moving her to and fro, sliding her along the length of

his cock. "But you damn near broke my ear drum with that scream."

Had Ella not been luxuriating in post-orgasmic lassitude, she might have been able to come up with some sort of snappy rejoinder to her lover's teasing. As it was, with Dirk lifting her hips off the ground with casual ease as he moved her slowly back and forth, letting her glide along his erection, Ella experienced an unprecedented sensation of being almost *petite*. She was by no credible measure a small woman, but when Dirk held her, his great strength made her feel small, delicate, distinctly feminine, and entirely overwhelmed.

"Move aside, my friend," Ben said, patting Dirk on the shoulder. "Her next orgasm is mine to provide."

Looking up at her men, Ella was shocked once again at how different they were physically. Dirk's chest was pale and nearly entirely devoid of hair. Ben's chest was lean, and on his chest was a triangular patch of dark hair.

When Dirk withdrew from Ella and handed Ben her legs, she experienced the sensation of being a possession without a will of her own. A possession, but not an object, and somehow that made all the difference in the world. Hardly thirty seconds passed from her orgasm with Dirk before she was on her back with Ben's hard cock filling her pussy, her voluptuous body trembling as he thrust deeply into her while kissing her with a questing tongue that danced with hers.

She hadn't entirely descended from her orgasmic heights with Dirk before she was again peaking, her clitoris so over-stimulated that Ben had hardly gotten into a steady, pelvis-slapping rhythm before Ella was coming again, hugging her lover tightly as waves of ecstasy washed over her.

This time, after her climax, she begged the men to give her at least a couple minutes to recover her strength. They relented to her wishes, though since each man had an erection pointed directly at Ella as she recuperated, she was tremblingly aware that *her* satisfaction preceded *their* satisfaction. Men like Ben and Dirk weren't likely to stop until they got as good as they gave.

“Come on, darling,” Dirk purred, his fingertips tracing light circles on the inside of Ella’s left knee, “aren’t you ready for some more loving?” His words were softly delivered in stark contrast to the brutish erection standing out thick and proud from his loins. “I certainly haven’t had my fill of you.”

Ben moved closer, taking Ella by her naked shoulders and turning her so that instead of sitting on the ground near the campfire, she was on her hands and knees.

“I don’t think I’ll *ever* have my fill of you,” Ben said, guiding the swollen crest of his erection to Ella’s kiss-bruised lips.

They were gentler with Ella this time. At least it seemed that way to her, though being aware of her own passion-fogged state of mind, she would never have made any claims to objective decision making. Without the solid surface of the earth beneath her hips, there was at least some yielding when Dirk thrust, some allowance for retreat when his torso collided with the cheeks of her ass. And when Ben drove his cock too deeply into her mouth, she could always retreat quickly to spare her throat.

With Ella’s next climax, she accidentally scraped her teeth against Ben’s seesawing arousal that pumped between her lips. He withdrew instantly, but Dirk’s next hard thrust knocked Ella forward so her face pressed against his solid abdomen, and the slick shaft of his cock was hot against her cheek.

Ben released his seed against Ella’s shoulder and back as Dirk’s eruption of ecstasy left lines from shoulders to buttocks.

When they moved away from Ella, she slumped naked to the ground, the grass tickling her sensitive, erect nipples. Suddenly, unbidden, she started to laugh. The absurdity of her entirely unplanned love life with two of the territory’s most notorious rakes, the ridiculous travesty of her engagement to Tim, and the awareness that she was a woman in the midst of a deliciously sweaty affair with *two* men all came crashing down on Ella.

She either had to laugh about it all...or cry.

## Chapter Six

They had been on the trail, now with the addition of the best tracker in the territory, Blue Sun Rising, for several days and nights. Nighttime was the best time to catch the cattle rustlers, though that was when it was the most dangerous and difficult to track the stolen cattle. Cattle thieves wouldn't mind adding "bushwhacker" to their list of accomplishments.

"Here's where they kept the steers. When the train came to a stop, they loaded them right into the cattle cars. They just kept the cattle surrounded without even bothering to fence them in," Blue said, standing beside his mount, a black and white pinto. "See here?" With his finger he circled a divot in the prairie beside the tracks where something heavy made its mark. "And here?" A similar divot, parallel to the tracks. "Those were caused by the side ramp of the cattle car. The train came to a stop. The side doors to the empty cars were opened, and the ramps were pulled out. From there just herd the cattle up the ramps and into the rail cars, close the doors, and they disappear forever. Or at least they disappear until they reach the stockyards. Since this is a southbound track, I'm guessing Kansas City."

"But what about brands? Every stockyard keeps records of who they're buying their cattle from," Dirk asked, clearly skeptical of Blue's assessment. "All cattle going to the stockyards have a brand."

"Who's to say they haven't got someone in the stockyard on the payroll? Once you've skinned the carcass, it's pretty damned hard to tell one cow from another," Ben added. "All it would take is someone at the stockyards turning his back at the right time."

"Brilliant," Ella said quietly. She hadn't anticipated the cattle

rustling to be this sophisticated, and because it was obviously a well-planned operation, a chill went through her.

“This is no fool’s game. This took solid planning and connections with the railroad,” Dirk said, looking at the marks in the grass. “Nothing I can see would disprove Blue’s conclusions.” He sighed, the exhaustion evident in his tone and posture. “The thieves have got to have men working on the railroad, and they’ve got to know in advance where Tim’s been sending his posses. That’s why they always go to other pastures to do their stealing, and your fiancé’s men come up empty-handed.”

“We’ll get the answers at the rail station,” Blue said. The man exuded such an aura of confidence the statements he made were seldom contradicted or even questioned. “We know that there are only a few men working at any given time at the rail station at Silver City.” He looked at Ella and gave her a sympathetic smile. “My cabin isn’t too far from here. We’ve all been pushing it hard. We can make camp, spend one more night under the stars, and ride out in the morning for my place. We’ll be there by noon. How about we get a good night’s sleep with a roof over our head and a belly full of hot food? I’ve still got the hide quarters of a buck in rock salt.”

“A roof over my head?” Ella asked in a whisper.

“We’ll all have ourselves some nice steaks,” Blue continued. “In the morning, we’ll all think clearly.” His gaze measured Ella. “It’s not easy thinking straight when you’re dog-tired and in need of a bath.”

Ella got the impression that Blue was trying to protect her, as though she alone was sweaty, exhausted to the bone, and saddle-weary. She almost said something about it, instinctively not wanting to receive special treatment. After a moment, she decided she was merely being thin-skinned after having been denied her usual creature comforts for several days. These men wanted the best for her, and they wanted to protect her. They treated her more respectfully during their days on the trail than her mother had in the most genteel of settings.



After some consideration, Ella realized there was another reason she was irrationally peevisish. After spending magnificent, multi-orgasmic nights in the arms of Ben and Dirk, she might not be able to share her passion with them again. In the morning after their magnificent days and nights of never-before-experienced *ménage à trois* ecstasy, they were now teamed up with Blue. Once he got on the case of the missing cattle, he worked himself and everyone else at a furious pace. If they went to Blue's cabin, Ella wouldn't have the privacy she would need to release her newly discovered sensuality upon Dirk and Ben.

She tamped down thoughts of the ecstasy she experienced in the arms of her lovers and tried to concentrate on the cattle rustlers and the problems they posed.

"The only way they could have done this," Ella said, her brain turning over possibilities that were unpleasant to consider, "is if men from my outfit were a part of the rustlers. So the T-3 has a traitor." She looked at the three men surrounding her. "If you men see the facts any differently, please tell me so. But it sure seems to me there isn't any of us who can say with certainty our own ranch hands aren't part of the rustlers."

"Damn," Dirk said quietly, shaking his head slowly, "the lady's right. The only people we can trust implicitly are ourselves."

\* \* \* \*

A warm breeze played with Ben's collar-length, raven black hair. He stood a dozen feet from the campfire, staring into the flickering blue and orange flames. Perhaps under other circumstances, he would have felt a sense of contentment. After all, the day had been quite successful. They learned how many rustlers were stealing Ella's cattle, and they found three different locations where the steers had been kept before they were loaded onto cattle cars to be brought, presumably, to Kansas City. All things considered, that was quite a bit

to put on the positive side of the ledger.

But Ben hadn't made love with Ella the previous night, and the appalling prospect of going two full days without kissing her mouth, touching her breasts, hearing her soft sighs as he kissed her pussy the way he knew brought her to a quick, quivering climax.

Switching women quickly was nearly a hallmark of Ben's previous sexual dalliances. He enjoyed the company of women, and they enjoyed his wit and charm, his virtuoso sensual skills, and his nearly indefatigable sexual stamina. But no matter how much his lovers wanted him to stay, he always kept moving from one woman to the next, cautious that any one woman might consider him her personal property. That's the way it had always been for him.

Until now.

A strangely sardonic smile curled the right corner of his mouth. How ironic it was that the man who had literally a dozen or more of the territory's most beautiful women willing to accept him into their beds at a moment's notice...should be the man who was now *sharing* a beautiful, voluptuous woman with another man!

There had been times since that first fateful night after Ben tackled Ella off her horse, and the passion erupted like a lightning fire among the three of them, that he considered asking Dirk to simply walk away from Ella, to leave her alone so that he, Ben, could have her all to himself. He wanted Ella—her body, heart, and soul—exclusively. But he also knew Dirk felt the same way about Ella. And it wasn't like either one of them could lay claim to her. She was the fiancée of yet another man.

But Tim was a problem Ben intended to deal with at a later date. Not much later but it wasn't an immediate problem...especially when he could still taste Ella's delicious kisses on his lips.

On the opposite side of the campfire, Blue rested back against his saddle, reclining on his bedroll, talking to Dirk in a low tone. It was because of Blue's presence that Ben hadn't made love with Ella the previous evening. When Ben earlier winked at her, she quickly let

him know most emphatically she would *not* make love to him with a near stranger in camp. Period. End of discussion...as far as she was concerned.

It was almost enough to make Ben resentful of his good friend, Blue.

"I'm going to take a walk, check the perimeter," Ben said suddenly. It always frustrated him whenever he couldn't directly confront a source of frustration, and being thwarted in his desire to make love with Ella once again was one *hell* of a frustration. Blue and Dirk, unaware of Ben's emotional quandary, merely nodded in acknowledgement. "I won't be gone long."

As he stepped away from the circle of light surrounding the slowly dying campfire, Ben felt a flash of excitement go through him as darkness swallowed him. It was a cloudy night with only a sliver of moon illuminating the prairie. Earlier, Ella stepped away from the camp, headed for the nearby stream to freshen up before retiring for the evening. Ben didn't know exactly where she had gone, but he did know where she would return to. The idea that he could lay in ambush for her, as he had on that first magnificent night when he first tasted her charms and freed the sensual woman trapped inside, was too exciting to resist.

He picked his spot carefully. It was closer to the camp than he would have liked—perhaps not more than seventy or eighty feet—but he was well hidden in shadows, and he had a vantage point for both the camp and stream. He could see Blue and Dirk near the campfire, but they couldn't see him. The location wasn't ideal, but it would have to do.

When Ella returned, she would walk right past him.

Another smile pulled at Ben's mouth, but this smile wasn't sardonic. It was sexual. Blatantly, fiercely sexual. Inside his black trousers, he cock started to grow, coming to life, anticipating the myriad of pleasures to be found with the surprisingly bewitching woman named Ella.

Rather than be uncomfortable, Ben quickly unbuttoned the fly of his trousers and pulled out his rapidly growing arousal. A moment later, and after a bit of wrestling, he tugged his testicles out as well. His genitals were pale against the dark serge fabric of his trousers, his testicles hanging low. Wrapping his fingers around the shaft of his cock, he stroked himself twice. It was all the stimulation he needed to swell to full stature.

Ella would walk by soon. He was sure of it. But she wouldn't want to make love. Of that he was also sure. But if there was anything Ben was confident of, it was that he could change Ella's mind about that whole making love thing, provided he had enough time. She might say *no* to begin with, but with the right combination of kisses and caresses, he could make her say *Yes! Yes! Yes!* in that breathy voice she used whenever she was thoroughly aroused.

Looking toward the campfire, Ben watched as Dirk stood. He made a last comment to Blue then began walking away from the fire and almost straight toward him. Ben's initial reaction was annoyance. He had been looking forward to "trapping" Ella all for himself. But that would have been selfish. He had no more right to monopolize her passion than Dirk did. Still....

"Ben? Ben, you out there?"

Dirk kept his voice very low, hardly more than a whisper as he approached. The only reason to do that was so Blue wouldn't hear. Ben suspected his old friend had the same plans for Ella as he did himself. Dirk continued moving closer, walking slowly, peering into the shadows, searching for his black-clad friend.

"Over here," Ben said, keeping his voice so low it wouldn't carry. Dirk stepped closer. His erection stood out through his fly. With a guilty shrug of his shoulders, Ben said, "I figure she's got to walk past this spot to get back to camp. Thought I'd wait to greet her."

Nodding his agreement, Dirk replied, "I kind of figured as much." He looked toward the campfire. Blue still reclined on his bedroll, his hands beneath his head, propped up on his saddle. "Ella's not going to

be in a frisky mood being this close to the fire.”

“We’ll just have to change her mood, won’t we?”

Dirk was busy unbuttoning his fly as he replied, “Seems like an effort well worth making.”

\* \* \* \*

*If this isn't love, then love doesn't exist.*

The thought did not bring any particular joy to Ella. If a woman wanted comfort and stability in her life, which Ella most certainly did, then falling in love with two men with notorious reputations for *not* falling in love was about the absolute *last* thing in the world that woman would want to do.

There was some consolation in Ella's next conscious thought. Not a lot but some.

*But I never intended to fall in love. It just happened.*

As Ella made her way slowly back to the camp, she was willing to accept whatever comfort she could find in her own chaotic emotions. The advent of Dirk and Ben into her life, with the concomitant introduction of sexual excess on a scale she never considered possible, had skewed everything in her life. She always thought she knew who and what she was, just as she assumed she knew her life and world and what to expect of them. Now everything—absolutely *everything*—had been irrevocably changed. Some parts of her life changed for the better, other parts for the worse. But *everything* had changed...and like the little fellow on the fence, all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put the egg back together again.

She walked barefooted from the narrow stream that cut through the McWilliams' southernmost property. Her boots were pinched between the thumb and fingertips of her right hand, which weren't nearly as spotlessly polished as they had been days earlier when she embarked on this sojourn. In her left hand were her damp and recently washed camisole, underwear, and socks. She rinsed the

undergarments out in the stream.

In a strange way, she enjoyed having so few creature comforts, so few of the amenities of a wealthy life she grew up with and always known. Out here on the prairie skirting the appropriately titled Badlands with Ben and Dirk and Blue for companions, she had a job to do, and she liked the fact that she could live quite comfortably without changing into a nice evening dress to have her four-course dinner.

Still, it would be nice to once again curl up beneath the cotton sheets and thick blankets in her big, comfortable bed with her head on the goose down feather pillow.

*A big, comfortable...uncrowded empty bed.*

Returning to her bed meant returning to the T-3 Ranch...and that meant leaving Ben and Dirk.

In an instant, Ella realized she would gladly forego all the delicious meals cooked by her family chef, give up all the luxury and comfort she had never in her life been without if only she could continue riding through the Badlands with Ben and Dirk. She wanted to share their lives and laughter during the day and their campfire at night. What could be better than sharing their passion out under the stars? Just to have the two of them with her, without anyone else casting a condescending eye at her for her libertine ways, would be worth giving up all the worldly comforts that were hers thanks to the fortune her father amassed and then willed to her.

But that wouldn't do. That wouldn't possibly do. Ben and Dirk were men who enjoyed their wealth, who took great pleasure in their legions of promiscuous women. Most of all, these were men who loved their freedom. Ella's flights of romantic fancy, she realized as she walked toward the campfire, were the stuff of silly, schoolgirl fantasies.

*No, not schoolgirl fantasies.* She immediately corrected herself in a characteristically self-lacerating way. *Schoolgirls don't take on lovers two at a time.*

Ella was so entrenched in her own thoughts that she nearly walked straight into Ben and Dirk before she was aware of their presence.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, so startled by the sudden movement in the shadows that she dropped one of her boots. When she bent to pick it up, she felt the free, unhampered movement of her breasts beneath her cotton shirt. Though the friction of the well-washed fabric against her nipples was very slight, she was distinctly aware of the sensation. Retrieving the boot so that she held both in one hand, she straightened and delivered a feigned frown to her men. “It’s not nice to startle women, you know.”

“What’ll you do?” Ben asked as he stepped closer, his tone suggesting he wasn’t in the least bit contrite. “Spank us for being naughty?”

“That’s not such a bad idea. In fact—”

Ella’s sputtered with shock, her words getting choked off the instant she saw that both Ben and Dirk, though fully dressed, had erections standing out through unbuttoned trousers. In the pale moonlight and cast against the dark fabric of their trousers, the twin columns of lust-hardened flesh looked eerily pale and very predatory.

With gargantuan understatement, Dirk declared in a casual tone, “We’ve missed you.”

“Obviously!” Ella took a step backward, her vision simultaneously drawn toward those parts of her lovers’ anatomies that gave her such exquisite pleasure, and appalled that they would allow their baser desires to have free rein when Blue was so close they could see him reclining near the campfire. “Have you completely lost your minds?”

Ben reached for Ella, and she skipped backward several steps. “You make us crazy,” he said, prompting a scowl from Ella. “Don’t be shy,” he said, his smile instantly becoming disarmingly benign, his powerful erection suggesting a rather more aggressive state of mind. “Blue’s a long way away. And even if he wasn’t, I’m sure he’d understand.”

“Understand?” Ella exclaimed, much louder than she would have liked. “How could he possibly understand what the three of us feel for each other when I don’t understand it myself?”

“Let’s not quibble.” Dirk moved so that he put a little more distance between himself and Ben while at the same time stepping closer to Ella. They could approach her now from different directions. In a way, it reminded Ella of the way wolves positioned themselves when moved in on a doe. “The night is warm, there’s very little moonlight, and no reason in the world Ben and I shouldn’t give you pleasure.”

A frisson of sensation went through Ella at hearing Dirk’s declaration. The word “pleasure” conjured emotions so vividly recalled that a small gasp caught in her throat, and her nipples tightened in sympathetic response. She raised her hands defensively. Dirk grabbed her left wrist, causing her to drop her boots.

“You can’t do this!” Ella said, her statement coming out so fast they nearly sound like a single word. “Blue’s going to catch us!”

Ben grabbed her right wrist, and Ella’s freshly laundered and still damp socks, chemise, and underpants fell from her fingers to the grass below.

An emotion very near panic suddenly came over Ella. Though her desire for Ben and Dirk was undiminished, the notion of shedding her natural inhibitions with her two lovers when her intemperate behavior might be witnessed by Blue was unthinkable.

“Stop it!” she hissed. She pulled hard, trying to free her wrists from their grasp. Though neither man was straining, they held her securely with very little effort. “Don’t do this to me.” In a hushed whisper laced through with fear and embarrassment, she added, “I’ll do anything you want me to do—just not now.”

“Sorry, my love,” Dirk replied, pulling Ella closer with his left hand as his right eased beneath the heavy, silken hair at the nape of her neck. “I kept my distance from you last night, and it damned near killed me to do it. I need a kiss. That’s not asking too much.”



But his cock was telling quite a different story, one that suggested the big Dutchman wanted kisses, all right...and so much more. The sight of his pulsing flesh caused a myriad of emotions to ricochet through Ella's consciousness. There was a part of her—a wicked, wanton part of her newly discovered sensuality—that wanted to drop to her knees to caress his magnificent erection with her lips and tongue, to feel him pulsing with virility as she sucked and nibbled, receiving sensual pleasure by giving it. But there was another part of Ella, the part of her that set very definable boundaries of right and wrong, that thought such behavior was thoroughly wicked and was made a thousand times more licentious when there was a possibility that a bystander would witness her licentious behavior.

"Don't." It was a small sound that came from Ella. The men pinned her between them. "I don't want to do this." But in her tone was equivocation. Even she heard it, and she damned herself for it.

"Give me the opportunity," Ben said as he firmly twisted Ella's arm so the wrist he held now pressed against the small of her back, "to change your mind."

"You're wicked," Ella whispered as Ben leaned down, his face coming nearer to her own.

"The devil you say," Ben replied as his mouth slanted down over hers.

## Chapter Seven

She felt overwhelmed by her lovers, and most startling and flattering for a woman of generous dimensions, magnificently small and feminine. She was pinned between Dirk and Ben, her arms held securely behind her back. Ben's mouth pressed securely against her own while Dirk kissed her throat. A strong, long-fingered hand caressed her breast, touching her through her shirt. Another strong hand was between her legs, a palm pressed snugly at the apex of her thighs, the contact bold, demanding. For Ella to feel the caresses and not know which of her lovers it was added significantly to the experience of being overwhelmed by masculine dominance and forbidden desires.

Little time had passed from Ella's discovery that Ben and Dirk were waiting for her in the shadows just past the campfire's glow, to the time that she was trembling while Ben's tongue explored her mouth. One strong hand busily unbuttoned her blouse while another hand unbuckled her belt and began opening her English riding breeches. The rapidity with which these men could ignite unquenchable fires of longing mystified Ella. She had never been a woman ruled by her passions, yet here she was, standing between two of the territory's most notorious rakes, dancing her tongue with Ben's while Dirk's moist lips caressed her throat just beneath her ear. Only the awareness that Blue Sun Rising, a man she hardly knew, was nearby prevented Ella from surrendering herself once more, willingly and without reservations, to her lovers.

When Ben ended his kiss, Ella tried to move her hands from behind her back. Neither of her lovers seemed inclined to relinquish

his grip on her wrist. Then Dirk cupped her chin in his big hand, forcibly turned her face toward him, and sealed his mouth over hers. Though Ella wanted to pretend she did not welcome his kiss, her purring whispered of carnal surrender.

Within seconds, her blouse was completely unbuttoned and pushed off her shoulders, baring breasts that gleamed pale and succulent in the moonlight. Ella was still kissing Dirk, her tongue seemingly battling with his in slow advance and retreat, when Ben sucked her left areola and nipple between his lips.

The heated wetness of his mouth upon her nipple made Ella's body flinch from head to toe. The men continued to hold her wrists, pinning her arms behind her back to give themselves unfettered access to her body. The awareness of being completely helpless, trapped in bondage by these wildly sensual men, gripped Ella almost as tightly as their physical presence. The slick, lubricating nectar of her passion moistened the lips of her cunt. The pink lips were puffy, swollen with anticipation. Her clitoris throbbed, aching with a rapidly escalating need.

A hand slipped into Ella's opened breeches. It was Ben, she realized, and a single, slender finger slipped easily between the lips of her pussy. A low, masculine groan came from Ben, the sound mingling with Ella's own sigh as she kissed Dirk.

By the time Dirk finally ended his kiss with Ella, she was dizzy with sensual want, no longer entirely capable of putting forward any credible defense against these men whose apparent goal was to drive her to climax after climax. Despite her disorienting passion, Ella was still clear-headed enough to cast a wary eye toward the golden glow of the low campfire. Blue was still there, now rolling a cigarette between his bronzed fingers as he reclined casually against his saddle. There was nothing in his demeanor to suggest he had any suspicions of what libidinous activities were occurring in the shadows less than thirty yards away. But still, his proximity added elements of fear and excitement to Ella's overheating senses.

In the next several seconds, several things happened simultaneously which served to show Ella just exactly how captive she was to the sensual emotions Dirk and Ben were able to foist upon her. Dirk abandoned her mouth, but before Ella could complain, he bent at the waist to take her nipple into his mouth. Standing in the darkness with her arms held securely behind her back, Ella clenched her teeth against the sigh of pleasure as both of her breasts were sucked, licked, and nibbled on, her nipples pebbling so fiercely hard they were nearly in pain. As this happened, Blue rose to his feet and, after a cautious glance into the darkness, pulled the fringed buckskin shirt over his head, leaving him naked from the waist up. His bronzed body, sinewy lean and solidly muscled, glistened erotically in the firelight, the copper hue of his flesh adding sinful temptation to his undeniable, masculine allure. The mixed-blood tracker was a feast for the eyes, his beauty heightened by the pleasure provided by the two handsome men sucking on her nipples.

Ben's finger eased up between the lips of her pussy, rubbing against her clitoris, and Ella's jaw dropped open, though she maintained sufficient willpower and presence of mind to keep the sigh of ecstasy silent.

Damn, he's beautiful, thought Ella, looking at Blue as he stood near the campfire, looking contemplatively down into the low flames, completely unaware of how his lean, athletic musculature and dusky-hued complexion were adding significant degrees to the sensual heat burning inside Ella.

She turned her gaze from Blue down to the two handsome men currently feasting on her nipples. The visual stimulation of seeing them, their faces very close together and pressed into the pillowy mounds of her breasts, added to the tactile sensation of having both of her nipples orally pleased at the same time.

*If all women knew what ecstasy it is to be pleased by two men at the same time, the world would be a changed place forever.*

As Ben's hand beat slowly, pumping a single finger in and out of

her pussy, Dirk used his free hand to push down her riding breeches from behind.

Ella raised her eyes once more to Blue. He stood a little closer to the fire now, which allowed her to see his illuminated form a bit more clearly. It was a fact which, in Ella's highly aroused state, seemed most propitious, as he rolled another cigarette. Suddenly, he lifted his head and peered into the shadows, looking almost straight at her. Ella's heart nearly stopped beating.

But Blue looked toward her for only a moment before he went back to the task of rolling another cigarette. If he had heard anything, it wasn't suspicious enough for him to investigate.

*I'll bet the rich society belles all want a taste of him*, Ella thought a bit cattily as she watched the dancing firelight play upon the perfect musculature of a man denied kinship by both the white world and his Blackfeet tribe.

Suddenly realizing her arms were no longer being held behind her back, Ella pulled her lovers until they were once more kissing her breasts. She held them tightly, pressing their noses, lips, and chins into her sensitive breasts as they sucked. And while she held Ben and Dirk, she watched Blue pull a cotton shirt over his head. A small sigh of discontent, like that of a child being denied a piece of candy, came from Ella when the mixed-blood tracker was no longer naked from the waist up.

Ben pulled Ella's arm from around his neck, looked to the side to see for himself what had drawn her attention, then flashed a smile that was a combination of lust, amusement, and covetous anger.

"I'm sucking on her nipples, and who is this hot-blooded wench looking at? Blue! That's who!" he whispered as he got down on one knee in front of her. "Hold her tight, Dirk. I know what our lady needs."

As she had in the past, Ella could see herself as though from a small distance, and what her mind's eye conjured was hardly one of genteel civility. There she stood, the owner of one of the largest

spreads west of the Mississippi, wearing an unbuttoned blouse and no chemise. She wore leather-reinforced English riding breeches, but they were pulled down to her knees, and she did not have on any underpants. A devastatingly handsome young man with long black hair and a smile that was charm itself was on his knees, giving her cunnilingus with the skill of a connoisseur as his slim-fingered hands squeezed the cheeks of her ass. Another man, blond and brawny, was bent nearly in half so he could suck hungrily on her breasts.

But the most damning part of the image was that Ella wasn't looking at the men who were focused so completely on giving her pleasure. She was looking at the mixed-blood Indian as he paced slowly near the campfire, casually smoking a cigarette.

Her knees started to shake first, and then her insides began to flutter. Ben's tongue was a serpent on her clitoris while a single finger pistoned between the lips of her cunt. Dirk sucked hard on one pink nipple while his work-roughened forefinger and thumb tugged and rolled the opposite nipple.

Conscious of her need to remain quiet, Ella clenched her teeth tightly but kept her eyes open until they glazed over and Blue was no longer visible. The orgasm was made more powerful by her response being restrained, and the jarring spasms that passed through her made her tremble violently for several cataclysmic seconds.

Weakened from the force her orgasm, Ella's knees sagged beneath her. She looked down at Ben, who smiled up at her, his too-kissable lips wet and shimmering with her lusty juices.

They helped her down to the grass, their hands strong, brooking no defiance as her blouse and breeches were removed so she was completely naked. Dirk took the time to unbutton his own shirt and opened his trousers enough to push them down to his knees. Ben, less patient, combed his fingers into Ella's hair then kissed her mouth hard. Ella could taste her own nectar on his lips as he turned her so she was on her side on the grass.

Dirk lifted Ella's left leg, placing it up on his broad shoulder as he

guided his erection to her moist entrance. Still dazed from the fierceness of the orgasm that had only seconds earlier subsided, Ella propped herself up with an elbow. Her mind was in a whirl as the conical crown of Dirk's cock pressed against the lips of her pussy at the same time Ben's hard flesh nudged her cheek, searching for her mouth.

They entered her simultaneously, piercing her pussy and mouth deeply, filling her with their virility. Ella closed her eyes, submitting to their dominance, her body trembling as the men found a rhythm that pleased her by pleasing them.

"This wench...has an eye...for our...dark-skinned...friend," Dirk said between thrusts as he worked his lower torso, driving his cock full-length into Ella. He was on his knees, straddling one of her legs as he held the other up on his shoulder. "What do you think we should do about that?"

With Ella's golden tresses in his fist, Ben's arousal plunged into her mouth until the crown was uncomfortably tight against the opening of her throat. As she squirmed, her eyes opening wide as she struggled against her body's natural reflexive impulses, Ben replied, "Maybe we should have our fill of her then watch as she gives Blue a blowjob. Think she'd like that?"

As his cock made a long, tantalizing retreat from her rapidly overheating pussy, Dirk replied, "I'll bet she's never had a taste of dark meat."

They kept their voices low, their words lurid, creating images of carnality that tantalized Ella's imagination. What kind of a wanton woman, she wondered, would have two magnificent lovers and yet be thinking of a third? Surely, she could not be such a woman!

*But I am precisely that kind of woman! I've got Dirk in my pussy and Ben in my mouth...and I'm going to come again!*

Dirk's arm was tight around Ella's upraised leg as his torso churned with steadily increasing fury, his pelvis striking her ass and thigh hard as he plunged to the depths of her femininity. Ella was

distinctly aware of the erratic motion of her breasts, of the cock that pushed and tugged at the lips of her pussy as it rubbed against her clitoris on its seesaw journey, of the hard cock that slid between her lips and over her tongue. When Ben filled his hand with her quivering breast and pinched her nipple hard, Ella climaxed a second time, her eyes squeezed tightly shut, her mouth open wide to accommodate Ben's throbbing erection.

She just finished her orgasm when Dirk, always clear-headed under any circumstance, withdrew completely and released his passion.

With two wrenching, draining orgasms in her recent past, Ella wanted time to recover her strength. But she knew she wasn't going to be given that opportunity. Not when Ben's desires had yet to be quenched. Within seconds, she was on her hands and knees in the grass with Ben kneeling behind her still fully dressed with only his rigid cock sticking out through his unbuttoned fly. Dirk moved so he was positioned on his back with his head directly beneath the swinging mounds of her heavy breasts.

Ben pushed the fingers of his left hand into Ella's hair and snapped her head up. They turned Ella so she faced the camp. As he invading her warm and wet feminine embrace, he said, "Look at Blue. Look at that handsome Indian while I fuck you."

Two powerful climaxes hadn't in any way dulled Ella's ability to feel the most minute sensation. Ecstasy and discomfort mingled into an erotic elixir that Ella suspected she could easily become addicted to. The sharp bite of pain she felt at having her hair pulled contrasted erotically with the warmth of Dirk's mouth as he sucked upon her nipple. Those feelings contrasted with the long slide of Ben's cock into her pussy and the gouging edge of the brass trouser buttons against her buttocks when he thrust fully into her.

Ella watched as Blue flicked the remains of his second cigarette into the low campfire. He stood then, peering into the darkness for weighty seconds, seemingly looking directly at her.



*He's watching me while I get fucked!*

Her third climax preceded Ben's ecstasy by not more than three seconds. The warm splash of semen on her back heightened the satisfaction of Ella's shuddering release. When the last spasm went through her, she waited until Dirk moved from beneath her and then collapsed onto her stomach on the lush grass, cradling her head in her arms, her skin tingling from head to toe.

"Damn, Blue's coming this way!"

Dirk's words put ice in Ella's veins.

"Don't let him see me!" she whispered, the afterglow of multiple orgasms vanishing instantly.

Ben was the only one of the trio to remain completely dressed. He shoved his half-erect penis back into his trousers, buttoned up quickly, and said, "I'll stall him. Dirk, you come back to camp as quick as possible. Ella, I think maybe you'd better make another trip back to the stream."

She smiled wearily and whispered in reply, "I'll be taking more baths than any five women in the territory...."

## Chapter Eight

Blue had chosen to make his cabin in the trees at the base of the hills. By building the cabin in the trees, he had protection in the winter when the Arctic winds howled down from the north. But putting his cabin in the trees instead of the valley below also meant that an enemy could sneak up on him.

It took him two years of hard labor, working on it whenever he had the time, to finish. Now, seeing it nestled in trees on the opposite side of the valley, seeing his three horses and twenty-six longhorns eating the lush grass of the basin, he felt a rush of pride.

Not bad for a half-breed bastard nobody accepted, he thought. It was a not altogether pleasant awareness.

The barn was two hundred feet from the cabin in the valley and away from the tree line. The barn was a year older than the cabin. A man can only work on one building project at a time, and priorities had to be determined. Blue and his horses lived in the same building for many months.

"I finished my house the spring before last. I finished the barn the year before that," Blue said, his dark face creased into a smile.

Ben looked across the valley. "You were telling me about it at Finnerman's ranch when he held that summit about the horse thieves riding north into Canada."

Blue wanted to change the subject. He'd been the tracker for the posse. They finally found the horse thieves, all seven of them, but not before they discovered a farmhouse where a husband, wife, and their four children had been slaughtered. The horse thieves had done the

murdering simply because they needed whiskey and money, and they weren't inclined to leave behind anyone who could identify them. All seven horse thieves knew that at the end of the trail only ropes awaited them. They decided to fight to the bitter end, and to a man they were shot down by the posse.

"I've put the roof on since then." Blue shifted in the saddle and surreptitiously looked at Ella. He had known her father well and knew of her immense fortune. What would she think of his humble lodgings? Blue didn't want to put much value in the opinion of a rich white woman, but that didn't stop his guts from clenching a little with apprehension. "I don't suppose it's much to you, but—"

This time it was Ella who created instant silence by raising her hand. "Not another word, Blue. I've been in this saddle for days, so right now that house of yours looks as welcoming as a British castle made of marble with the drawbridge lowered especially for me. If you listen, you can even hear the trumpet fanfare."

Blue gave the briefest nod in acknowledgement. He looked into Ella's eyes, half expecting her to look away. She didn't turn her eyes away, and in their blue depths was amusement. Blue sensed she liked evening the score with him, and his estimation of her went up once again.

"That's a bit lofty for my home," he said, "but I appreciate the intention just the same."

When they reached the house, he took the reins for Queenie from Ella. "Why don't you go on in and make yourself comfortable? I'll put up your mare for you, Mrs. Murphy."

He watched the heavy sway of her breasts beneath the jacket, blouse, and camisole as she swung down from the saddle. She turned to face him, putting her hands on the curve of her hips. The move forced her bosom to press a little more prominently against her shirtfront, though Blue doubted this was her intention.

Ella said sternly, "Say my name."

"Ella."

“There. Now that’s not so difficult, is it?” She smiled, and not for the first time did Blue notice just how plump and kissable her lips were. “I’d rather you didn’t call me Mrs. Murphy.” But then the smile transformed. It was a subtle change, but the smile infinitesimally turned sad and self-effacing. “And I’m hoping that I never give anyone reason to call me Mrs. Cutler.”

She lowered her eyes as though she said something to be ashamed of. Blue wanted to tell her she mustn’t be ashamed or embarrassed because of her unwise engagement to a despicable man. Though he was an articulate and literate man—the Lutheran missionaries made sure of that—he kept his silence. Perhaps it was because he was so strong himself, or maybe it was because he received so few comforting words in his life, either from the Blackfeet, who had never really accepted him into their tribe, or from the missionaries, who had given him an education but not an ounce of love. However it happened, giving comforting words was extremely difficult for Blue, and he cursed himself now because of it, knowing Ella was a woman needing gentle words that touched the soul.

“You’re a good woman, Ella.” His voice was rough-soft, hoarse with an inner tension, and he was surprised to hear the emotion in his tone. He hadn’t said much, but he was relieved to get any words out at all.

“Thank you, Blue. I owe you a favor,” Ella replied. She half-turned toward the cabin before stopping herself. Blue had a view of her in profile, and seeing the extravagance of her bosom reawakened his masculine senses to the presence of lush femininity nearby. “Actually, I owe you several favors,” she added. “There’s no doubt in my mind that you’re the best tracker in the territory. I swear you could track a mouse over a mountain of solid rock. Daddy always said there was nobody better than you.”

As difficult as it was for Blue to provide comforting words, it was even more difficult for him to accept words of praise. He turned away, leading his pinto and her Appaloosa into the barn.

\* \* \* \*

Dirk ran the curry comb over the rump of his black quarter horse with white stockings, added another half bucket of oats to the animal's feed bin, then looked over at Ben. Their eyes met, and without exchanging a word, each voiced identical questions.

*Will we make love to Ella tonight? What about Blue?*

During the time he'd been riding with Ella, her lush beauty haunted Dirk day and night. He, quite naturally, often thought about their shared passion. Once her inhibitions had been seduced away, she had given herself without reservation. As she explained several times between bouts of lovemaking, her behavior simply wasn't indicative of the woman she looked at in the mirror in the mornings. Knowing her licentious behavior was so out of character for her made the *ménage à trois* lovemaking even more intensely satisfying for Dirk.

But sex wasn't the only thing that played with Dirk's thoughts. In his mind he heard the music of her laughter even when he was all by himself, like earlier when he had ridden out ahead of Blue and the others to reconnoiter from the top of a hill into the neighboring valley. And of course there was that certain something in her eyes that was so completely different from all other women. Her eyes were a deep, rich navy blue that glistened wetly in a healthy way, though they could get cold and flinty in an instant if she thought she was being talked down to. And her breasts! Was there a woman within a thousand miles of the Badlands with such extravagant, round, responsive—

"Dirk? You all right there, my friend?" It was Ben, and he was giving Dirk a studied look.

"Sorry. You ready to go inside?" He was embarrassed at being caught daydreaming. Ella had a peculiar ability to make him feel positively adolescent.

Ben grinned then glanced over to see that Blue was still on the far side of the barn. In a whisper, he asked, "You were thinking about

Ella, weren't you?"

"When I'm around her, I feel like a boy, a damned love-struck pup."

"Me, too, my friend. I never dreamed I'd feel so..."

"Naive?"

"No. More like giddy or something like that." Ben's brows narrowed, and his shoulders rose and fell briefly. "It's like sex is all new to me again. But hell, you and I have been cutting a pretty wide swath through the ladies for years now."

"Does it bother you we're sharing her?"

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't think about it. But she's such a woman! Sharing her passion is better than not experiencing it." He looked away for a moment. "For all the things you and I have done over the years, this is the first time we've ever done something like this. And I've got to tell you, at first watching you with Ella really made me jealous, but now it just excites me. When I see you with her, it just makes me want to join in."

It was Dirk's turn to grin. "I watched her sucking you the other night. It made me hard as stone."

Blue, having finished feeding, brushing, and watering his pinto and Ella's Appaloosa, crossed the barn.

"It'll be a bit crowded inside, I'm afraid, but at least we'll all have a roof over our heads," Blue said. "There's only one bed." He stepped outside and looked up at the dark sky. "I smell rain. Wouldn't surprise me if we had some coming our way soon."

"Only one bed," Dirk repeated, putting a hand on the much smaller man's shoulder, "but I've heard it has more than one occupant as often as not."

Blue grinned. It was common knowledge that wealthy ladies in the territory, typically married, wishing to have an "exotic experience" rode to Blue's out-of-the-way cabin or met him in a rented hotel suite. When he slept alone, it was by choice.

Smoke rose from the cabin's two chimneys. One was for the

fireplace, the other for the stove. Dirk was pleased that Ella, despite her vast wealth and numerous servants, hadn't simply waited around for others to do what needed to be done. She took the initiative to get the fires started.

When he stepped into the cabin, last in the queue of men, he saw Ella standing near the stove. There was a smile on her lips, and it was obvious that she had undergone some physical exertion.

"I found your water buckets, and I followed your tracks to where you take your water from the stream," she explained, talking to Blue. "Since you're our host, I think you should take the first bath when the water's the hottest and cleanest."

She had taken off her jacket and unfastened two of her blouse's buttons at her throat, and now showed a hint of cleavage. Dirk thought it ridiculous to be so aroused by the woman's modest display, but he was coming to understand that everything about Ella affected him more strongly than with other women. He couldn't say why it was so, but he felt its proof in his soul and in his slowly lengthening penis.

There was a sheen of perspiration on her forehead, and Dirk suspected she hurried when getting the water, evidently determined to do her fair share of the work. The more he knew of the woman's character, the more he found there was to like.

He turned his back, pretending to be surveying the cabin, but what he was really doing was telling himself that being caught having a raging erection would be wildly embarrassing. A perfectly natural occurrence, given Ella's ostentatious charms, but embarrassing just the same.

Blue, of course, refused to be the first to bathe. But Ella insisted, and while it was true that the men in the cabin with her were notoriously stubborn, so was she. Confronted by an intractable woman, Blue relented.

"I'll just be outside," Ella said quietly, heading toward the door once the last boiler was poured into the galvanized bath tub.

“No.” Dirk said the single word without actually thinking it. In a slightly softer tone, but with just the same authority, he said, “You can’t leave, Ella.”

“But...” Her protest dissolved in the air.

He watched as her gaze darted left and right. She caught her lower lip between teeth that gleamed white in the pale light of the three kerosene lanterns. He sensed her confusion, her fear...and her desire. He’d seen what happened when she released her inhibitions, and he knew that such extreme behavior frightened her. He also knew that though she was the confident and resourceful leader of the T-3 Ranch, there was a submissive woman within her that creamed, trembled, moaned, and climaxed when dominated in an erotic manner.

Dirk turned to Blue. The right side of his mouth pulled upward in a wolfish smile. “Go ahead. You should go first.” To Ben he said, “Come on, let’s get more wood in the stove and in the fireplace. We’ll fill up the boilers so that when it’s Ella’s turn to bathe, she gets fresh, clean, hot water.”



## Chapter Nine

Ella tried to ignore the slight tremble in her knees. It was impossible, just as it was impossible to ignore the lean, dark-skinned, handsome half-breed in the bathtub. Dirk's sudden command that she remain in the cabin while the men bathed had shocked her to the marrow. It was partly because the command came so unexpectedly and partly because she knew what it was like to be psychologically dominated by Dirk and Ben. Her pussy became instantly dewy and slick.

She added another piece of wood to the stove just to give herself something to do. She had to keep moving, or it would be impossible to not look at Blue. When her eyes darted toward him, she saw he was sitting in the galvanized bathtub in the center of the room. His copper-hued body was as lean and sensual as a mountain lion's. There wasn't an ounce of excess weight on him.

"Come over here and sit down," Ben said, patting his thigh. He and Dirk had taken the two straight-backed, bentwood chairs from the small kitchen table by the stove and placed them near the bathtub. "Don't worry. The water will be plenty hot for you when it comes time for you to bathe."

The casually spoken words caressed Ella as surely and physically as if Ben stroked his fingertips along the inside of her naked thigh. With her back to the men, Ella closed her eyes for a moment. What was happening? Recent history already taught her that with Ben and Dirk she was capable of the most outlandish, intemperate behavior. And now they were sitting close to Blue while he washed himself, the three men enjoying a casual conversation while imbibing Kentucky

sipping whiskey. They behaved as though there wasn't a woman with them in the small, cozy cabin, though the woman in that cabin was all too aware of their presence.

Summoning courage, Ella turned slowly. Ben sat in his stocking feet, his jacket off and his shirt almost completely unbuttoned to reveal a lean-muscle chest with dark, curly hair. On the floor near his feet was a half-empty bottle of whiskey. He positioned his chair so close to the bathtub that if she sat on his lap, she would be within arm's reach of Blue.

Another shiver went through Ella. What did Ben expect of her? Was she supposed to pretend Blue wasn't attractive, wasn't naked, and wasn't right there in the room with her? She wanted desperately to taste Ben's kisses, to feel his heart pounding furiously against her own as he plunged into her again and again, but from the way he was behaving, it seemed he wasn't in the least bit interested in being intimate with her. Were their nights of passion a thing of the past now that they were in Blue's cabin?

Ella turned back toward the stove, her mind in a whirl. Ben had first seen through her defenses and understood her need for dominance, her hunger for submission to great strength. Dirk was the one holding her wrists on that first glorious night of shared passion, but it was Ben who knew, even when Ella herself did not, that she craved a sense of feminine surrender to masculine forces too powerful to be resisted.

"Come here, Ella."

This time Ben's tone was authoritative. What had been a request was now a command. Ella's clitoris responded by beginning to awaken, the delicate lips of her sex becoming slick with nectar and puffy with anticipation. A quavering smile touched her full-lipped mouth as she turned and crossed the room to Ben.

*If he wasn't so handsome, I wouldn't be so weak.*

But Ella knew it was more than just Ben's looks that stripped her of her ability to resist seduction. It was his extraordinary presence, his

masculine bearing that exuded limitless confidence and virility. It was what made her body respond to his voice as though he was intimately caressing her with the consummate skill of a connoisseur of sensuality.

His knees were spread wide apart to give her room. Though there was nothing inherently obscene about the posture, in Ella's passion-distorted consciousness, it seemed utterly wicked. When he patted his thigh, she sat, studiously avoiding looking down into the bathtub.

"Why don't you get a glass?" Ben asked, looking up into her eyes. His tone was cordial, casual. Ella wasn't deceived by it for a second. "Have a little whiskey with us."

"I really shouldn't."

Her heart was racing. Nervously, Ella swept an errant tendril of golden hair behind her ear. She felt her ears and cheeks getting warm with embarrassment. When Ben rested the hand holding his whiskey glass on her thigh, the breath caught momentarily in her throat. Every nerve in her body was taut.

"Perhaps you should not," Ben said quietly, his tone ambiguous. "But it's the things in life you shouldn't do that are usually the most fun."

"And you've had more than your fair share of fun, haven't you?" The instant the words passed between her mouth, Ella blushed. She put a hand to her mouth and closed her eyes. "I can't believe I just said that." She shook her head. "Why is it I'm always saying the most outlandish things with you two?"

Ben's left hand was against her back, and though she knew it was impossible, Ella could have sworn the heat of his palm was not just going into her blood, it was going straight to her clitoris.

"It's a gift we have," Ben repeated after a lengthy pause.

His hand at her back began to move slowly, a light, caressing rub of a work-roughened palm touching her through her blouse and camisole. Ella looked at Ben, trying to read his thoughts. She found it impossible. When she turned her attention to Dirk, she recognized the

look in his eyes as predatory male. He wanted to devour her in the best of all possible ways, and the thought of it sent a shiver slithering along her spine. Memories of the cataclysmic climaxes she experienced during the days and nights of passion when he put his lips and tongue to work on her clitoris were never far from her thoughts. Ella was discovering that when it came to climaxes—in particular, her own climaxes—she could be *wildly* self-centered.

Sensing more than actually seeing, Ella knew Blue was looking at her. She managed to turn her attention toward Dirk for a moment, then back to Ben, without ever looking at Blue. But the effort to keep her gaze averted from the enticingly naked Indian was obvious.

Ben looked into Ella's eyes and said, "Why don't you wash Blue's back?"

Again, the breath caught in her throat. Ben's hand, at the small of her back, pushed firmly. She eased off his thigh, straightening her legs beneath her.

"Hand her the soap, Blue," Ben said, his tone casual, his eyes glittering with lustful mischief. "Let her finish with you, then Dirk can wash off his trail dust."

Ella looked at Ben and Dirk, searching for answers to questions they refused to acknowledge. Were they really throwing her at Blue, as it seemed? Ella felt as though she was in a very provocative game, the rules of which were arcane and so mysterious she could never hope to fully understand them.

She moved slowly, not unlike a woman in a trance, until she stood behind Blue at the high-backed end of the bath tub. While looking into Ben's dark eyes, she sank slowly to her knees.

"Here," Blue said, holding the bar of soap near his shoulder. "And thanks for the help."

When she reached for the proffered bar of soap, Ella saw her hand trembled a little. She rolled the soap between her palms, working up lather. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Ben and Dirk watching her with unblinking interest. The conversation among the men had

stopped. Ella realized everyone was waiting to see just exactly what she would do next.

It was at that moment that all fear left Ella. In a moment of crystalline clarity, she realized she held the power over her own decisions. The men would allow her to resist, if that was her desire. And if she wanted to submit to them, then Ben and Dirk would undoubtedly guide her into their own private world of sensuality—a world that lacked boundaries, a place where “too much” was “not nearly enough.”

But what role, she wondered, would Blue play? It was a question fraught with possibilities.

She started with his shoulders, her hands moving slowly over bronzed skin. Blue's hair was black as a crow and came down nearly to the middle of his back. She smoothed the hair aside. When he leaned forward in the tub, Ella began washing his back.

She felt the restrained power of the man, the muscles solid and sinewy beneath the copper-hued skin. There wasn't an excess ounce on him, and once again, Ella erotically imagined him as a sleek mountain lion.

As she worked her hands along Blue's shoulder blades, Ella looked at Ben, gave him a softly sensual smile, and asked, “Would you mind going to the cupboard and getting me a cup? I'll need it to rinse the soap from his hair after I wash it.”

She turned her attention back to Blue. When Ben returned with a tin cup, Ella took it from him with a hand that no longer trembled.

“Close your eyes. You don't want soap to get in them,” Ella instructed. “I'll wash your hair for you.”

She dipped the cup into the warm water several times to get Blue's long, thick hair completely wet. She worked up a rich lather and soaped his hair. She had to pour a dozen cups of water over Blue's head to get all the soap out.

“There. Now you're clean,” Ella said, still on her knees behind Blue.

She wasn't at all certain what would happen next or what would be expected of her. None of her experiences in the past twenty-two years could prepare her for men as wickedly and sensually inventive as Dirk and Ben. She felt her pulse in her clitoris, and the urge to touch herself intimately in front of these three men was suddenly a very strong compulsion.

"I've got towels over there," Blue said, pointing in the direction of the kitchen.

As Dirk went to the kitchen, Ella looked at Ben, seeking some sign from him, some hint as to what he expected of her. In his eyes she saw amusement and desire. That she expected. She hoped for direction, and that he wouldn't give her until it suited his wishes.

When Dirk returned, he handed Blue a towel. Ella remained on her knees as Blue stood, water cascading down his dusky body. Ella felt nectar flow to the lips of her pussy as she visually caressed Blue's nakedness. Even relaxed, the muscles in his thighs and buttocks were prominently displayed.

"Dirk, you're next," Ben said as Blue stepped out of the bath tub, already drying himself off. To Ella, he added, "You've got a camisole on beneath your blouse, don't you? Why not take off your blouse? That way you won't get it wet." He gave Ella a half-smile that toyed with her senses. "Might just as well get rid of those fancy riding breeches while you're at it. As big as Dirk is, he's likely to splash water over the edge of the tub."

Ella undressed slowly, feeling the eyes of the men upon her as she removed her clothing. When she was down to only her cotton underpants and camisole, she lifted her gaze, and what she saw caused a sharp intake of breath.

Blue sat in the chair that had been vacated by Dirk. He was naked, rubbing his hair with the towel, his body in a casual sprawl. But if one judged him by the fully formed erection jutting up from his loins, his mood was certainly not casual.

Naked, Dirk stepped into the bath tub. He made no effort to hide

his erection either from the other men in the room or from Ella. When she saw his arousal, Ella was again shocked at its girth. Scintillating memories of the pleasures she experienced when taking that cock to the depths of her pussy came rushing to the forefront of her consciousness.

Ella eventually finished washing Dirk's hair and back, in no hurry to speed the process. When he got out of the tub, she took a fresh towel and dried his back, though she consciously avoided drying his front, where his swollen erection was on prominent display. Ben was next, and by the time she finished washing his hair, Ella was almost vibrating with sexual tension.

"Let's take this tub outside and dump it," Ben said, standing naked by the tub, his erection angling slightly upward. A blue vein pulsed visibly along the shaft. "Me and Blue on one side. Dirk, you take the other. We'll fill it with fresh water for Ella."

Ella thought it a very strange sight. There she was, in a small cabin with three completely naked men, all of them with impressive erections, none of them behaving as though anything was out of the ordinary. She watched the play of powerful muscles beneath the skin as the three men lifted the heavy tub and carried it outside.

Overwhelmingly aware that now it was her turn to bathe, Ella rose to her feet. Would it be better to remove her underwear and camisole while the men were outside, or should she wait for them to return? Unconsciously, she crossed her arms over her bosom. Since she was a girl, she had been uncomfortably conscious of her breasts, and how their size drew the attention of men both young and old. Lately, Tim had been teasing her for their size, speaking derogatorily of her voluptuous figure. What did these men think of her extravagant breasts, her curving hips?

The men brought the tub back to where it had been and poured in the hot water from the boilers on the stove and over the fireplace. Then, in unison, the three turned and faced Ella, each with a cock rigid as oak and eyes that glistened with carnivorous hunger.

*What have I gotten myself into?* Ella wondered as she grabbed the bottom hem of her camisole and began raising it.

\* \* \* \*

“Is somebody going to explain just what the hell is going on?” Blue asked when they stepped outside to empty the bath tub.

Ben chuckled. “I assumed you’d be a little on the curious side of life.”

“That’s one of the great understatements of all time.”

Ben looked at Dirk, and together they shrugged their shoulders in mute agreement, both men silently understanding the other in the way that lifelong friends sometimes can. “It’s not real easy explaining how Dirk, Ella, and I got together. It just sort of happened without any planning, and that’s the truth. Maybe it was just that she’s a young widow who is now engaged to a complete jackass. Maybe she’s been neglected. Or maybe the stars were in the right alignment, if you believe in astrology. I’m thinking that maybe it’s a full moon thing, and it has made us all a little crazy. But whatever it is we’ve got going, it’s damned exciting.” Ben’s gaze went briefly down to Blue’s erection, shining wetly in the moonlight.

Seeing Blue naked gave him a better understanding of at least one reason why so many of the *beau monde* society’s ladies enjoyed sharing their charms with a man polite society refused to accept. “It’s been a long time since she’s felt like a passionate woman, a long time since she’s been shown love and affection. She might appreciate you showing her just how beautiful she is.” Ben chuckled softly. “You’re obviously up for the task. Come on, let’s get back before she locks the door on us.”

There was confusion and awe in Blue’s tone when he murmured, “Ella Murphy...I never would have guessed.”

When they returned, Ben saw Ella had gotten to her feet, but she hadn’t moved far in their absence. He looked at her and felt his



erection stiffen. She seemed lost and vulnerable standing there in just her camisole and drawers.

The tub was soon filled with clean, steaming water. Ben turned to Ella and gave her a half-smile. She hesitated briefly, then grabbed the bottom of her camisole and dragged it slowly up over her head and off completely. Her breasts, round and firm, swayed momentarily when she tossed the camisole aside, and Ben felt a tightness in his throat, just as he did the first time he saw her bosom in all its extravagant glory.

Ella unknotted the drawstring to her underpants and let the cotton slither down her legs. She stepped out of them and then stepped into the bath tub. Though Ben tried to remain calm, he knew that on this night he would not be in possession of his usual orgasmic discipline. It had taken nearly an hour for the three men to bathe, and in that time, the sexual tension in the cabin was slowly and steadily increasing. The game was to pretend to be casual when, in fact, all four people in the room were anything *but* casual. Seeing Ella's body now, pale and voluptuous, her lush curves the embodiment of feminine fertility, caused the pressure in his testicles to build. His next orgasm would surely be volcanic.

"You just sit there, and we'll bathe you," Ben said with feigned casualness as he picked up the soap.

"All of you?" Ella asked, her tone interlaced with trepidation.

Ben leaned close so that his mouth brushed Ella's ear as he spoke. "Just close your eyes, my lady. Leave everything to us."

Ben rolled the large bar of soap in his hands to work up a frothy foam then handed the bar to Blue, who did the same. Though the men did not rehearse their actions, by an unspoken communication they knew none of them should touch Ella before any of the others.

Ella folded her arms over her breasts. Dirk and Blue, kneeling to her right and left, took her wrists and uncrossed her arms. And then, simultaneously, the men put their soapy hands upon Ella and began to wash her arms and shoulders with a curious tenderness.

\* \* \* \*

*I'm going to hell for this. I'm going straight to hell, and I don't give a damn!*

Thoughts of fiery damnation were difficult to dwell upon when every nerve in Ella's body was vibrantly alive and tingling with heightened sensitivity. She had three sets of masculine hands touching her, washing her, the fingers and palms slippery with soap suds, kneading the muscles in her shoulders, gently gliding over her breasts and arms and throat.

A sigh escaped her. She started to open her eyes then adamantly stopped herself. Ben told her to close her eyes, and she would follow his orders. On the only passion-filled evenings of her life she'd ever experienced, she followed every command given to her by Ben and Dirk, and the end result of her submissive obedience was more climaxes than she ever experienced before.

She rested her head against the tub's sloping backrest and then, while battling with inner demons of modesty and the notion that no good woman would ever give herself to three men at the same time, rested her arms against the curled edges of the tub, availing herself completely.

"Raise your foot," she heard Blue say.

Strong fingers wrapped around her ankle, lifting her foot out of the water. Ella understood she really had little choice over what happened, and the awareness caused a small shiver to go through her. Unable to keep her eyes closed, Ella opened them as she straightened her leg, angling her foot toward the far wall.

"Beautiful legs," Blue said quietly, his soapy hands massaging Ella's foot. When he worked a slippery finger between her toes, Ella flinched and giggled. "Ticklish?"

Ella nodded. She did not trust herself to speak in as casual a tone as the men. Her senses were rapidly overloading with erotic

stimulation. Though it had been wickedly arousing to have Ben and Dirk simultaneously using their charms on her, to have *three* men working their soapy hands over her naked, fatigued body was divine.

While Blue washed Ella's left leg, Dirk washed her right arm. And leaning around the high back of the rectangular tub, Ben worked his soapy hands over her shoulders and upper arms.

Ella knew her perceptions were deceiving her because everything seemed so natural, so harmless, but what was happening could *not* be considered natural or harmless. These were cattlemen and horsemen, men who lived with a lasso in their hands, and consequently their hands were callused from hard labor. But with the soap, their hands were silky soft as they touched, rubbed, cleaned, caressed. Sensual receptivity hummed through every nerve in Ella's body.

Blue placed her foot back in the water and said in a soft but commanding voice, "Lift your bottom up."

A sob caught in Ella's throat. She looked into the Indian's dark, fathomless eyes for a moment. Though different from Dirk and Ben, in matters concerning comportment and competence, he was identical to his friends when it came to self-confidence. She closed her eyes to summon courage then arched her back, lifting her pelvis up out of the water.

"That's it. That's right," Blue purred, his fingers tantalizing as they began working their way up her tapering thigh.

Dirk released Ella's arm. When his big hands closed over her breasts, his soapy fingers circling her pink, erect nipples, Ella uttered a warbling sigh then said, "Oh, God!" when Blue's palm pressed against the lips of her pussy.

Her thighs clamped shut, but it was an unconscious move from a feminine body unaccustomed to receiving so much pleasure from so many different nerve endings all at one time.

"Spread your knees." Ben's tone was low and authoritative.

"Oh, God," Ella whispered, hearing the domination in his voice. In her heart she knew she had little choice but to relent to desires she

could not possibly resist.

It was as though her legs belonged to someone else. Slowly, her knees spread apart. Blue brought his hand back to her pussy, and Ella watched as he circled her clitoris briefly with the tip of his middle finger before easing the digit between her pink lips. The smooth slide of the finger into her body was electric. Her mouth opened, but the gasp of pure pleasure remained silent—momentarily.

“Oh, God!” she exclaimed an instant later when Blue had a finger inside her pussy and caressed her clitoris with his thumb. After several seconds, she explained, “That’s too good!” And then, “My blood’s on fire!”

It was an awkward position to be in, her feet in the water with her hips lifted up above the mountain of soap bubbles, her thighs quivering as passion escalated, Dirk’s big hands tantalizing her nipples while Blue’s hands worked demonic magic upon her pussy. Awkward, but magnificently entertaining.

She felt Ben’s breath against her ear when he whispered, “Come for us, my sweet. Surrender, Ella. Surrender yourself to us. Submit.”

The climax hit Ella faster and harder than she expected. Ben’s words were the aphrodisiac that added the last touch of wantonness Ella needed to erupt. The orgasmic contractions were painfully powerful, and she shuddered as the erotic energy was released from her body.

And once the last spasm squeezed Blue’s invading fingers, Ella was far too sensitive to let the caresses continue. She dropped back into the tub, splashing water over both sides in the process.

“Stop!” Ella panted. “I can’t take anymore.”

Ella rested her head against the tub’s angling backrest, closing her eyes to savor the delicious afterglow. She felt the eyes of the men upon her. Now that she had her orgasm, clear thinking returned, and with it, embarrassment at her own wanton excesses.

“I’ll get some dry towels,” she heard Ben say. “I think our lady has been properly bathed.”

The words *our lady* tantalized Ella's imagination. She breathed deeply, a faint smile touching her mouth as she thought about what exactly it meant being a *lady* to three men with libertine sensibilities. Around her she heard the soft sounds of bare feet against a hardwood floor.

"Get out of the tub, Ella," Ben said, his voice low, sultry. "We'll dry you off."

Ella opened her eyes, and yet another startled gasp came from her. Standing by the foot of the tub were three handsome men, each with a flagrantly aroused penis pointed at her. Ella's desires had been quenched, but one look at the three men standing before her and it was glaringly obvious that their lust had yet to reach orgasmic release.

"Oh my..." Ella said, a sheepish smile curling a full-lipped mouth that had not yet tasted its final kiss of the evening. She caught her lower lip between even white teeth. "I...I think I've been selfish. You've done so much, and I've done so little."

Ben smiled at her and said, "But I'm sure you understand the meaning of the word 'reciprocity.'"

Ella did, and seeing three erections aim like fleshy spears at her, a shiver zipped up her spine.

## Chapter Ten

Ella stepped out of the tub, and the men went to work, slowly drying her with towels. Blue was on his knees behind her, starting at her ankles as he wiped his way slowly up the backs of her legs. Ben was in front of her, similarly employed. Dirk, the tallest of the three, was at her side, kneading her scalp with a towel.

If Ella felt pampered while in the bath tub by the attentions of the three men, the sensation of being utterly indulged now was even more pervasive. She felt like a decadent goddess, and it was a glorious sensation.

“I’ve no doubt that it says something terrible about me,” Ella purred, her eyes closed as six strong hands touched her, “but I’ve never in my life felt so feminine as I do right now with you three men. Do you suppose Cleopatra felt this way?”

Ben, on his knees in front of Ella, replied, “You couldn’t be terrible, even if you tried. You deserve ten thousand kisses.”

A moment later, when Ben’s warm lips touched her pussy, she sighed and came to the conclusion that if what she was experiencing in Blue’s small cabin with these three men was truly wicked, then she would embrace wickedness with all her heart and soul.

She opened her eyes just in time to watch Ben’s tongue snake out between his lips and flicked across her still-erect clitoris. She bent slightly at the waist, putting her hands on his shoulders to steady herself as his tongue became more active. She was discovering that Ben’s tongue was a serpent capable of caressing with consummate skill.

And that’s when she felt Blue’s slick tongue flick against her

taboo entrance. A startled sob escaped Ella as tantalizing tongues entertained her fore and aft. Dirk, standing at her side, took her by the upper arm and forced her to stand erect. He gave her mouth a dominating kiss then bent over and sucked her areola and nipple between his lips, drawing a fierce suction.

“Oh, yes!” Ella purred, wrapping her arms around Dirk’s head to hold him tightly to her breast.

Hot, wet mouths caressed. Blue’s tongue danced and teased her forbidden passage, sending unprecedented pleasure coursing through Ella. She hadn’t realized until that moment her body’s potential for ecstasy by such a taboo caress. Pleasure surged through her pelvis in pulsing waves. She was pinned between Blue and Ben, delighting in the act of being devoured by them.

When the orgasm hit moments later, Ella’s high-pitched cry of release echoed off the cabin’s walls and rang through the darkness of the prairie. Her legs shivered so badly that she would have fallen had she not been pinned between two powerfully built, kneeling men who had a steely grip on her hips and thighs.

She pushed Dirk away, then Ben. Blue leaned back, sitting on his heels but remained on his knees. She was enervated by the draining force of the climaxes these three men had given her in such a short period of time. She breathed deeply, the surface of her skin tingling in the orgasmic afterglow.

“I thought...I would...die,” she said between gulps of air.

Later on, Ella would not be certain of exactly what happened next. She stood, bent over at the waist with her hands on her thighs just above her knees. Then the men surrounded her, lifting her, carrying her over to Blue’s bed. She was pushed onto her back. Dirk’s huge hands surrounded her ankles as he held them high. The crown of his erection pressed against her pink lips. Then Ella’s view of him was blocked by Ben as he straddled her shoulders with his thighs. His cock looked painfully rigid, and a pearl-like drop of fluid glistened at the slitted tip.

“Suck,” he commanded, grabbing Ella’s hair in his fist, forcing her head up.

Dirk’s thick cock forced her pussy to expand at the same instant Ben’s pulsing erection filled her mouth. There was nothing gentle about the coupling. For the men, tenderness had given way to unrefined, animal lust. Occasionally, Ben thrust too deeply into Ella’s mouth, and when this happened and the taut head of his cock threatened to drive down her throat, she sputtered, her body reacting negatively to the harsh treatment. But she made no effort to stop Ben, or even to slow him down.

The men—her men—were exactly as she wanted them. Ben and Dirk ravaged Ella, pulling her hair, plunging their cocks deeply into her body time and time again. She had stripped them of their *savoir-faire*, denied them their practiced ability to be casually aloof even in the most intimate of circumstances. Dirk and Ben had been reduced to their most primitive, primal selves, and their barbarous behavior made Ella’s pussy cream.

It wasn’t long before Ben made a sound in his throat. It was the strangled sound of a man trying to hold back his climax and failing. Ella knew he was going to come in her mouth, and for a single flashing moment, she started to panic. Though she had given fellatio before, she never allowed her husband to climax in her mouth, and Tim never seemed interested. Ben thrust deeply into her mouth one final time before his semen, thick and potent, raced through the shaft of his erection.

Ella swallowed without hesitation. She swallowed three times as, above her, Ben growled throughout his orgasm.

She still had Ben in her mouth, the salty tang of his cum faintly unpleasant, when Dirk withdrew from her tight vaginal embrace and released a torrent of semen. Ella felt it striking her, leaving warm lines of cream from her breasts to her pussy.

Looking up into Ben’s eyes confirmed to Ella that she had done the right thing. Shining in his eyes was pure gratitude and complete



sexual satisfaction. While the taste of his cum might have been a bit unpleasant, the reaction she received from Ben made it infinitely worthwhile.

Ben tumbled to the side, laughing softly in post-orgasmic good humor. Ella looked at Dirk, who sat on the bed holding her by the ankles, his cock resting warm and heavy on her abdomen. The incredible volume of his climactic release astonished Ella once again.

"Move aside, Dirk," Blue said in a tone tight with sexual tension. "I can't wait another second. This vixen's in my blood!"

Blue flipped Ella onto her stomach. An instant later, his naked thighs were on the outsides of hers, her body flat on the blankets, her breasts compressed beneath her with the Indian's weight upon her. A moment of panic gripped Ella when she felt Blue's cock, rigid as steel, slide between her thighs, rubbing against the still tingling lips of her pussy. She had never before gone anal, and until Blue's tongue caressed her ass, she had not even thought it a place where pleasure could be sought.

"You're not done," Blue whispered, his breath warm against Ella's ear as the crown of his erection pressed against the lips of her pussy, "until I say you're done. And that's not happening anytime soon."

As the hard cock forced the lips of her cunt to separate, Ella wondered if it was possible for a woman to get fucked to death. If it was possible, then surely this night would be her last on earth. And if death by fornication was a crime, then Dirk, Ben, and Blue would be the guiltiest of men.

Ella just knew she would die with a smile on her face.

Once properly aligned, Blue thrust deeply into Ella's tight pussy, his lean body directly above hers, his torso slapping noisily against the globes of her ass. To Ella's amazement, taking a cock into her body while flat on her stomach caused the friction against her clitoris to be entirely different somehow. Different, and wildly stimulating.

"Fuck...me," she said between jolting thrusts of Blue's pounding

torso. "Make me...come...again!"

Ella loved it all. Every sensation excited her. When Blue grabbed her wrists tightly and pinned them to the mattress above her head, the sense of bondage she experienced was thrilling. She loved the heat of Blue's labored breath against the side of her face. The feel of his chest against her back, lean and sweaty with the exertion of his passionate labor, made nectar flow from her pussy. The hard, driving thrusts of his hips pounding against her ass to plunge his cock deep into her pussy was the sweetest abuse she could imagine. Each time he filled her with his erection or lifted his hips to withdraw, the underside of his shaft slid against her clitoris, pushing her relentlessly closer to a wrenching climax.

"The next time I fuck you," Blue said through gritted teeth as he toiled above Ella, the slap of his sweaty flesh striking her buttocks echoing off the confines of the cabin, "I'm going to fuck in you in the ass!"

Ella screamed out then because there was only so much stimulation a woman could withstand, and Blue's comment promised a debauchery she found herself quite willing to embrace, so the fourth climax of the evening was her most powerful one. She was still screaming when Blue pushed himself off Ella, withdrew at the last stroke, and then released his passion on her back and buttocks.

Exhausted, Ella thanked Blue for having the good judgment to not climax inside her. When the men helped her to the bath tub, she was so overheated that it pleased her the water had cooled. With soap and a towel, the men once again bathed Ella with such gentleness that she almost fell asleep in the tub.

\* \* \* \*

"We shouldn't go far from the cabin," Blue said the next morning, looking up at a steel gray sky. Off to the north, clouds with an angry blue tint rolled in, low and ominous. "This one's going to be a

soaker.”

As he finished saddling Queenie for Ella, Dirk looked up at the clouds and shook his head. “No, you’re wrong. The wind’s out of the north, and it’s too strong. The clouds will blow over without releasing so much as a drop of rain.”

“We’ll get soaked to the skin.”

“We’ll stay as dry as unbuttered toast.”

Ella stepped forward, a smile on her lips. “You two bicker like an old married couple.”

Blue jerked a thumb in Dirk’s direction and replied, “Only when he’s too stubborn to realize that I’m right.”

Dirk chuckled. “He thinks just because he’s part Indian he’s got insight into the weather.”

“There’s no way I’m going to pick sides between you two.” Ella swung up into the saddle. “We’re going to check out the Manson acres this morning, right?”

Blue looked at Ella sitting confidently in the saddle, and delicious memories of feeling the rounded globes of her ass against his torso as he made love to her the first time came to mind. He instantly forced the thoughts away for two very good reasons. The first was that he had a job to do, and to do it in a professional manner required his undivided concentration. The second was that thinking about Ella would give him an erection, which wouldn’t be at all comfortable, trapped inside his buckskin trousers. It would also be highly embarrassing.

Ben said, “Come on, if we’re going to ride, let’s ride, but I’m thinking we should check out Old Man Johnson’s range. Maybe he’s seen something.”

Ella chuckled softly. “Do you men ever agree on anything?”

Blue said, “We agree on you.” He watched her cheeks instantly turn pink, and he knew his bold declaration embarrassed her but excited her as well. “There’s a lot of men who have married with less love in their heart than I have for you right now.”

“You know,” she replied, “for a man who says he’s not good with words, sometimes you sure know what to say.”

He wasn’t certain, but Blue thought her nipples had suddenly become just a little more noticeable through her chemise and blouse.

“And just in case you’re curious,” Dirk said, “I’d like to include my name on that list of men totally and completely infatuated with you.” The right side of his mouth quirked up in a grin. “And not just for tonight. I’m talking about tonight and tomorrow and the next day and next week and when the snow flies and then the spring sun melts the snow.” He put a hand over his heart, his grin boyish despite the sincerity Blue saw in his eyes. “I’m hoping you don’t mind.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” Ella replied, her gaze darting from one man to the next. “Quite the contrary, in fact.” Her lashes lowered. “I’m just not sure I’m worthy of so much”—she cleared her throat nervously—“attention.”

Blue asked, “If that means ‘loving’ in the emotional sense, then I know you’re worthy. If that means ‘loving’ in the physical sense, then I’ve got an elixir, passed down from one generation of Blackfeet to the next, that works as a magnificent lubricant.” His eyebrows danced briefly with amusement. “It’s slippery as the Devil and made for sin.”

“And so are you,” Ella replied, “on both counts.”

“Then my grandfather’s secret ingredients will be a blessing to us all, won’t they?”

Ella closed her eyes, and Blue smiled when he watched her literally shiver with anticipation.

Ben cleared his throat, drawing attention to himself. When all eyes were upon him, he said with a theatrical flourish, “Apparently, I’m not the only man to have fallen in love with Ella.”

Out of the side of his mouth, sotto voce, Blue said to Ella, “I knew that eventually he’d say something that was right.”

“But I am the first to fall in love!”

Ella looked once again from one man to the next, her gaze darting here and there before settling on Ben. “Oh, dear,” she whispered, “this

is going to get complicated, isn't it?"

"That," he replied, "is an understatement."

Blue sighed wearily and added, "Among my tribe, a good hunter can have many wives. It's never the other way around. Never."

"Yeah? Well, this isn't your tribe," Ben said.

Blue looked into Ben's eyes, then into Ella's. He sensed her apprehension and knew that his next comment carried with it great weight.

"This isn't my tribe," he said after several seconds. "But it could be my new family. And I wouldn't have it any other way."

\* \* \* \*

"Don't say it 'cause I don't want to hear it!"

Dirk's words were nearly drowned out by the nearly continuous thunder. If it wasn't the rolling thunderclaps that made the big Dutchman's words difficult, it was the sound of rain striking man, woman, and beast.

Though it had been raining less than ten minutes, there wasn't a single part of Ella's body that wasn't as wet as if she had been sitting in a bathtub. Even Queenie, who was usually the most amenable animal Ella had ever known, walked with a world-weary step, her ears flattened low to her head to keep the rain out.

"Blue, how much longer until we're back to your cabin?" Ella asked, her shoulders hunched against the lashing rain.

"If we move steady, an hour," Blue replied. His coal black hair was tight to his skull, and his buckskin shirt and trousers, though sun-bleached nearly white when dry, were now nearly black. "But if we push these horses in this rain, we're begging for trouble." As if to emphasize his point, Blue's pinto stumbled briefly when it stepped into a water-filled hollow. He cast Dirk a look of feigned fury then smiled at Ella and said, "Do you think my big, blond friend gets tired of being right all the time?"

“Shut up, Blue,” Dirk grumbled, his massive shoulders hunched beneath a sodden corduroy jacket.

Ella grinned and put a forefinger to her lips, indicating silence.

It pleased her enormously that these men, whom she thought nearly flawless and invincible, could be so thoroughly wrong about something of which they were so completely confident. Seeing their vulnerability was almost worth getting caught in a downpour miles from a warm, safe, dry cabin.

\* \* \* \*

“You go inside,” Ben said, taking Queenie’s reins. “I’ll take care of your mare.”

“I’ll get the fires going,” Ella replied quickly, grateful that her men would take care of Queenie for her. Still, she hesitated a moment, uneasy with not quite doing her fair share. She had servants her entire life, but Dirk, Ben, and Blue were most definitely not her, nor anyone else’s, servants.

“Go on now!” Ben prodded. He tilted his head to the side to drain water from the brim of his Stetson before entering the barn. “We’ll be there as soon as we see to the animals.”

When Ella stepped into Blue’s cabin, she felt a strange sense of homecoming that was different from anything she’d ever known. When her father was alive, and she’d return to the T-3 Ranch, she had known what it was like to feel a sense of gratitude and security upon returning home. That changed in recent years. Home now meant her mother was near, a fact which brought no sense of comfort. It also meant Timothy.

The thought of her fiancé was something Ella decided she must avoid at all costs. At least while she was with her men. Soon enough, she’d have to face the unpleasant reality of having a fiancé, but that time wasn’t this evening.

She hung her hat on the peg in the wall, and water dripped from it.

For a moment, Ella considered whether it was proper to be walking around Blue's cabin, dripping water all over the wooden floor he worked so hard to make sure was smooth and level, then decided her men weren't the kind to get too angry over a little thing like rainwater. Besides, what choice did she have?

The first thing she did was get a fire started in the stove. She was hungry, and she was certain her men were as well, so a hot meal was definitely in the plans.

Then she got a fire going in the fireplace and put the boiler in place above the flames. The men may not want a bath, but they would surely appreciate hot water to wash up with.

Lastly, she inspected Blue's blanket and towel supply. She set aside three thick blankets for the men, along with three dry towels, and found one final one for herself.

At the southernmost end of the cabin she found two hooks, one on each facing wall, and soon found the slender rope with loops on each end that could be fixed to the twin hooks. The only trouble with Blue's clothesline was that he never intended for it to be used for four people. When Ella stripped out of her blouse, camisole, riding breeches, underwear, and socks, her clothes took up nearly the entire length of the clothesline.

"Darn," she muttered to herself, looking at her dripping clothes and judging how much more line she'd need for the clothes of three men. She vigorously rubbed her thick, blonde hair with a towel. "How's a woman supposed to impress her men when it's impossible to create a romantic atmosphere?"

The door opened, and Blue asked, "Who were you talking to?"

"Just thinking aloud," Ella replied quickly, flashing the three rain-soaked and trail-weary men a smile. "Take off those wet clothes, and hang them up wherever you can. I've got the fires going, and it won't be long before I can serve up a hot stew to take the chill out of your bones."

Despite being fatigued and waterlogged, all three men looked at

Ella, clad only in a towel that appeared to be ready to fall from her voluptuous form at any second, with sensual interest that ran the gamut from famished to starving.

“Do as I say now,” Ella said, knowing she had better direct the men’s attention in other pursuits. To do anything otherwise was to tempt a sensual response from the men, and though she always considered herself a forceful and determined woman, she had come to understand that when these men turned their seductive charms upon her, she would succumb whether she intended to or not. “I’ve put out a towel for each of you to dry with, and then a blanket to wrap around you until the food’s ready and your clothes are dry.”

The teasing banter was endlessly amusing to Ella as she cooked. The men wrung out their sodden clothes, spreading the garments out before wrapping themselves up in blankets as the aroma of beef stew wafted through the small cabin. The damp towel around Ella’s curvaceous form was apparently too tempting a target, and the third time one of her men successfully stripped her naked, she abandoned the towel in favor of a blanket, which she wrapped around her body and tossed over her shoulder like a toga.

“I’ll need to make a run into town soon,” Blue said as he held up a whiskey bottle with less than a quarter of its contents left. “My larder’s getting slim.” He grinned at Dirk. “My tobacco papers got wet. How do you suppose that happened?”

“Let Dirk and I stock you a grubstake,” Ben said quickly. “It’s the least we can do.”

“And that way we won’t feel guilty about holing up here with you,” Dirk’s gaze turned toward Ella with intimate familiarity, “and Ella.”

Ella pulled on one of Blue’s leather gloves to lift the cast iron stew pot out of the fire. “Enough talk about this, that, and everything else,” she said as the men pulled their chairs closer to the table. “Time for you to tell me how my cooking tastes.”

“If it tastes as good as you,” Ben said, his dark eyes suddenly very



intense beneath black brows, “then I’m sure the three of us will never get enough of it.”

“You say that,” Ella replied, her heart accelerating rapidly as the ambience in the small cabin altered radically, “as though you’d like to eat me alive.”

“Precisely,” Ben replied.

“With tiny nibbles that’ll make you squirm,” Dirk added.

“In places on your body you’ve always ignored,” Blue concluded.

Ella knew it was going to be hours before she would get any sleep. For an instant she considered putting up token resistance, but that was essentially quite silly because she knew in her heart that she would give these men anything they desired, and they knew it, too.

## Chapter Eleven

Ben awoke with Ella's plump left breast filling his hand and the warmth of her naked back against his chest. It was a spectacular way to awaken, he immediately decided. The cheeks of her ass pressed loosely against his pelvis, with the backs of her thighs against the front of his. He felt warm and spectacularly, deliriously content. It was a state of mind nearly unprecedented for him.

With full consciousness came an almost instantaneous awakening of his penis. To his dismay, his erection started to grow, sliding between Ella's thighs. After a long night of lovemaking with Ella doing all she could to satisfy the lustful hungers of three virile men, it seemed to Ben that it would only be fair and fitting if he let her sleep.

Still, the urge to awaken the woman he loved with a rollicking good fuck as a way of greeting the new morning was decidedly tempting.

He blinked his eyes and pushed an elbow beneath him to get a better look around the cabin. He was on Blue's bed, with Ella sandwiched between himself and Dirk. All three were on their right side, facing the interior of the cabin. Blue was on a pile of buffalo robes just outside the bed.

A pang of guilt went through Ben. As a wealthy man, he'd never slept on a floor in his entire life. He wasn't entirely certain how many guest bedrooms there were in his house, but it had to be close to a dozen or more. No matter how many guests were spending the night, they'd have a big, comfortable mattress all to themselves. No need to share with anyone, unless sharing was preferred. Blue didn't have such luxury, and yet he gave up his own bed to accommodate his

friends.

Ben decided at that moment he would make sure Blue's cabin could accommodate more people comfortably, particularly since he strongly suspected *he* would be one of those frequent guests. The trick would be getting Blue to accept a gift without the independent-minded tracker feeling as though he was being given an unearned gift.

Easing away from Ella, careful to not disturb her, Ben got out of bed. He stepped into his underwear and pulled them up into position past a half-formed erection and buttoned the waistband. He paused a moment, standing at the foot of the bed to look down at Ella. With her sleep-mussed blonde hair spread over her face and pillow, she was more lovely than ever in Ben's eyes. And with her sleeping on her side, her breasts lay one atop the other, their voluptuous splendor half-concealed by a blanket that slipped down. Ben had always preferred slender women, but now that he discovered Ella's delights, slender women seemed unpleasantly boyish and unappealing.

With a smile on his lips, Ben turned away from the bed. If he stayed there looking at Ella much longer, his penis would grow to full stature, and once that happened, he knew his willpower would be insufficient to rein in his desires. He'd awaken Ella and make sweet morning love to her, but she needed to sleep, and no matter how much Ben wanted her, he wouldn't behave selfishly.

He went to the stove, found the kindling and a month-old newspaper and got a fire started. He looked at the water bucket and found it three-quarters filled, but decided on fresh water instead, and went out to the nearby stream to get it.

By the time Ben returned in the cabin, both Dirk and Blue were on their feet, shirtless but wearing trousers. Ella was alone in the narrow bed, the blanket now pulled up to her chin, sleeping peacefully. Ben assumed one of the men pulled up the blanket, probably to avoid temptation. It was motivation he could well understand.

"Morning," Ben said in a whisper. "Thought I'd get the coffee going."

"I've got plenty for breakfast," Blue said, "but how about I do the cooking instead of Ella?"

Dirk and Ben both nodded in enthusiastic approval. Opinions regarding Ella's cooking abilities were unanimous.

"The woman's got talent in a thousand different ways," Ben said, keeping his voice low. The last thing he would ever do is intentionally hurt Ella's feelings. "But cooking isn't one of them."

"I finished the plate of stew she made last night," Dirk said in a conspiratorial whisper, "but only out of respect for Ella."

The three men smirked. Having spent countless nights on the trail, they learned to fend for themselves, and cooking was an essential skill. But Ella, the pampered daughter of a rich man, hadn't out of necessity learned the art of making meals tasty.

Movement out of the corner of his eye drew Ben's attention. He turned to see Ella prop her upper body up with an elbow. The blanket fell away from her pale breasts, and Ben heard the sudden inhalation as all three men in the cabin reacted to their naked splendor. She combed fingers through her golden tresses, smoothing the silken strands away from her face, seemingly oblivious to how the move caused her breasts to tremble tautly.

"Did I oversleep?" Her eyes were only half-open.

"Not at all," Ben replied quickly. "Why not stay there and let us serve our lady breakfast in bed?"

"That sounds heavenly." Ella tossed the blanket aside and rose to her feet, making no effort to hide her nudity, a fact which caused a sudden tightening in Ben's throat and an instant swelling elsewhere on his body. He watched, nearly spellbound, as she plucked Dirk's shirt from the back of a chair and pulled it on. "Let me splash some water on my face and take care of a few things, and I'll be right back."

She walked to the cabin door, her demeanor casual despite her dishabille as she rolled up the sleeves several times. The shirt, massively oversized for Ella, covered her to mid-thigh. She

disappeared without another word as three grown men stared at her open-mouthed and mute.

Alone in the cabin with Dirk and Blue, Ben let out a long, slow, breathy sigh. He rolled his head on his shoulders in an effort to force himself to relax and sighed a second time.

He asked, "Anybody else in this room feel as love-struck as a schoolboy?"

"Still wet behind the ears," Dirk said.

Blue groaned. "Just as green as grass."

"What are we going to do about it?"

Always the most pragmatic of men, Blue made an ambiguous gesture with a hand and answered, "As long as we don't let her cook, I don't know that there is anything *to* do about it."

Dirk nodded in agreement. "You're right. We can't let her cook again."

"Other than that," Ben muttered, turning away, his gaze unfocused, "the woman's damned near perfect."

\* \* \* \*

Kneeling in the narrow, cool stream, Ella was not nearly as calm as she appeared when she left the cabin. When she woke and gazed at her men, they appeared delightfully sleep-mussed, and with all three shirtless, she had her choice of Dirk's thickly muscled and hairless chest, Ben's hairy and lean-muscled chest, and Blue's hairless, lean-muscled, and copper-hued physique. What more could any woman ask for? She had an embarrassment of masculine riches to choose from...but, was it greedy and immoral...

By comparison, Ella held the self-conscious fear that she wasn't giving her lovers an attractive enough woman to look at. The least she could do was present to them a clean body to look at. And touch, if they wanted. And taste, if that would give them pleasure.

A shiver went through Ella that had nothing to do with the cool

water she knelt in. The pleasures she experienced when her men put their lips and tongues to wickedly sensual use was such that multiple orgasms were the only possible end result. While all three were talented, Ben seemed particularly skilled in pleasuring with his lips and tongue.

She ran her hands over her body, ignoring the goose bumps and how her nipples were tight and erect from the cold. When she was certain she was as clean as she'd ever get without soap, she rose to her feet, walked out of the stream, then wiped off the water as best she could with just her hands.

When she put Dirk's shirt on again, her nipples, tightened from the cool water and not an erotic response to anything the men had done, made dents in the well-washed cotton. Ella buttoned the shirt starting at the bottom, stopping at a midway point between her breasts, allowing a portion the inner slopes to be visible.

As she made her way back to the cabin, her naked legs scissoring smoothly and the grass beneath her bare feet still wet with dew, Ella felt more free, more unconstrained by her world than ever before in her life. If she could choose, she would stay at Blue's cabin with her three men, and it wouldn't matter a bit that she didn't have her elegant wardrobe, her big feather mattress, her silk sheets, or her meals made to perfection by a chef who knew all her most favorite recipes....

But staying at Blue's wasn't something she could seriously consider, no matter how tempting the prospect.

Before she let melancholy get the better of her because of the reality of her life, Ella banished all such thoughts from her mind. As she reached the cabin door, Ella paused a moment to remind herself that right now she should accept pleasure wherever and however she could and not worry about the life she led at the T-3 Ranch. There would be time enough for worry when she returned to the tepid life she had known before her world had been turned upside-down by three amazing men.

The instant the door opened, the olfactory delights of bacon and

potatoes frying in a skillet made Ella's mouth water. She had not eaten much of the stew she'd put together the previous evening, having been quite displeased with the results of her culinary efforts, even though all three men said they enjoyed their meal.

Her eyes swept the room. Though she promised to be gone only a few minutes, it took her nearly twenty minutes before she was satisfied with her results. In the time she'd been gone, the men put shirts on, though none wore socks. They appeared comfortable with each other, and when they simultaneously turned to watch her enter, she saw the sensual warmth in their collective gazes.

"Breakfast smells delicious," she said, stepping closer, consciously aware of wearing precisely *nothing* beneath Dirk's blue cotton shirt. "Obviously, at least one of you is a much better cook than I am."

"Go back to bed," Dirk said. His sheepish grin let Ella know her stew hadn't been as well-received as she'd been led to believe. "Even out here, a lady should be served her breakfast in bed. After all, you are a princess."

"I'm not a princess."

Blue said, "You are to us."

"That's silly."

"Perhaps it's silly," Ben said, "but amuse us anyway. Besides, there's not really room for all four of us around Blue's kitchen table, especially with Dirk's legs going on halfway to tomorrow. The bacon and potatoes are already fried. We're just waiting to know how you want your eggs."

Ella picked up her brush and, as she walked over to the mattress on the floor, began brushing her tresses. As she pulled the bristles through her locks, smoothing out the tangles, she turned and looked at the men. They watched her through lidded eyes, their growing hunger for her almost palpable. She felt the movement of her breasts beneath the shirt and was aware of how, with her arms lifted, the bottom hem of Dirk's shirt rose up her naked legs, showing the men an indecent

amount of thighs that were smooth and tapering.

“I like my eggs over medium,” Ella answered finally. While the men watched her with almost unblinking interest, Ella’s empty stomach was suddenly of little concern to her. She smoothed her golden hair over her shoulders. “A lady could get awfully spoiled being pampered by you men.”

In a low voice, Dirk replied, “Get used to it, Ella. It’s going to happen a lot.”

“Constantly, if I’ve got anything to say about it,” Ben added.

The sexual tension was so prevalent Ella could almost taste it in the air. She stood at the edge of the low mattress, knowing all she had to do was say the word, and the three men would pounce upon her in the most erotic ways possible. But for reasons she wasn’t entirely certain of, she didn’t want that from them. At least not just yet.

“Over medium it is,” Blue said after several uncomfortable seconds of absolute silence. True to his ability to keep emotions private, there was only a trace of sexual tension on his voice. “Ben, why don’t you get the table set for us? Dirk, get down the bread and butter from the cupboard.”

It surprised Ella that when the eggs were cooked in the big cast iron pan—prepared by Blue to perfection, she noted with a touch of jealousy—the lavish helpings of potatoes, bacon, and eggs were put onto plates and then distributed as though there was nothing at all unusual about the morning. The sensual tension of only a few minutes earlier disappeared entirely, and as she ate in contented silence, the men sat at the kitchen table, eating heartily, discussing what they should do next to find out the identity of the cattle rustlers plaguing Ella and the T-3 Ranch. Occasionally, they would look over at her as she sat cross-legged on the bed, giving her a smile, keeping her a part of the conversation without actually pulling her into it.

When the men finished their breakfast, Ben rose from his chair and crossed the room over to Ella. He reached down for her plate, but she kept it from him.



"No you don't," she said firmly, holding her plate away from him as she got to her feet. "I may not be able to cook, but the least I can do is clean up the dishes." She turned her attention from Ben over to Dirk and Blue. "You're all too good to me. You pamper me all the time." She looked away from a moment, shifting her weight nervously from foot to foot as nascent insecurities came to the fore. She fingered the collar of the oversized shirt she wore. "I wish...I wish I had some fashionable clothes for you to see me in. Something pretty and ladylike." Her voice was quite soft. "I'll go on a diet and lose weight. You'll like that."

The men stared at Ella with varying degrees of disbelief registering in their expressions.

"She's talking nonsense," Blue said, ending the brief silence after Ella's unsolicited declaration.

"If I didn't know better, I'd think she'd been hitting the bottle already," Dirk added. He pulled the plate from her grasp and set it on the table, then reached for Ella. "Come here, you silly fool, and give me a kiss."

"I'm serious!" Ella said sharply. As Dirk reached for her, she danced nimbly out of reach. "I want to be slender and pretty for you!"

"I don't want you to change a thing." Dirk's hand snapped out, his long fingers wrapping around her wrist. Ella felt his strength, and when he pulled her closer, she resisted, but her libido reacted instinctively to his domineering masculinity. "Not one damn thing, do you hear me?"

"But—"

Powerful arms wound around Ella, forcing her body to press firmly against Dirk's chest as his mouth slanted down over hers to silence her protests. Her arms were pinned to her sides, her spine made to lean sharply backward as Dirk forced her to bend to his wishes. When his tongue tested her lips, Ella opened her mouth without resistance. As his tongue danced erotically with hers, Ella trembled. Dirk's right hand moved down her back to slide up beneath

the tails of his spare shirt, cupping her ass. Strong fingers buried into her bottom.

Seconds ticked by. Ella's eyes were closed, but she heard footsteps around her. Dirk raised the shirttails higher, filling his hands with her buns, pulling her in tightly against him so her abdomen pressed against the rapidly swelling bulge in his trousers.

And then, just as abruptly as he captured her in his arms and put an end to her protests with a commanding kiss, Dirk released Ella, setting her free so quickly she felt disoriented and a little dizzy.

She wasn't free for long. Hardly had Dirk pushed her to arm's length when Blue grabbed her by the shoulders, turned her sharply to face him, then sealed his lips over hers in a French kiss that was deep and soulful. Taller than Ella though much shorter than Dirk, when Blue squeezed Ella's ass and pulled her tightly against himself, she felt the erotic texture of his butter-soft buckskin trousers against her pelvis, against the tingling lips of her pussy. Fresh cream moistened her tight, tingling channel. The leather seemed to define the man's primitive wildness, and her clitoris tingled in response to it.

Ella was sucking on Blue's tongue when she felt Dirk's huge palms on her shoulders. He caressed her briefly then began pushing downward. She resisted at first but only for a moment before letting her knees bend.

## Chapter Twelve

Ben's emotions were in chaotic disarray as he watched Ella being forced to her knees between Blue and Dirk. There was a part of him—possessive of Ella, covetously wanting her exclusively and privately—that wanted to attack Dirk and Blue for having the temerity to turn their lustful attentions on the woman he loved. But another part of him, a slightly more rational part, took voyeuristic delight in watching the voluptuous blonde filling her hands with two powerful erections. Her eyes were glassy with lust as she glanced up at Dirk's face and then looked at the thick column of flesh that filled her hand.

"Suck," Dirk growled hoarsely as he twisted her long, golden hair around his fist. And when Ella opened her lips and took his cock deep in her mouth, he added breathily, "Oh, fuck!"

Ben was aware of his own racing heart and of the rapid swelling of his cock. Seeing Ella on her knees between his friends, her face in perfect profile as she pleasured Dirk, her cheeks hollow with suction, was the single most erotic thing he'd ever witnessed. For a full twenty seconds she fellated Dirk, and while she did, Blue rubbed the crest of his erection against her cheek and temple. She released Dirk from her mouth, turning her face submissively toward Blue. An instant later, another hard cock was filling her mouth.

Almost in a trance, Ben unbuttoned his shirt and removed it, then stripped out of his trousers. His cock was fiercely rigid, angling sharply upward, throbbing with tension. He stared at Ella, hardly blinking, narcotized by her lurid beauty as Blue's dusky erection slipped between her pouting lips. The soft moans that came from Ella

were a carnal music that rang in Ben's psyche. He wrapped the fingers of his right hand around his erection and stroked softly, slowly, feeling his onrushing excitement, frustratingly aware that despite his famed sexual discipline, when Ella was involved, he was helpless against the desires she inspired.

He stepped closer then sank slowly to his knees. When his face was level with Ella's, she turned her eyes toward him as she nibbled tenderly on Dirk's shaft. He winked at her, a quick, almost comical gesture intended to harness his cascading self-control. As Dirk pumped his hips, fucking his erection deep into her mouth, Ben unbuttoned her shirt to expose the swaying mounds of her breasts.

"Lovely," Ben whispered, speaking more to himself than anyone else as he opened the shirt completely, exposing the entire front of Ella's body. His eyes caressed her heavy breasts as they rolled from side to side during her energetically delivered fellatio. The supple curves of her hips and thighs put fire in his blood. The triangular patch of curly public hair and the pink lips of her pussy held him transfixed. "You can't change, Ella. In my eyes, you're perfection itself."

He was close now, his face mere inches from Ella's as she alternately sucked and nibbled on Dirk's pale cock and then Blue's dark one. With a hand that trembled slightly, he reached between her wide-spread thighs. When he touched the delicate lips of her cunt, her slick juices coated his middle finger. He slipped the finger smoothly between welcoming labia. As he pushed his finger into Ella until his palm pressed against her clitoris, she moaned loudly, leaning into Dirk to take his lusty flesh as deeply in her mouth as possible.

"What a woman. What a sexy, sexy woman," Ben said softly, fingering Ella with one hand as he stroked himself with the other. "She's so wet. She makes me so hard. Her juices are pooling in my palm." When a lock of honey blonde hair slipped over her eye, falling down near her mouth, Ben eased the hair away with his fingertip. "Watching her is more exciting than being with all the other women

in the world.”

Using the tip of his middle finger, sensing her cresting excitement, Ben rubbed Ella's clitoris with a firm, circular motion as she sucked on Blue. As he hoped, she began shivering as a climax gripped her, her voluptuous body quivering during the peaking sensuality. Her muffled, high-pitched moans of climactic release were the sweetest music Ben ever heard. Throughout her climax, she never took Blue out of her mouth.

“Bed,” Dirk growled, taking Ella by the upper arm and bodily hauling her to her feet. “I need you in bed!”

A thousand times in his life Ben had been a participant in episodes of wild, uninhibited sensuality, but this was the first time he was willingly being little more than an observer. He knew he would join eventually. But for now, watching Ella with Blue and Dirk stoked the lusty fire burning within him, heightening his anticipation for her to levels previously unimagined. He watched, completely naked and still kneeling on the floor, as Dirk carried Ella to the bed, then stretched out on his back. She immediately straddled his torso and reached down to guide his enflamed arousal to her honeyed slit.

“Oh, God!” Ella gasped as she lowered her rounded hips, impaling her sweet pussy on a thick cock moist with her own saliva.

Ben moved closer to the bed, his eyes wet and glittering as he watched the lips of Ella's pussy spreading wide to accept Dirk, gliding down the length of his shaft until her pubic hair mingled with his.

“Tight!” Dirk groaned, his fingers burying in the pale flesh of Ella's hips as he held her securely. “She's so fucking tight!”

What happened next brought Ben out of the opium-like mental fog that voyeurism reduced him to. He watched as Blue moved so he stood behind Ella. When he eased the shirt off her, she looked over her shoulder to smile up at him. But then he put a hand at the back of her neck and pushed downward, firmly and insistently, until her lush breasts were compressed against Dirk's naked chest.

Ben saw it then. The fear that sparkled like diamonds in Ella's eyes. She looked at Blue, her clear blue eyes wide and glassy with lust, but touched with fear as he positioned himself behind her.

"Oh my," she whispered as Blue guided the crown of his arousal to her tight, virgin passage. "Oh, no."

Ben's initial reaction was to stop Blue. A look in Ella's eyes told him she was afraid of being penetrated in such a fashion. There was something else in Ella's tone, in her eyes, that hinted at submissive acquiescence to dominate masculinity. Ben had seen that look before, and his lust flamed as he recognized its existence again.

Blue held her hips and pushed forward with constrained strength. When Ella accepted him, her mouth and eyes opened wide, but only a brief squeak of pain escaped her throat.

"Easy!" Ben said, unable to remain silent. "She's new to this."

"Oh, God!" Ella gasped. "He's so...."

Ella collapsed onto Dirk then, her arms folding beneath her when Blue's chest pressed against her back. From less than a yard away, Ben was at a perfect vantage point, and the visual stimulation was so intense it was nearly physical. As Blue's hard cock pressed deeper and deeper into Ella's ass, Ben watched as beads of perspiration instantly formed on her forehead and temples. Her eyes squeezed tightly shut, her mouth open as she breathed in rapid staccato. Ella's breasts appeared even more round as they pressed firmly against Dirk's chest while he labored beneath her, thrusting his hips upward to spear his cock into her.

It took perhaps thirty seconds and half a dozen revolutions of his lean hips before Blue buried all of his cock inside Ella's bottom. When his torso slapped wetly against the widespread cheeks of her ass, she opened her eyes, looked straight at Ben, and said between hard thrusts of two powerful men, "They...they're so...deep...so fucking...deep...in my...pussy and...ass." She licked her lips to moisten them, and concluded, "Come." And then, with less ambiguity, "Come closer."

He had held himself out of the lusty action as long as his willpower lasted. Ella's gasping, impassioned plea was Ben's breaking point. He moved forward quickly, combing his fingers into luxurious honey blonde hair, and plunged his cock between Ella's lips, driving into her mouth until the crown of his erection threatened to enter her throat. When Ella sputtered, nearly gagging, Ben withdrew, but only for an instant. His passions were an inferno that could not be cooled.

Ben watched his hard cock pistoning between Ella's lips. The sounds of feverish passion filled his ears, most of the sounds low and masculine, but others high-pitched and frantic. He heard perspiring flesh striking moist flesh, the sound mingling with the labored groans of four people furiously struggling for pleasure's ultimate release.

No previous climax had left Ben feeling so thoroughly drained. He plunged deeply into Ella's mouth, holding tightly onto her hair as his hot, thick seed raced through his shaft. Ben's groans of fulfillment mingled with Dirk's and Blue's as they flooded Ella with their passion.

\* \* \* \*

"You two have no idea what it is like to be outside of society and looking in," Blue stated firmly. "You've been rich your entire lives. You don't understand how hard it can be trying to live outside of what is self-righteously referred to as 'polite society.'"

"I don't give a rat's ass what anyone else thinks," Ben replied, leaning back in his chair at the kitchen table. "I'm in love with Ella. You're in love with Ella. Dirk's in love with Ella. If this polite society you're so all-fired concerned about doesn't like it, then I say to hell with them!" Ella watched him smile, but it wasn't a friendly expression. "And if anyone says anything nasty about Ella, I'll call the bastard out. Do either of you know anyone whose faster on the draw than me?"

“Stop it,” Ella said sharply. “I don’t want you men saying things like that. All this talk of gunfights scares me.” She shook her head and her blonde tresses swirled around her shoulders. “Our love, as unconventional as it is, shouldn’t be defined by guns and violence. It can’t be about that.”

Ella stepped forward and placed her hand lightly on Ben’s shoulder, affection shining in her eyes as she looked down at him, then at Blue and Dirk.

“I never dreamed that anything like this could happen. Certainly not to me,” she continued. All she wore was Ben’s oversized shirt, and when he slid his palm up the back of her naked thigh, she shivered. Her eyes drifted momentarily closed. “But no more loving. At least not for today.”

“Sore?” Blue asked, his voice very soft, the tone colored with guilt.

Ella nodded then nibbled on her lower lip for a moment as a faint blush colored her cheeks. “But I wouldn’t have changed anything about what we did.” Ben’s hand slipped up the back of her leg until his palm cupped her bottom. “And I can’t wait to do it all again.” A sigh escaped her lips. “Having all three of you inside me, all at the same time, made me feel things I’d never dreamed were possible. I felt it all. Your strength. Your desire for me.” Ben’s fingers tightened on her bottom, and Ella shook her head. “I felt your love for me. Love and lust. What can be better than that?” She turned so that Ben’s hand was no longer beneath the tails of the shirt, his fingers no longer caressing responsive flesh. “Start thinking, all of you. Figure out how we can live our lives together and not have my name be a byword for immoral behavior.”

“We’ll think of something,” Dirk said. “Ben and Blue won’t let you go, and I damned sure won’t. So we’ll think of something, and your reputation won’t be tarnished because of your love for us, or our love for you.”

Ella nibbled on her lower lip again, and a gentle, impish warmth



came into her blue eyes. "Perhaps what you need is some incentive."

"Incentive?" Dirk's brow furrowed. "Having your love all to ourselves is one hell of a lot of incentive."

As Ella sank slowly to her knees, she purred, "Perhaps. But just because I'm a little sore, that doesn't mean my lovers should be deprived." She opened Ben's trousers. He filled her hand, growing quickly. "Don't come," she whispered, leaning over his thigh to plant a light kiss on the crown of his arousal. "None of you get to come until you figure out how we're going to make this work." She licked the tip, and Ben almost instantly swelled to full stature. Taking his erection between her lips, she nodded briefly, sucking lightly. Ben let out a low groan of pleasure before she released him, then crawled on her hands and knees over to Dirk. "Like I said, what you need is incentive. And you can think of me," she took Dirk's big hand and licked along the middle fingers, "as inspiration."

## Chapter Thirteen

“As much as I hate to say it, I’d better get back home soon,” Ella said as she poured coffee into blue, enameled tin cups.

“Will there be trouble?”

Ben’s question had been casually delivered, but Ella sensed that all three men watched her very carefully, each wanting to protect her from a loathsome fiancé who somehow foisted his way into a decision-making position at the T-3 Ranch.

“There’s always trouble but nothing that I can’t handle.” Ella sat on Blue’s lap and then took a sip of coffee. “Tim will complain for a while, so I’ll give him a couple hundred in spending money, and he’ll ride off into town. As for my mother, she’ll lecture me about my responsibilities to her, tell me I’ve got to set a date for the wedding, and complain that she doesn’t have enough spending money. She’ll be more expensive than Tim, and she’ll complain a lot more. Frankly, I wish I could pay her enough so that I wouldn’t have to listen to anything she says.”

“I thought we had agreed that you were with us now.” Dirk’s statement came out cold and defiant as he looked at Ella, and there was a distinct proprietary emphasis on the word *us*. “What the hell does it matter what Tim or your mother thinks or says?”

Ella closed her eyes for a moment, summoning willpower. She understood that, as extraordinarily wealthy men, Ben and Dirk couldn’t possibly understand the restrictions society placed upon women—even women of wealth and social standing. Just the same, to hear their sense of possession and protectiveness of her filled her heart with love.

"We discussed this before," she said after several seconds of silence. "We'll be together. All of us. Together. I don't know how." She took a deep breath. "I only know that it will be. But we can't flaunt society so completely that we get ostracized." As a woman, she understood the stratification of society so much better than men. And it was wealthy men who least understood the disadvantages of living outside of society's acceptable standards. "We've just got to be intelligent and clear-headed."

"She's right," Blue said, his tone sharp, almost eliminating any possibility of dissention. "You men have been borne into privilege, which means you haven't any real understanding of privilege. It's always been so much a part of you that you can't see it. Ella has wealth, and that gives her luxury and esteem, but if we do anything that makes her despised by society, we'll have harmed her more than any of us can imagine." He combed fingers through his long, silken hair. "I can't imagine that any of us wants to harm Ella by our love for her."

"Amen to that, brother," Dirk said in a voice hardly more than a whisper, but filled with sincerity.

"So then it's up to us," Ben said, "to figure out how to make this work. There's got to be a way where the four of us can be one. Some way to keep our love secret from the bluebloods from Boston who come here to buy all our land. If they find out about us, it'll be a public scandal." He closed his eyes briefly. "And the first bastard who says there's something sinful about my love to Ella is going to get called out. I'm not the fastest man on the draw, but I'm faster than most, and I'll shoot the first man who slanders my love for Ella."

Blue stepped forward, raising his hands. "Wait! Just wait a second. What we're talking about needs clear heads, rational thinking." He looked directly at Ben. "And clear thinking doesn't include gunfights and duels!"

Ella said softly, "I've fallen in love with three men. Would you please tell me what's rational about that?"

It was Dirk, the largest and most powerful of the men, and the least patient, who stepped forward. "Enough! Later on we'll figure out how to keep our love alive and a secret. That's for later. For now, there are bastards out there stealing our lady's cattle, and I think we ought to do something about it." He sighed and rubbed a huge palm against his face. "Besides, it's a damned site easier thinking about cattle rustlers than figuring out how to be just one of three men in love with the same woman."

Seconds ticked by, and the men exchanged glances. At first they were deadly series glances, but then they all smiled. Ella stood back, observing them, aware that they had just—each in their own way—given a vow of love.

There was a part of Ella that wanted to shout out of her joy, of her happiness. But there was another part of her that understood these men mustn't be pushed, mustn't be rushed. Whatever decision they came to individually and collectively, they had to believe that the decision was theirs, and not one that had been foisted upon them. Ben, Dirk, and Blue were men who faced challenges head-on. Ella understood, instinctively, that if she was to have a life with these men, then she needed to let them make their own decisions.

But, oh, dear God, how she wanted them all. And not just today and tomorrow and the day after that, but for a lifetime....

Ben broke the silence with, "We'll ride into town and check out the railroad station. Somebody there knows what the hell is going on, and we're going to find out who it is."

For a moment, Ella closed her eyes. There was a lethal finality to Ben's tone that frightened her. These men were undoubtedly compassionate with her, but she couldn't imagine anything more frightening than getting on their bad side. While as individuals they were dangerous men that intelligent men didn't rile, collectively, they were a deadly force only the most foolish would challenge.

"When will I see you again?" Ella sent the question to all three men. It surprised her how much she wanted their companionship.

Their attraction to her started out almost entirely sexual, but it evolved rapidly into something much more than physical.

“As soon as we know something, we’ll let you in on it.” Ben looked at Blue. “How about we stay here for the next couple days? That way we’re all close together should the rustlers strike again.”

“Good,” Ella said. “I like having all three of you together.”

The men turned toward Ella, each with an instantaneously ravenous look in his eyes. Ella hadn’t meant the statement to be flirtatious. She simply liked their companionship collectively, but she couldn’t ignore the flare of desire that suddenly flamed into life within her.

## Chapter Fourteen

“I d-don’t want to die.”

The station manager was on his knees with his fingers laced together behind his neck. Blue stood behind him with a pistol pointed at his head. Ben and Dirk were in front of him with expressions that suggested death might be the only painless option the manager had.

“Let’s hear the whole story,” Ben said quietly. “Don’t leave anything out. Think of this as the best chance you’ve got to talk yourself out of getting killed.”

“It was Tim Cutler’s idea right from the start. He decides how many head we cut out of which of the herds. He’s got men from the T-3 and the GWR Ranch he sells the cattle to,” the station manager said in a quavering voice. “In Kansas City, they’re getting thirty dollars a head. Tim sells them to the men for twenty. They tell me how many empty cars to add to the train, and I see the cattle cars are added. We make a stop wherever they’ve got the stolen cattle, and they pack them in. Me and the boys get five dollars a head. When the cattle get to Kansas City, they’re sold for twenty-five dollars.”

“Nice. Damned nice,” Ben said, scratching his chin. “The stockyards in Kansas City save five dollars a head. Everybody makes money all down the line.” He pulled his pistol and very slowly thumbed the hammer back. “Now tell me which of my ranch hands are in on this.”

“Peg Leg Sanders, Wally Nichols, Bob Turnman, and some guy named Abe,” the station manager said quickly, staring down the black muzzle of Ben’s pistol.

“When is the next rustling?”

“Night after tomorrow.”

“Say a word about this to anyone, and we’ll come back,” Ben said.

\* \* \* \*

Sitting in her favorite rocker, Ella took a sip of tea, crossed her legs at the knee, and looked out her bedroom window at the T-3 Ranch. She had been gone less than a fortnight, but in those few days, it seemed as though everything in her life had changed.

Ella wondered if she had somehow subconsciously known what would happen if she surreptitiously escaped the T-3 Ranch and followed Ben and Dirk on their quest to discover the identities of the cattle rustlers. Had she somehow known that following them would be the first step, like a domino being tipped to start a chain reaction of falling dominoes, in simultaneously falling in love with three men?

Three men. Not one. Not two. Three men. Each unique.

She closed her eyes, remembering the last passion she shared with the men. When she first took Blue’s hard erection into her virgin bottom, it initially felt like she’d been skewered with a red-hot branding iron. The pain lanced through her, but she didn’t ask Blue to stop. She could have, and she suspected he would have relented to her wishes. But she hadn’t said a word because she knew she wanted him right where he was. Even if he hurt her, she wanted the pain he provided.

Instead of begging Blue to stop, she asked for Ben to come closer.

A shiver went through Ella. The awareness that she had taken three men into her body at the same time was not one that sat easily with her. But she *had* done exactly that, and the sensation of having a cock in her pussy and another in her ass, each pumping and driving, filling her completely, forced a climax upon her that made her feel as though her heart would explode right out of her chest.

Another shiver went through Ella, but this one wasn’t from a

pleasant memory. While she had been getting gloriously triple-penetrated, all attention was naturally focused on her. Dirk, on his back, had been pinned to the mattress, despite his great strength, beneath the combined weight of Ella and Blue. When he climaxed, releasing his sperm, he hadn't disengaged from Ella.

What would happen if she had gotten pregnant?

A smile slowly curled the outer edges of Ella's mouth. She discovered, to her delight, that the prospect of having a child with *her men* wasn't as horrifying as she initially thought.

It came to her then as an epiphany. She did not know how she would do it, but she would create a life with Ben and Dirk and Blue. Much of that life would, out of necessity, have to remain a secret from society. But she would make a life with her men somehow.

With her mind made up, Ella tugged the bell pull for her maid. More tea, and perhaps a celebratory cookie or two, was in order.

\* \* \* \*

"We're going to have to kill them," Tim Cutler said, his hands on his hips, his hat pushed back on his head. "That goddamned coward at the station told them everything. He says he didn't, but I know the jackass, and if he got squeezed by men like Ben and Dirk and that goddamned half-breed, Blue, he'd spill his guts in a heartbeat."

Peg Leg Sanders took a drink of whiskey before passing the bottle, which Tim provided, over to Bob Turnman. "You figure killin' 'em is better than just riding out while we can?"

"You don't know the kind of men we're dealing with here." Tim inhaled slowly, forcing himself to remain calm. It was never an easy thing for him to do, especially not when he was dealing with inferiors. "Ben Stenacci and Dirk van Gild take these things really damned personal. They won't give up until every last one of you gets his neck stretched. And as for just riding away, that half-breed with them is the best tracker folks around here have ever seen. Once he's on your trail,



it's only a matter of time before you're caught."

Peg Leg scratched his beard-stubbed chin. Trying to think gave him a distinctly pained expression.

"I say, first things first, we get my men from the T-3 that have been in on this, and then we ride out to Blue's place over in the valley. Since they're not at the GWR Ranch or Dirk's Circle Three Ranch, they've got to be staying at Blue's. There's what—nine of us? That's nine against three, and you fellas are a damned site better at killing than you are at being cattlemen, so I'm liking those odds." Tim smiled, and for the first time since he found out about the station manager being visited by Ben, Dirk, and Blue, he felt a surge of confidence. Until a minister officiated his marriage to Ella, he had to choose his actions with extreme caution. "We'll all follow the Rule of the Three S's, and everything will be fine. Just fine."

"What's that rule?" Peg Leg asked.

"Shoot, shovel, and shut up."

Peg Leg smiled.

\* \* \* \*

"I really can't believe that you'd ride off like that when there are bad men rustling our cattle," Rosamond said, her tone shrill. "You ought to consider yourself a lucky woman that Tim doesn't just find himself another woman. A woman who appreciates him! He doesn't have to do all this work for the T-3, you know."

While writing a check for two hundred dollars, Ella made a face. "I'm not entirely certain Tim's in great demand," she said, keeping her tone indifferent. "Besides, what would he do for money if he ends his engagement to me? I'm his meal ticket, Mother. Yours, too, for that matter."

"I don't like your tone, Ella. I don't like it at all."

Ella carefully ripped the check out of the ledger. She placed the bank draft on her desk rather than hand it directly to her mother.

When she at last lifted her gaze, she didn't feel so much as a flicker of respect for her mother.

"Will that be all?" she asked dismissively.

It pleased Ella to watch Rosamond's jaw drop open. The passionate days and nights she spent with *her men* (it gave her enormous pleasure to think of them as such) not only broadened her sense of what it meant to be feminine and gave her more sexual satisfaction than she dreamed was possible, they elevated her confidence in every aspect of her life to unprecedented levels.

She simply wasn't afraid of the bitter, old woman anymore. And with each tick of the clock, the promise she made to her father to follow her mother's wishes seemed more like a promise her beloved father *wouldn't* want her to keep. After all, hadn't he always been devoted to her happiness? And hadn't Ben, Dirk, and Blue brought her exquisite happiness and so much more?

Rosamond rose to her feet, her face suddenly pale. There was hatred in her eyes. "I don't like your tone." She picked up the check. "And I don't like your attitude."

Leaning back in her chair, Ella remained seated. "I guess it's fortunate for me, then, that I don't give a damn what you do or don't like."

Rosamond strode out of Ella's office. Ella remained in her chair, a smile touching her lips. It was the finest victory she had over her most vitriolic nemesis. She had little time to savor victory, however, because hardly had Rosamond left her office before Tim walked in.

"Just where the hell have you been?" he demanded.

"I had business in Fargo." It surprised Ella how easy it was now to lie to her fiancé. She shrugged indifferently. "It was something that just couldn't be avoided, and it took a lot more time than I anticipated." She looked him in the eyes. "And I do wish you wouldn't just come barging into my office like this. I didn't even know you were in the house."

Tim cocked his head to the side, scrutinizing her a bit more

carefully. Ella could tell he didn't like her lack of deference. She *liked* the fact that he didn't like it.

"You're going to be my wife. You should have cleared it with me before you left."

While it was true that for quite some time Ella "cleared" all of her decisions with Tim before acting on them, those times were now all behind her. Since the inclusion of Dirk, Blue, and Ben into her life, virtually *everything* changed. For the better.

Tim sat in the chair facing her desk. Ella would have preferred that he remain standing while she sat, but she decided against telling him so. In that moment, Ella realized she did not hate her fiancé. She pitied him a little, but she neither loved him nor hated him. She tolerated him in the manner of an adult accepting a young child's inability to understand life's complexities.

"I need a check, and I need it now."

Ella smiled. "No, you *want* a bank draft, and you *want* it now. There's a difference between wants and needs."

She saw a muscle flicker in Tim's jaw. "Don't try to rile me, Ella. You might just succeed, and then maybe you wouldn't be so pleased with yourself."

Ella didn't want fear to show in her eyes, but she knew it did because a moment later, Tim smiled. He was the kind of man who liked seeing fear in women.

"Sure, you remember the time I slapped you, don't you?" he asked, his face granite-hard. "That's a good thing to remember. You're my fiancée, and I love you, but as soon as we're married, there will be some changes made around here. I've been busting my ass running the T-3 Ranch, and I deserve something for that. I deserve a *big* something for that."

In a voice not nearly as authoritative as she had hoped, Ella said, "You promised me you'd never do that again. We...we made a promise to never even talk about it again."

He had once slapped her on the side of the head so hard that she

nearly dropped to her knees, rendered only half-conscious with a ringing in her ears. She didn't carry any mark from the assault other than the ones she carried on her soul. She told her mother she was going to call off the engagement, but Rosamond said that she had been disrespectful and that any man worthy of running a ranch the size of the T-3 would have acted similarly.

Ella looked at Tim, and as she looked at him, she could feel her mother's presence as though she stood behind him, giving him guidance.

"How much do you want?" The words came out more woodenly than Ella would have liked. She wanted to be strong, but she wilted under Tim's glare too many times in the past to make a clean break from bad habits.

"Five hundred."

"Five hundred! I wrote a bank draft for you before I left! What did you do with it all?"

"Just write the fucking check."

Tim rose to his feet, and though Ella at first inhaled sharply in fear, she very quickly had to suppress a smile. At five-foot-seven, he wasn't nearly as big as any of *her men*. Either Ben or Blue could whip Tim without breaking into a sweat. And with Dirk, her big, burly Dutch lover, it wouldn't even be a contest.

Ella picked up her pen and dipped the solid gold nib into the inkwell. How much longer did she have to finance her fiancé's drinking and gambling? How many more dollars of her hard labor would he spend with careless indifference? It would be so easy to simply end the engagement, but that would mean putting herself in direct opposition to her mother's wishes. Whether she liked it or not, Rosamond was a formidable enemy.

"Five hundred," Tim repeated as Ella's pen hovered above the check ledger. "There's some things I've got to do, so I want you to stay at the ranch until I get back."

Ella started writing the check. "But I may need to go somewhere."

She flinched, and the pen jumped in her hand when he shouted, "Stay at the fucking ranch, Ella!" And then, in a conversational tone, "Stay here, please. I think I'm finally getting a handle on our problem with the cattle rustlers."

Tearing the bank draft from the ledger, Ella handed it to Tim. When she looked into his eyes, she saw something hidden in them that she couldn't read. Something, she realized, was scaring him. Something changed for Tim since she rode away and spent blissful days with her lovers.

"Things are going to change around here," Tim said as he folded the check and put it into his breast pocket. "You've been riding pretty high in the saddle, Ella, and I've been dumb enough to let you do just that. But that's all going to change. I've got to take care of something, but when I come back, we're going to have a talk. It'll be the kind of talk where I do all the talking, and you do all the listening. And then I'm getting a preacher and you're going to be my wife. That's the way your mother wants it, and that's the way I want it, so that's the way it's going to be."

Once Tim left her office, Ella began to shiver. She underestimated Tim, dismissing him as insignificant in her life. That was a mistake. He was a vicious coward. There was no doubting that. But cowardly men were sometimes the most deadly, and that was something Ella was just now beginning to fully understand.

## Chapter Fifteen

Rosamond had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. She experienced this feeling only once before, and that was when, during the reading of her husband's will, she learned that the miserable, ungrateful bastard she married left everything—every last horse, cow, and red cent in his bank account—to his daughter. All the money Rosamond believed would finally be under her control was, in fact, controlled by Ella. Rosamond's resentment of her daughter was a percolating poison in her system that wouldn't end until she had complete control of the T-3 Ranch fortune.

But that was going to change. And it was going to change tonight. It had to change tonight because Tim told her just moments earlier that the railroad station manager, when confronted by Ben and Dirk, confessed to cattle rustling. That meant it was only a matter of time before Ella learned which people were directly involved in the cattle rustling operation. Inevitably, the daughter would learn of her mother's duplicity. And, undoubtedly, Ella would also learn of Rosamond's affair with Tim.

Rosamond looked at the double-barreled derringer in her hand. The weapon seemed very small, but she had no doubts as to its ability to inflict a lethal injury. Years earlier, when Rosamond had been getting quite tired of waiting for her husband's wealth, she had considered an "accident" to be the proper way to simultaneously attain wealth and become a widow. To practice, Rosamond had taken the derringer, pointed it at a watermelon from a distance of less than ten inches, and pulled the trigger. The weapon's roar and recoil frightened her, but seeing the watermelon literally disintegrate made

Rosamond cackle with maniacal glee.

She lost her nerve back then. Her husband, Arno, was a tough, old cowboy who started with little and still managed to create one of the largest cattle and horse ranches east of the Rockies. He battled Indians and poachers, rustlers and mountain lions, and he'd come out victorious every time. Rosamond was afraid that if she should try to kill Arno, even if it was to sneak up on him from behind, he would sense it somehow. That was just the kind of man he was.

But Ella wasn't as deadly as her father. She didn't have his sixth sense for danger. Ella had grown up with great wealth, and though her father taught her many things, Rosamond knew that he had always insulated her from the violent days when he was creating his empire.

All Rosamond had to do was come up behind Ella, aim fast, and squeeze the trigger. The bullet would do to Ella's head what it had done to the watermelon. Rosamond wondered whether she could actually shoot her own daughter in the head, but hardly had the question been asked when she nodded, knowing she wouldn't lose so much as a minute's sleep for murdering the ungrateful child.

Rosamond was convinced there wasn't a jury in the world that would convict her of murder. She'd say it was an accident, a terrible, tragic accident. After all, no mother would murder her own daughter. Right?

Rosamond imagined herself in court, her eyes red-rimmed from crying, turning to speak directly to the jury as she explained how Ella had always been the light of her mother's eye. And Rosamond was a respected member of her church who gave generously every Sunday, even if she did as often as not nod off during the sermon.

A smile touched her thin-lipped mouth. Tonight, Ella would have an "accident," and then Rosamond would have her fortune.

\* \* \* \*

From her office, Ella heard Tim's vulgarities as he shouted orders

to some of the cowhands. He wanted a horse saddled immediately and promised to take a whip to anyone who slowed him down. It wasn't long afterward that she heard the pounding of hooves as he and several men rode away from the T-3 at full gallop.

For twenty minutes, Ella sat in her office thinking. She had seen anger in Tim's eyes before. Many times, in fact. But this time when he looked at her, there was something *more* than just anger. Was it fear she saw? What changed? She'd written him a bank draft for money to spend foolishly on good whiskey and bad cards, but that didn't seem to put an end to his foul mood. Something was gnawing at him, eating at him, and she couldn't figure out what it was.

He said he had to do something. Ella smiled as she recalled his words. There was little doubt in her mind that whatever the "something" was, it involved whiskey, laudanum, cards, or prostitutes. Perhaps all four.

But this didn't sit quite right with her, either. Since her engagement, she'd been writing him bank drafts, and he'd been spending that money at the card tables and saloons in the territory. In all that time, he'd never shown the desperation and fury she just witnessed.

She didn't know why Tim had ridden away from the ranch at such a furious pace, but that wasn't what mystified Ella the most. In all their time together, she'd never known him to socialize with any of the ranch hands. In fact, he made no effort to hide his condescension of the hardworking men who kept the T-3 operating at a healthy profit.

So why would Tim want hired hands with him now? He certainly wasn't intending to socialize with those men. Besides, not even Tim rode to saloons at a full gallop.

So where was he going? And why?

Ella was out of her chair a moment later, her feet moving without conscious thought as she considered the possible motives for the behavior of a man who, at least theoretically, would one day be her



husband.

By the time she reached her office door, she was in full stride. She opened the door and nearly collided with Rosamond.

"Ella!" Rosamond snapped.

Ella sidestepped her and started down the long hallway, now nearly jogging.

"Ella, I'd like to speak to you! Now, if you don't mind! And privately!"

The shrill quality of Rosamond's tone carried with it another emotion that Ella couldn't even guess at. "Not now, Mother!" she said, raising her voice and not giving a damn as she rounded the corner and hurried down the stairway to the ground floor.

From far behind her daughter, Rosamond called out, "I said now, Ella! You mind your mother! Do you hear me?"

Ella found a young stable boy tending to a calf whose mother died while birthing. Though she couldn't remember his name, she knew he was the son or nephew of one of her more experienced workers.

"Excuse me, did you see Tim before he rode off?" Ella asked, her stride still too fast for her to appear casual.

The boy, freckle-faced and obviously intimidated by being asked a direct question by the mistress of the ranch, cleared his throat several times before answering, "Yes, ma'am, I did see Mr. Cutler before he left. He...um...."

Though Ella did not like browbeating her employees, she was in no mood to gambol about, waiting for answers. "Who did he go with? Where is he going?" Her tone was sharp-edged.

The boy's face paled. "He...he went with some of the older guys. He went thataway," he said, pointing southwest. "Mr. Cutler and the others packed Winchesters with 'em with extra ammunition."

The boy pointed in the direction of Blue's cabin. The cabin was a long way away, but the direction was dead-on.

Why would Tim ride with cowhands straight in the direction of Blue's cabin, armed to the teeth with Winchesters and carrying extra

ammunition?

It was probably nothing, Ella told herself. Merely a coincidence. Nothing to concern herself with. Unless, just maybe....

“Saddle up Queenie!” Ella said, nearly shouting. “And I want two of the fastest tagalongs we’ve got!” She looked straight into the frightened boy’s eyes. “I want a Winchester on each mount and extra ammunition in each saddlebag. Get whoever you need to help you, but I want that done, and I want it done now!”

The boy ran off to the stables. The mistress of the T-3 Ranch had never before shouted at him like that. Never.

\* \* \* \*

Rosamond stood in the foyer, staring at the closed door her daughter just ran through. The small derringer was hidden in her hand. Hidden and useless. All she needed was for Ella to just walk into the library so they could be alone with the door closed, and the murderous deed could be done. But as she had so often in her life, Ella disappointed her mother by being headstrong and refusing to do as she had been told.

“Ma’am, can I do something for you?” a kitchen maid asked.

“Sure. You can go fuck yourself and die. Can you do that for me?”

\* \* \* \*

She’d never pushed Queenie so hard. The game Appaloosa’s long legs stretched out, eating up the prairie beneath it. A mile. Two miles. Three miles went by before Ella nudged back on the reins, slowing the mare to a rolling trot.

Ella looked back at the two tagalong chestnut geldings. Like Queenie, they were game animals and willing to run, but Ella could tell they didn’t have the heart of her favorite mare. Queenie was one

of those rare but magnificent animals that was born to run far and fast.

Without stopping, Ella pulled the nearest chestnut alongside Queenie. She prepared the gelding by talking to him as they trotted side-by-side for fifty yards. Then, slipping her feet out of the stirrups, she hopped up onto her knees on Queenie's saddle, waited several strides until she was certain of her balance, then made the short leap onto the gelding's saddle.

"Good boy!" Ella said as the gelding adjusted to her weight in just a single stride.

Ella transferred Queenie's reins to her left hand. She was making good time. Faster, she was certain, than Tim and his men, because they hadn't taken with them tagalong mounts. Maybe she could catch up to them before they reached Blue's cabin.

Beneath her right thigh, in a saddle scabbard, Ella felt the Winchester she demanded. With a pistol, she was as likely to shoot herself as her target, but her father taught her well how to use a carbine, and she was deadly accurate within one hundred fifty yards.

\* \* \* \*

It was daydreaming about Ella that saved Ben's life. He didn't know it at the time, but if he hadn't bent over to pluck a four-leaf clover from the ground, intending on telling her that since they had begun sharing passion, he believed himself to be a blessed, lucky man, and the rare clover was symbolic proof of that. But hardly had Ben begun to stoop when he heard the sharp crack of a nearby Winchester and the sickening *thunk!* of a heavy, lead bullet slamming into the trunk of a pine tree. A moment earlier, Ben's head had been in line with the path of the bullet.

The gap between awareness and reaction with Ben took milliseconds. "Ambush!" he shouted, bent at the waist, running a zigzagging pattern through the pine trees north of Blue's cabin. "Ambush! Ambush!"

A volley of bullets whizzed around him, splintering limbs, breaking off chunks of bark. Though the thick brush provided ample opportunity to approach the cabin without being seen, all those branches made getting an unobstructed shot from even a close distance very difficult. Branches snapped off the trunks of trees, and bullets grazed thick limbs before whining off into the valley below. The volley of gunfire produced nary a single drop of blood.

Just when Ben was certain there were only four shooters, and they were all behind him, a gunman stepped out from behind a tree, in front and to the right where the tree line met the valley. Ben saw him, and his stride faltered for just a second. It was Tim Murphy aiming his Winchester, and it shocked Ben because he'd never known the man to ever to do his own dirty work.

The bullet slipped between his left arm and his side, but not without gouging out a furrow of skin and meat from Ben's ribs. The wound felt like molten steel had been poured along his ribs. Cursing his bad luck yet aware that an inch in another direction and he would be on the ground with a serious bullet wound to internal organs, he was inside the cabin an instant later.

Blue had been bathing when he'd first heard Ben shout "Ambush!" so he had water dripping down his bronzed, lean body as he stood at one of the two north-facing, fortified windows, Winchester in hand and fresh box of ammunition at his feet. Dirk was at the west wall, fully dressed with a Winchester to his shoulder and a look in his eyes that said he *really* wanted to put an end to this fighting quickly, and all by himself.

"Don't be hotheaded now," Ben said, sliding past his lifelong friend.

"Screw that."

Ben smiled. "Well, try to save at least one or two of them for the rest of us."

There was silence outside, but Ben doubted the attackers retreated. "Blue, this is your country. You know it best. What's the smart way

to play the hand we've been dealt?"

"First off, they made a big mistake. They warned us of their presence, but they're still high up in the mountains. My guess is that they sent someone down ahead of the rest, someone to scout a trail through the trees. Ben surprised him somehow, and rather than just walking away from an easy shot, the fool just had to take it. That tells me we've all got a price on our head. The fella couldn't turn down easy money. How I'm sure they wanted it to go was to get up close on us before any shots were fired. Probably wanted to burn us out, then shoot us when we can't take the heat or the smoke. Can't do that now without showing themselves."

Ben removed his neckerchief, folded it neatly in a square, and then pressed it to the wound on his side. It was bleeding profusely because there was a four-inch, ragged gash along his ribs, but despite the blood loss and the burning pain, the truth was that he could have been hit a lot worse. And aside from an unpleasant scar, he'd live a long life.

Later on, naked in bed, with Ella at his side, he'd have a thrilling story to tell of how he had acquired his "war wound."

"How many do you think there are?" Dirk asked Ben.

"At least six, from what I could see. And Tim Cutler's with them. He's the one who winged me."

"What do you know about that?" Dirk chuckled, his mouth twisted up on one side in a snarl. "We've got 'em pretty shaken if even that cowardly bastard's scared enough to pick up a rifle."

Outside, it was Ella's fiancé who began shouting demands, and Ben gritted his teeth. "All right, you boys in there, come on out with your hands up! We've got you surrounded!"

Blue muttered a very foul word before replying, "Why should we come out?"

"Because you're all wanted men! Wanted for cattle rustling!"

Despite the seriousness of the situation, all three men in the small cabin laughed softly.

"I count three of them over here," Blue said quietly, peering through the partially opened, fortified window.

"I count three over here," Dirk said.

Ben said, "I've got three over here, not counting Tim. That makes ten in all."

"Ten against three. Doesn't seem like a fair fight, does it?" Ben asked Dirk with a broad smile.

"Not fair at all. Maybe we should let them round up half a dozen more men just to even up the odds."

Bravado vanished when Tim shouted "Now!" and all nine of his gunmen began unloading their weapons on the small cabin. The .44 caliber bullets punched through the window reinforcements where the wood was only a single layer deep. A bullet took the hat off Dirk's head, nearly parting his hair. Another bullet ricocheted off the shoulder stock of Ben's rifle, drastically limiting the weapon's usefulness.

"I'm guessing they're not really looking for us to surrender," Ben said, searching for the bravado that had come so easily just a few moments earlier. On the dinner table, the coffee pot took a direct hit, and dark fluid spewed from two holes.

"Wally! Hey, Wally!" Tim shouted. "You get those torches lit! Everybody else, keep shooting! We'll either burn 'em alive or shoot the bastards when they come out!"

"Gentlemen," Ben said, "I think we've got more of a problem than we anticipated."

Peering through the crack in the window, Ben watched as two men, neither one a man he recognized, slipped out from behind trees, rushing closer. Each man carried a five-gallon kerosene can and an armload of thick sticks with cloth wrapped around the ends. Both men were grinning. They stopped perhaps fifty yards from the cabin, apparently to prepare the torches before they moved closer.

Lifting the rifle to his shoulder, Ben waited. He'd have to shoot through tree limbs, but there was a chance—a slim chance, but a

chance, nevertheless—that his bullet would fly straight. Perhaps he could take out one killer.

Though Ben's view of what they were doing was obscured by trees, by their movements he assumed that the torches had been laid out on the ground, and now the men were saturating the cloth heads with kerosene. They were laughing between themselves. This was their idea of a well-spent afternoon. Ben wondered just how much of a bounty Tim Cutler placed on their heads.

From his right, from farther up the hillside, three more men showed up. They were too far away with too many branches in the line of fire for Ben to have an easy shot. But he could see them, and now he even recognized some of his own men, and the blood began to boil in his veins.

"We can't let them get this cabin started on fire," Ben warned. He couldn't imagine a more hideous death than dying in a fire.

"I've got a foot of dirt piled on the roof," Blue explained. "If they're going to get it started, they'll have to get it started from below, or throw one of those torches through a window."

"Dirt on the roof, eh?" Ben chuckled. "You're one smart fella. I'll grant you that."

There were five of the killers crowded together, and Ben figured that even if his bullet ricocheted a little, he'd still likely hit one of the outlaws. They lit one torch, and with it they lit the others. As he lined up his sights, the booming report of a Winchester echoed through the narrow valley. The man holding the one lighted torch staggered. More gunshots rang out, fast shots coming from a carbine, paced at less than a second a piece. Kerosene sluiced into the air as the metal containers were struck rapid-fire. Another shot caught one of the thieves in the throat. As he sputtered, he dropped his burning torch onto the kerosene can at his feet.

It took just two or three seconds. It began and ended so quickly, it took a moment for Ben to understand exactly what happened. Tim's gunmen were preparing their torches when Ella, behind them, opened

fire. She shot the ringleader, then put holes in the kerosene containers, then started shooting the men again. Three went down with her bullets. When the lit torches landed in the spreading pool of kerosene, there was a great *whoosh!* and then the men on the ground were in flames. A final man, his clothes drenched in kerosene but unharmed by bullets, let out a pitiful scream of agony as he ran down into the valley, his body engulfed in flames from his thighs to his head.

Ben soon heard the sound of pounding hooves. Tim, and what few men he had left, was on horseback and riding hard. This was more of a fight than they had imagined, more than they could tolerate, and the thought of it brought a smile to Ben's lips.

"Hail the camp!" Ella called out.

Ben looked at the two men in the cabin with him, his smile filled with pride. "It's Ella! She's the one who saved our bacon." He looked at Blue, whose body was now dry but still completely naked. "You might want to put something on. Ella will be here in a minute." He chuckled. "Or Dirk and I could just take our clothes off, so you wouldn't feel left out."



## Chapter Sixteen

"It is...*so*...unfortunate that we have to maintain this charade," Ella said with mild annoyance as she reclined in an enormous wing-backed chair near the fireplace. She had on her robe, the very sheer white silk one that covered her to the ankles but showed every curve of her body when she wore it without anything beneath.

Dirk's head appeared as he climbed up the ladder, squeezing his broad shoulders through the trap door in the floor.

"It's for your own good, my love," the big man said, getting to his feet and then turning around to help Blue climb up into the room. Ben was last to reach the hotel's lavishly appointed luxury suite. "Appearances must be maintained."

"To hell with appearances!" Ella shot back, piqued that she should have to hide the love she felt for these three men.

"Let's not get that started all over again. It's best for you to not flout convention." Blue ran fingers through his shoulder-length black hair in a gesture of frustration. An outcast from so many cultures, she knew he had an understanding of the subject. "Some secrets are best left secrets."

\* \* \* \*

After Tim's attempt to kill the men she loved, Ella's cowardly fiancé had run away. Ella heard that he'd gone to Deadwood to become a professional gambler. She didn't care where he went, so long as he stayed away from the T-3 ranch and the three men she loved. The men, however, were not so quick to forgive their lover's

ex-fiancé. They put a “Dead or Alive” bounty of two thousand dollars on Tim Cutler’s head—a bounty which was never collected. Ella, not approving of the bounty but unable to convince her men to withdraw the money, insisted that the bounty not be “Dead or Alive.” Too much blood had already been spilled, she insisted. The men relented to her wishes, though they grumbled about Tim being more worthy of having a deadly bounty on his head than anyone else in the territory. But Tim, most uncharacteristically, drew a derringer when apprehended. He came within an inch of killing his abductor. The bounty hunter, more experienced in matters regarding weaponry and their use, put a bullet through Tim Cutler’s chest.

As for Rosamond, she actually did try to shoot her daughter. Ella’s quick defensive move caused the bullet to miss, and though Rosamond claimed it was an accident, she was immediately shipped off to a pleasant boarding house in St. Paul and given a small, monthly allowance. Rosamond, however, claimed there was nothing pleasant about the boarding house. Her claims fell on deaf ears. Provided she stayed in St. Paul, the monthly allowance would continue.

When the four-story Grand Hotel came up for sale, Ella did not hesitate. The first thing she did was have the entire top floor renovated into her private living quarters, which she called the Presidential Suite. The second thing she did was have three of the rooms directly below the Presidential Suite completely renovated, attached with side doors for each room. The three rooms were very comfortable, each with a large bed and even walk-in closets.

The last thing she did during the renovation process was to put a trap door in the floor of her Presidential Suite that lead down into the middle room of the three below.

Ella was often seen in her Presidential Suite, sometimes walking on the balcony outside. Townsfolk would think it only proper that she spend time away from the T-3 Ranch, particularly after the unpleasantness caused by the loathsome man she nearly married.

Nobody faulted her for spending time away from a ranch that held so many horrible memories.

Ben, Dirk, and Blue, rakes that they were, decided to rent rooms on the third floor. Everyone in town knew they'd taken the rooms on a permanent basis so they would have a comfortable place to drink and gamble and bring their lovers.

There wasn't a busybody in town who suspected that once Ella pulled the curtains on her fourth floor penthouse, three of the town's most handsome and eligible bachelors would climb a short ladder up into her suite, and the loving, sometimes tender, sometimes strenuous, always unconventional, would begin.

## THE END



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