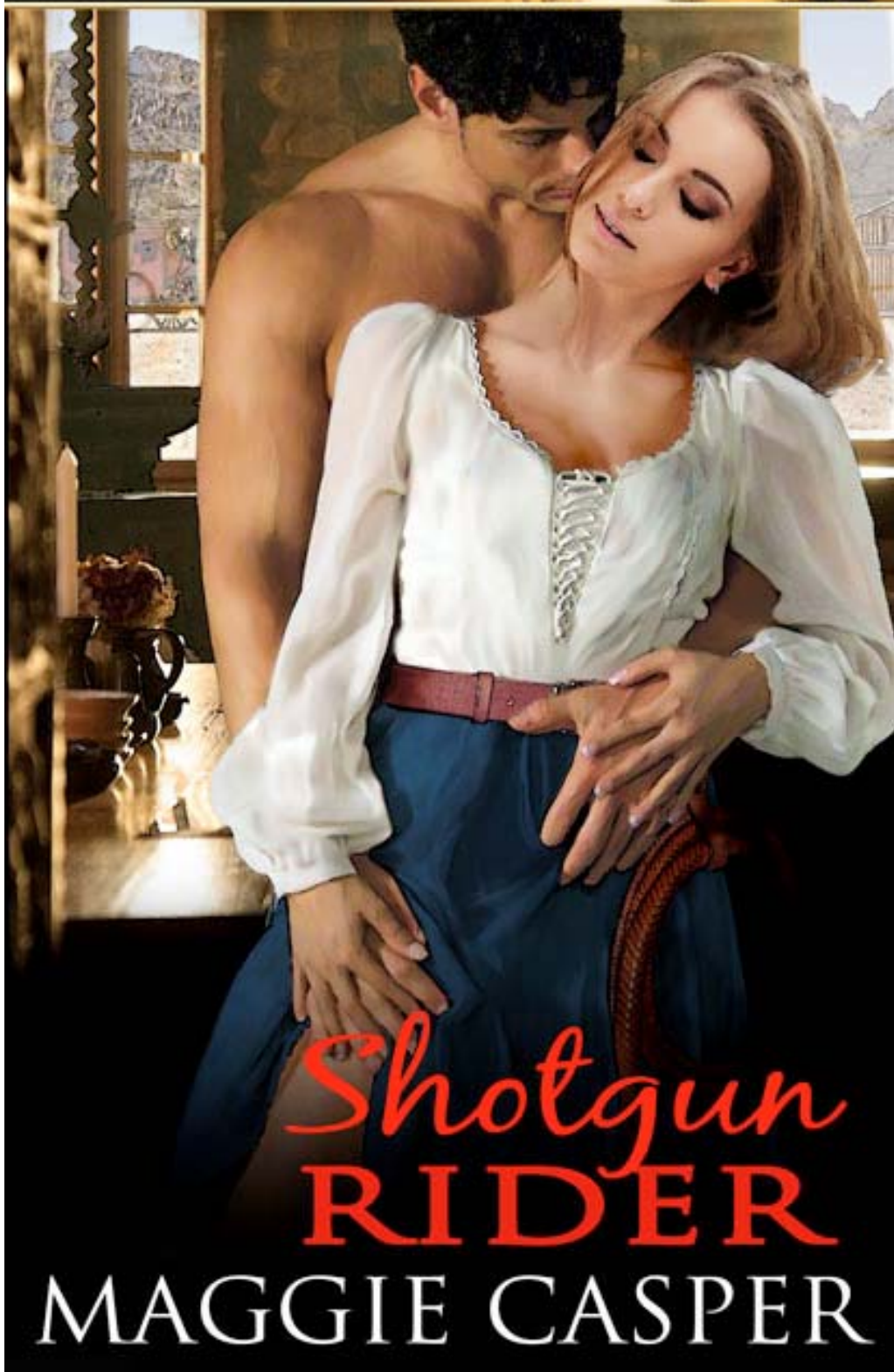


ELLORA'S CAVE **LAWLESS**



## **Shotgun Rider**

*Maggie Casper*

Living life as a man is not easy for Penny “P.J.” Parker. Nevertheless it’s much more freeing than being trussed up in layers of clothes and expected to act a certain way because she happened to be born a woman. Her life is in for a change though when Penny gets word from home that her mother has died. She decides to head back to Virginia City and take over her mother’s brothel, Penelope’s Pleasure Emporium. Problem is, when she gets there, she finds out her mother didn’t leave the family business to her alone.

Will Langtry, Jr.’s first thought, upon learning of Penny’s imminent homecoming, is to buy her out and run the brothel himself. He’s got no use for a woman when it comes to business matters. Will is used to being the boss and has no intention of changing anytime soon. But his first glimpse of Penny, seeing her in the flesh, has him rethinking his plans. All of a sudden he wants to keep the feisty beauty as close as possible.

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Shotgun Rider

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# ***SHOTGUN RIDER***

**Maggie Casper**

### *Acknowledgements*

To Aunt Pearl, your memory will live on in the land you worked and loved as well as those you touched with your kind ways and gentle smile.

To Uncle Leroy for being a strong and patient teacher of life's lessons.

Mama, this one's for you. Smile down upon us from your new home in the stars. And please don't forget the ladybugs.

I love you and miss you all!

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

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Wells Fargo: Wells Fargo & Company

## **Chapter One**

*Virginia City, 1865*

Although a foul word didn't often leave her mouth, P.J. Parker could curse with the best of them. She could also scratch, drink, out gamble and manhandle her so-called man parts like a pro. She'd never before considered those things to be proud of as most men, but then again, P.J. wasn't most men. Or a man at all, for that matter. Born Penelope Jean Parker, P.J. had taken on the role of the male gender at an early age. In the process, she became one of the best stagecoach drivers to run the Oxbow Route before the War Between the States, at which time it became known as the Central Overland California Route.

Learning how to bind her overly endowed breasts tight enough and scratch and belch like a man had served their purpose just as learning to wield a six-horse whip and shoot a gun had. Such skills had also kept her safe in a world that belonged to men. A world that left little for women, especially women alone.

With a bit of arm strength and the flick of her wrist, P.J. sent her whip sailing. The answering crack spurred along the horses, causing them to pick up speed. "Ya! Get a goin'."

This was an area P.J. didn't care to dally through and so she kept her guard up. It was notorious for both robbers and Indians brave enough to leave the reservation.

This time though, she sat on her bench alone. Usually a shotgun rider sat beside or behind her, shotgun in hand at the ready, but her man had come down sick and P.J. hadn't been willing to wait for either his recovery or someone to officially take his place. She had things to do, very important things.

Such as return home.

Home.

The word didn't really mean much to P.J. She hadn't really had one since the age of ten when her mother sent her Back East to get a proper education and become a lady. She couldn't help but snort at the idea. She cleaned up well and even remembered all the etiquette lessons that had been drilled into her head. However, these days her opportunities to wear anything resembling the trappings of a woman, much less a lady, were few and far between.

Melancholy overtook P.J. at the thought of her mother. They not only shared a name but also a need not to be molded into what was considered normal. The letter had found her too late and that rankled. They might not have always seen eye to eye but they loved each other fiercely. To think, her mother, one of the most notorious madams in the West, owner of Penelope's Pleasure Emporium, was gone hurt something fierce. Living with the knowledge she hadn't been able to say goodbye was even worse. It was something P.J. struggled with daily since learning of her mother's death. It was the reason she was heading home for the first time in years. She needed to settle her mother's belongings and then decide what to do with the rest of her life.

Movement out the corner of her eye caught P.J.'s attention. A couple of riders were damn near killing their horses, pushing them to breakneck speeds, in order to catch up with her coach. It was a dangerous game they played. She shook her head, her palm tingling as it curved around the ivory handle of her gun. Men were such stupid creatures. P.J. watched, waiting for them to split up, one coming up on either side of her coach. They really should pick a different way to do things. They didn't realize when they always did things the same way it was much easier to be outsmarted.

P.J. had become notorious for shooting first and taking the men in so the sheriff could ask questions later. The problem was, these yahoos wouldn't be expecting P.J. Parker to be driving the coach they were planning to rob. It wasn't her usual sixty-mile route. Not that it mattered to her either way. If they planned to lighten her coach they deserved exactly what they got.

Her nerves were on edge, the hair on the back of her neck stood on end as she waited for some sign these men might possibly be friendly. It wasn't to be though. As she'd anticipated, they split into a V and pulled weapons. With no backup, things were bound to get hectic. It was obvious her passengers realized the same thing if the shifting of the coach and shrill screams coming from inside were any indication.

"Would you sit still already," she grumbled as she pulled on the reins to slow the horses.

Dust billowed around them, blocking her view for a brief second. Her heart thundered, perspiration dotting her upper lip. P.J. reminded herself it would do no good to get antsy or nervous. There were only two of them. She could do it.

A shout came from the rider coming up on her left. The sound of his horse's labored breathing grated on her nerves. He should be shot for his treatment of the animal alone. If there was one thing P.J. hated it was the mistreatment of animals, women or children. Normally men could fend for themselves, so she almost always left them to their own devices.

P.J. lifted the handle of her whip from where it rested beside her on the driver's bench then laid it across her lap. Next she unsnapped her weapon from its leather holster strapped to her side while struggling to hold on to the reins with one hand. With narrowed eyes, she watched as they approached. The one to her left pulled his gun and fired a shot off just as she palmed the handle and let loose her whip. The force of impact as the bullet grazed her shoulder caused P.J. to hiss between clenched teeth. Luckily enough, it didn't change the course of her whip. She felt nothing but satisfaction as the man tumbled from his horse, landing in a bone-breaking heap upon the dry desert ground.

Without waiting for the other rider to make a move that might earn her another crease, P.J. dropped the handle of her whip back into her lap. She pulled her gun from its holster, aimed and fired. All in a matter of seconds. Unlike his yellow-bellied snake



of a friend, the other man managed to cling to his horse, although his posture wasn't nearly as upright.

P.J. waited to see if he planned to continue the attack or slink off. She was ready for either. When he slumped farther over his horse's neck and turned away, she brought the team to a stop. After jerking up the brake handle, she climbed down from the driver's seat.

"Everyone all right in here?" she asked, peeking her head in through the door.

Nine faces peered back at her, shock written all over them. It was finally a plump grandmotherly type who spoke up, stammering her thanks. "I've never seen anything quite like that. You've my thanks, sir."

P.J. smiled and tipped her hat in a gentlemanly manner. Shading her eyes with her hand, she turned toward where the man had tumbled from his horse. When she spotted his body, she headed in that direction.

It was only a matter of seconds before a couple of the dandies who were passengers joined her. "Why are you going back there?" one asked. He seemed genuinely clueless.

"The man might have been a thief, but since I'm able, he'll be taken to town. Hopefully someone can identify his body and he'll receive some sort of burial."

The other man scoffed, "He don't deserve even that much."

P.J. silently agreed. After all, he had tried to rob her coach and in the process shot her, a wound that was burning something fierce now. Her only reply was, "It's the right thing to do."

Upon approaching the man, it was plain to see he was deadlier than dead. His body was sprawled in a very unnatural way. It took the three of them, P.J. and her none-too-happy passengers, to carry the body back and strap it, covered by a moth-eaten blanket, to the coach. It would be nightfall before they made Virginia City now for sure.

P.J. sighed. Just because it was the last leg of her last run didn't mean she would allow things to go to hell in a handbasket. She'd see her customers, the Wells Fargo

trunk stowed beneath her bench, and especially her gorgeous scarlet Concord Coach safe to the end of the journey or die trying.

It took several more hours to finally reach their destination. By the time they pulled into town, the sun was beginning to set and the street was mostly empty. Several men piled out of a saloon up the street and those still taking their evening stroll stopped to watch.

A wiry little man dressed in a suit and bowler hat came barreling out of the saloon, quickly making his way toward her. "Thought you got lost, Parker. Good thing I decided to stick around for a bit."

P.J. chuckled as she opened the door for her passengers to alight from the coach. She smiled pleasantly enough at each of them before finally addressing the man.

"Mr. Dewey, I presume." She took his hand in a firm handshake. "We had a bit of trouble." She began untying the body from the boot of the coach. "The other one got away." Someone behind her lit off, she presumed in search of the sheriff, for which P.J. was grateful. She didn't want to wait around any longer than she had to. More than anything, she wanted a bath, a meal and a good night's sleep. All in that order.

When the sheriff showed up, he asked P.J. several questions. She gave a description of the bandit the best she could and explained exactly what happened. The sheriff listened then slapped her on the back with a smile. "Guess he didn't know who he was messing with."

"Guess not," P.J. murmured. "Or he would have known Wells Fargo never forgets. He'll get his soon enough, I'm sure. They always do. One way or another."

P.J. climbed back up onto the coach and grabbed her satchel from beneath the driver's seat as well as the locked Wells Fargo box. As soon as her booted feet hit the ground, she turned in search of Mr. Dewey.

When she spotted him helping to unload luggage, she stalked toward him. "I believe this belongs in your hands." She handed over the locked box.

He took the box and thanked her. "Are you sure we can't talk you out of retiring, Parker?"

"I'm sure." It was time. She might never be a lady and do the things ladies did, such as marry and have babies of her own, but she was ready for a change, that much she knew for sure.

"I've been authorized to offer you quite an increase in pay."

More money held no appeal. She'd saved pretty much everything she'd ever made, spending only enough to keep herself fed and clothed. There was nothing else to waste money on when she spent all of her days sitting topside of a coach. "Not interested but please pass along my thanks anyway."

Mr. Dewey seemed to realize she meant what she said. "Very well then." He reached into his vest and removed an envelope plump with money. "Your final pay. If you ever change your mind..." He let the sentence trail off, but P.J. knew exactly what he meant and tipped her hat in acknowledgement as she headed off to rent a room at the closest hotel with a kitchen.

\* \* \* \* \*

William Langtry, Jr. sat at the end of the bar, sipping whiskey. A rider had come in several hours ago, spreading the news about the notorious P.J. Parker driving his coach into town with a dead man strapped to the boot.

It had been years since he'd seen little Penelope Parker. He'd always called her Penny since her mom was named Penelope as well. Besides the fact the name seemed like a mouthful for such a gangly little girl, it got way too confusing with two of them around. Back then, she had been all knees and elbows. Her wavy hair, an unruly mess unless someone forced her to sit still long enough to give it a good brushing.

Will couldn't help but wonder how she had grown up. The years must not have been nice to her if she was able to pull off living her life as a man. Hell, he'd thought she'd be Back East somewhere, married with a gaggle of kids tugging at her skirts by

now. It wasn't until Penelope had been on her deathbed, her breath ragged in her chest, fighting for every gasp from the influenza that had raged through the area like wildfire, that he'd found out otherwise.

It was hard to imagine cute little Penny growing up and living life as a man. He couldn't help but picture her flat-chested and buck-toothed, if she had any teeth left at all. It didn't bode well for him. He'd spent his entire life working in Penelope's Pleasure Emporium. First he'd helped do chores as a young boy. Back then, his father had held the job he now oversaw, which was pretty much everything from protector to bartender and fix-it man. Upon his father's death, he'd taken over the job.

And now he was part owner of the place. He still couldn't believe Penelope had named him in her will. He would forever be grateful, but if he could, he would have her back and healthy instead. She'd been one of the best people he'd ever known. A mother figure when he'd needed one.

She'd give the shirt off her back to help others and all she ever received in return was to be ostracized from polite society because it was what was expected when a woman sold her body. That hadn't kept her from being happy though or from loving her little girl enough to send her away where it was safer, where she could become a lady, one who could walk in polite circles. Instead, the ungrateful chit had left school to lead the life of a man.

It was damn near too much to think about. Will hoped Penny, or P.J. or whoever the hell she was now, decided not to stay. Maybe she would sell out to him and leave, which would suit him just fine. However, if she did decide to stay around and, god forbid, actually wanted to play a part in running Penelope's she was going to be in for a drastic change. Because Will planned to see her do it as the lady her mother always planned for her to be. She would dress the part and act the part, and if she gave him any grief, the brat wouldn't be able to sit properly until she figured it out.

With his plan firmly in mind, Will rose to his feet and started making rounds of the place. He passed slowly by closed doors, being sure the only sounds he heard were

pleasurable ones. He wouldn't allow his girls to be abused. Anyone who tried to do so answered to him. It had always been that way and always would be. Not many were dumb enough to try, but there was always a chance and so he continued his rounds.

Everything seemed to be in order. Rollicking music filled the rooms. Some of the girls danced, their scantily clad bodies swaying forbiddingly to the piano music. It was a type of foreplay for some. They would dance and drink then hide off in a room for a "poke", as the crude old-timers called it.

Some of the girls employed at Penelope's never worked from their backs, they only danced or served drinks. Although he kept a close eye on all the girls, those were the ones who Will paid extra attention to. They all wore matching bracelets clamped around slender and sometimes not-so-slender wrists. Doing so made it easy for the men to recognize a girl who was not willing to lift her skirts over one who was. The little piece of jewelry saved Will a lot of wear and tear on his fists.

A high-stakes poker game was taking place in one of the back rooms. More than likely it would continue on until the wee hours of the morning. There were often more brawls in the poker room than in the rest of the brothel. A cheating man could cause a ruckus in a matter of seconds. They didn't usually stay alive long enough to complain.

The place was filled to capacity. People in every type of dress, from the dirtiest of miners to the uppity dandy dressed in styles Will considered sissified, clamored for a turn around the dance floor. Those seated took advantage of being at eye level with swaying derrieres with a smack here and a pat there. Giggling girls of the night sat perched on laps, kissing, fondling and enticing the men to spend their money upstairs. One of Will's jobs was to make certain the foreplay didn't pass certain limits. They might be a whorehouse, but Penelope had always made sure the place was classy, not vulgar the way some of the other brothels that had come in since gold had been found back in fifty-nine were. Looking around once again, Will decided it was going to be a very profitable night indeed.

He only hoped it stayed that way once his new partner showed up.

## **Chapter Two**

P.J. roused herself from bed. She'd become used to early mornings and long days full of hard work. It seemed strange for her to wake up without having someplace she needed to be.

For the first time in weeks she spied herself in a mirror. Clothed in only a sheer chemise and clean from her bath the night before, P.J. was sure she looked different than she did when she dressed as a man. For one, her hair was clean and lay in short blonde curls around her face. When out as a man, she allowed her hair to stay dirty. It not only hid the color of it but it kept the curls calm.

Another big difference was found in not binding her breasts. She'd started growing curves early on. Unlike her mother who was of average size, P.J. had enough up top for three women. It had always been the bane of her existence because they were so awkward to conceal. She had to admit though, it was rather nice not to have the wide bands of muslin cutting off her air and making her sweat, but there was no way in hell she was going to strap on a corset. That would be like trading one discomfort for another, and as far as P.J. was concerned, she was done being uncomfortable.

She finished washing her face in the wash basin of water provided then removed the bandage on her shoulder and cleaned that area as well. The bullet crease was not too deep and although tender to the touch, it didn't hurt much at all. P.J. rolled her shoulder, testing the muscles then placed some salve and a clean dressing on the wound. It was in an awkward spot, making it hard for her to tie off by herself. Once finished, she dressed in a long skirt and loose blouse. She then gathered her belongings into her satchel and left the room she'd rented for the night.

It had been years since she'd been to Virginia City and from what she'd seen of it last night, the place had grown by leaps and bounds. Although she had an idea of

where Penelope's was, she wasn't certain how to get there. Asking was going to draw all sorts of unwanted attention, but as far as she could tell, there was no way around it.

P.J. made her way down the staircase, watching for anything out of the ordinary. It seemed as if she was always on the lookout for trouble. It was habit, but she seemed to be even more cautious when not toting a gun on her hip. For now, her whip would have to be enough. It was as much a part of her as her arm and as so would stay tucked into the special holster on her wide leather belt made specifically for it.

Because she was already paid up, there was no reason for her to stop by the front desk and confuse the poor desk clerk any more than he already seemed to be. He looked from her to the stairs and back again, as if trying to figure out where she had come from. After all, the man kept his eyes on the stairs and he sure hadn't seen her head up them. P.J. merely tipped her head in greeting, a small smile curving her lips as she made her way to the dining room, all the while wishing she had a clean pair of denims to wear.

A hearty breakfast of eggs, sausage and biscuits was served. P.J. ate alone, her back to the wall, facing the rest of the room. Wouldn't do any good to be caught unawares. Once she'd eaten every last bite, she left through the front door of the hotel. It was a bright and sunny day with no more than a slight breeze to stir the dust. People milled about the wood plank sidewalks, roaming in and out of local shops.

For a minute, she just stood there and took it all in. Was Virginia City the kind of place she could settle down in and possibly once again call home? It was hard to say without seeing the brothel where she'd spent the first ten years of her life. The thought of going back made her nervous. Not because she had bad memories of the place. More because it would only cement in the fact her mother was no longer among the living.

"Might as well get it over with."

P.J. started off toward the stables in hopes of renting a horse for the day. It was a short walk and within minutes she was sitting astride one of the oldest, poorest-looking swaybacked creatures she'd ever seen with directions on how to get to Penelope's.

She'd tucked her skirts up and into the front of her belt, making breeches of sort, which caused not only her ankles but a good portion of her calves to show.

P.J. didn't have time to care or to worry about those watching her, disapproval marring their every feature. She had business to attend to and until it was done she wouldn't be able to settle in anywhere or care about much of anything.

It would have been an easy-enough distance to walk if she were not in a hurry, she thought to herself as she reined in her horse. She took a bit of time to straighten her skirts and tie the rented horse to a hitching post out front of the building. Looking up, she realized it was exactly as she remembered. With wooden sides turned gray with time, the building stood two-stories high. Penelope's Pleasure Emporium was painted in deep red for all to see.

The windows were covered with heavy velvet to keep not only the sun but the prying gazes of passersby out. After so much time, she was a little excited to see if the inside was still the same. And in a way hoped it wasn't. The gaudy red velvet lining nearly every surface was enough to make her nauseous. It was one thing she and her mother agreed upon, but instead of changing things to be a bit more welcoming, her mother had firmly stated the look of the place was eye-catching and expected.

If it was the same and she decided to stay it would be the second thing P.J. planned to change. The first was to get rid of anyone either not old enough or who wasn't there completely by choice. She didn't really think there would be anyone under those circumstances due to the type of person her mother had been, but a few months had passed between the time of her death and now. P.J. had to be sure.

Entering through the unlocked front door gave P.J. a grave disadvantage. The dim interior took her several minutes to grow accustomed to after being out in the bright morning sun. When her eyes finally adjusted to the difference, it was only to find the room empty. Or so she first thought.



Moving around in the far back corner of the main room was a man. A tall man. He was strongly built. From where she stood, his shoulders appeared to be very wide. Brown hair covered his head, touching his collar in curling wisps.

He finished whatever task he was doing then turned toward her, wiping his hands on a towel. "May I help..." His voice trailed off and he looked at her as if he knew exactly who she was.

Maybe he did.

P.J. straightened her spine as the man moved closer. When he was close enough for her to see well, she recognized him instantly. It might have been fourteen years since she'd laid eyes on Will but she knew it was him just as he evidently knew who she was.

Her mother hadn't been embellishing in her letters when she mentioned he'd grown into a fine specimen of a man. He was indeed. Now that he was facing her, P.J. could see exactly how fine. A well-trimmed beard and mustache covered his lower face, giving him a cuddly appearance even though his eyes warned a person to watch their manners. They were deep brown and wide set, covered with brows drawn down in a furrow.

His clothing was simple. The type a man used to hard work wore. Denims that seemed to hug his form like a second skin hung low on his slender hips. His button-front shirt was rolled at the sleeves, leaving his arms bare, showing a smattering of dark hair. P.J. followed the buttons up, curious if any at his corded throat would be undone. She was left wondering as to whether he would have chest hair or not. If she had to guess she would say yes, considering the amount on his arms and face. Her fingers itched to find out, completely surprising her.

There was no way she could be feeling desire merely from looking at a man. Could she? Hadn't she proved she was not the type to feel desire? Her one and only try at spreading her thighs for a man had proved a very negative experience indeed. She'd been told she was frigid and better-suited to remain a spinster. It was one of the many reasons she'd left the hoity-toity school her mother had shipped her off to. After six

years there, learning to be a lady, she'd realized the only difference between the dandies in the East and the rough gold miners of Virginia City were their speech and clothes. Other than that, they were all out for the same thing and more than willing to let a woman know they weren't good at the task when it didn't go their way.

Given the option of marrying and repeating the uncomfortable experience, living her life as a spinster or taking off to make her own way, the choice had been an easy one. It was as simple as swiping some boy's clothes from the neighbor's drying line and finding a job as a stable hand to get her on her path to her new life. Between the things Will's father had taught her and those her boss at the stables had, she'd learned enough to wield the reins of a six team without a problem.

Thoughts of Will's father brought P.J. back to the present. She stared up at him and tried for a smile. It wasn't something she was used to doing. Smiling lit her face and made her appear more feminine, not something a woman pretending to be a man was going for.

"It's good to see you, Will."

He continued to stare at her. His mouth dropped open as if to speak but nothing came out. His lower jaw bobbed around for a minute, reminding her of a fish out of water, but still no words made their way through his lips. His nice, full, soft-looking lips.

*Stop that!* P.J. warned herself with a shake of her head. She was beginning to feel somewhat self-conscious. Lifting a hand to her hair, she patted, thinking maybe it was sticking up. Sure, it was much shorter than fashionable. Not even long enough to put up in a fancy twist or braid, but it was clean and smelled nice.

Will felt poleaxed. She was stunningly gorgeous. He'd damn near swallowed his tongue upon first seeing her. Her hair was short and curly, framing her face like a doll. She appeared almost angelic. So why did all the blood in his head rush south of his belt

buckle and his mind immediately conjure some of the most lewd acts he could think of with her as the star of the show?

His gaze traced her face, wondering if her cute little dimples would deepen as she sucked his cock deep into her throat before moving lower. When he came to her breasts, he had a hard time not drooling. Flat she was not. And if he was not mistaken, other than a chemise under her blouse, she wore nothing. No corset to hold in those magnificent beauties. He idly wondered how in the hell she'd been able to pull off her guise as a man with a set of gals as large as hers were.

Will trailed his gaze slowly over her chest again before moving down the length of her body, stopping briefly on the whip coiled at her side and then back up. When he finally reached her face, she smirked.

"Need me to open my mouth so you can check my teeth as well?" He was already beginning to irritate her, which didn't bode well for either of them. Didn't matter though. He'd gone from hoping she would leave as soon as she sold out to making the decision to keep her in Virginia City, preferably in his bed, for a long time to come.

When the meaning of her words finally sank in, Will narrowed his eyes at her. He wasn't the type who took being sassed back to without retribution. And she evidently wasn't the type to stand still while being ogled as if she were a new heifer, so they were definitely at an impasse because he planned to look his fill any time the opportunity arose.

"Except for your eyes, you don't look anything like your ma." It wasn't one of his best opening lines for sure, but for some reason, their differences struck him. He was glad they didn't look too much alike. It might have caused some issues for Will to bed a woman when she reminded him of the closest thing he'd ever had to a mother.

The thought of her beneath him brought forth all sorts of visions. He liked his loving somewhat different than most. He preferred his women to enjoy not only a good fuck but the feel of his hand warming her ass, the sensation of his rope twined around her body, securing her in a way that made her vulnerable and at his mercy. There was

nothing better than hearing a woman beg, cry and scream for what her body craved as far as Will was concerned. He also expected his women to obey. Not because they were afraid of him but because they respected his authority. If there was one thing he didn't like it was a beat-down, spiritless woman. He needed spunk. It made things much more interesting.

"We work with what god gave us," was all she said in response.

"Well, little Penny, god gave you more than enough and in all the right places, so you'll be getting no complaints from me. Now come on in and sit down."

She snorted in a very unladylike way and rolled her eyes before stalking around him and to the bar where she straddled a stool as if she were wearing breeches. Will sighed. There wasn't much ladylike about her movements, that was for sure. He had his work cut out for him.

"Something to drink?"

"No thank you. I've already had breakfast."

Will stood on the business side of the bar, facing her. He couldn't keep his eyes from her, all of her. She really was magnificently built. Her innocent face was at odds with her erotic curves. The silence stretched, allowing his curiosity to get the best of him. "How did you manage to hide those?"

Her head snapped up and a blush stole over her cheeks. "You know then."

It wasn't a question really, but he explained anyway. "When your ma was real sick, she told me. She said she thought it best I knew so I could try to get word to you."

Penny inclined her head. "Thank you. I only wish I had made it sooner." Her voice cracked at the end, a sad look replaced the shine in her eyes.

Will reached across the bar to lay his hand over the top of hers. An electrical jolt traveled up his arm, making him want to jerk back, but he didn't. She needed the comfort and he would have time enough later to wonder why he reacted to her the way he did.

"We do what we can, Penny."

"P.J."

He smiled amicably, nodded then said, "Well enough for others, if you don't mind everyone knowing you are a woman, but I'll still call you Penny."

She opened her mouth, probably to blast him with a few choice words, but snapped it shut when he interrupted. "What are your plans?" he asked when she said nothing.

A small shake of her head made her curls bob and sway. "Other than visiting my mother's grave, I don't know yet."

"Okay then. We'll figure it out when we get back. In the meantime we'll take your stuff back over to the hotel and drop it off." Will started around the bar, grabbing his hat off a peg along the way.

"Now wait just a minute!" Penny stood, meeting him without thought of backing down if her stance was any indication.

"Yes?" He had an idea of what bothered her but wasn't quite sure, so decided to prompt her for an answer.

"First of all, there is no 'we'. If you'll point me in the right direction I'll go visit my mother's grave alone." She took a deep breath as if speaking so much at one time had left her winded. "I also have no intention of staying at the hotel when I can stay here in my mother's room."

He'd expected the first but her desire to stay at Penelope's threw him. "You can't stay here, Penny. This is a brothel and will be opening to the public in a few hours."

Once again she rolled her eyes at him. "In case you've forgotten, I grew up here and as such am well aware what goes on. I've lived the last eight years of my life as a man, Will. You can't possibly think I did so and still remained an innocent."

It hit him then that she was right. She'd probably seen as much, if not more, of life in the real world as he had. Why that bothered him so much, he wasn't sure. He didn't

understand one iota why he felt the need to protect her from any more hardship but he did.

"I'm staying here as long as I stay in Virginia City and no amount of arguing is going to sway me." Then she turned to him as if finally realizing something. "For now at least, I own Penelope's and as so will do as I see fit with the place."

"Half," he growled. She was challenging him.

The single word stopped her dead in her tracks. "What?"

"Your ma left you half of Penelope's. The other half belongs to me."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Why would you go and do a fool thing like that?" Penny grouched while staring down at her mother's headstone.

It had been quite nicely done. For that, she assumed Will was to thank. Speaking of the man, he was already becoming quite high-handed where she was concerned. It was something Penny wasn't at all used to. Taking care of herself was a daily occurrence, so having someone else insist she do something differently than she had planned sort of grated on her nerves.

On the other hand, it was nice that he cared enough to see her safely to her destination. He'd grumbled about the hazards of a woman traveling alone.

"I've been doing so since I was sixteen," she'd argued.

"That may be true, but you didn't do so dressed in that," he said, eyeing her unfettered breasts. "Penny, you'll have to take me up on my offer of an escort out of town to where the cemetery is or not go. Your choice."

How was it possible after all her years of being P.J. that hearing her old nickname could feel so right?

She shook her head, deciding to save such thoughts for a later time. She did not want to be aware of how it excited her to hear her name on his lips.

Will allowed her the privacy she needed to say goodbye without contest. He stayed sitting astride his horse, a tall, shadowy figure in the distance. Penny was grateful for his actions. She wasn't much accustomed to crying in front of others and didn't plan to make a habit out of it now that she was back to living her life as a female.

When she walked through the gates of the cemetery and mounted her swaybacked nag of a horse, he said not a word. They rode in edgy silence back to town. Penny had a few things she wanted to do. Among them was buy a several new items of clothing. Possibly even a corset so as to fit in with what was considered proper a little bit better. The thought made her shudder but she knew a woman had to do what a woman had to do. And until she decided whether or not she was going to stay in Virginia City and help run Penelope's, she would have to appear as if she had at least a basic idea of how women dressed.

She slowed the horse then waited to see if Will would do the same. When he stopped beside her, she told him what her plans were. "I need to pick up a few items of clothing and then I want to see about buying a horse."

He seemed to ponder her words for a moment then nodded in agreement. "I'll take this tired ole gal back to the livery and see if they've got an appropriate beast for sale while you're doing your shopping." He peered up one side of the street and down the other before turning his gaze back to her. "There are quite a few shops that should suit you well right here on this block. I'll meet you back here in two hours."

Penny was worried about what he might consider an appropriate horse for a woman. "If by appropriate you mean old or so short my feet will drag the ground you'd better forget it. I've been driving a six team long enough to know how to handle a spirited horse."

He smiled indulgently as she dismounted. After gathering her horse's reins, he tipped his hat and started at a slow walk toward the livery.

"I mean it, Will!"

"I'm sure you do, Penny," he threw over his shoulder without turning around.

Steaming in irritation, she stomped into the closest shop and was pleased to see it contained exactly what she'd been hoping. Lace, frills and frippery hung from every surface imaginable. It was a somewhat uncomfortable place to be.

A bell over the door jingled as she'd entered, bringing from the back a willowy woman with a measuring tape draped over her neck. "May I help you?"

Penny figured she might as well get it over with and order a couple full sets of underpinnings. Because, sure as she was standing there, the minute the now-smiling woman found out she owned a brothel, her welcome would drastically change.

"Yes, thank you." She went on to tell the woman what it was she needed. They spoke about fabric choices while Penny stood still to be measured. The experience wasn't nearly as painful as she'd expected. Of course, she might very well change her mind when it came to actually strapping on one of her new corsets. If what she remembered was correct, they were the most uncomfortable contraption man had ever come up with.

The next store Penny wandered into had off-the-rack skirts and blouses that would do. There was no reason to buy anything other than serviceable clothing. Penny had no desire to play the part of a madam whether or not she decided to stay on as owner of Penelope's, so there would be no need for fancy clothes. She could oversee the goings-on at Penelope's in cotton just as well as in satin. Hell, if things became too hectic she would throw on her denims. Wouldn't matter much, as far as Penny knew, she was going to be ostracized either way as soon as word got around of who and what she was. The thought of adding to the gossip by letting out that she was P.J. Parker, stagecoach driver, made her chuckle. They wouldn't know what to do with such information.

Penny tried on a couple of shirts and blouses in a curtained-off room at the back of the store before making her purchases. She added two new pairs of denims and a few long-sleeved, button-up shirts to her stack, causing the clerk to raise a brow as he wrapped her purchases. The man didn't ask any questions though, for which Penny was grateful.



By the time she finished her shopping, Will was ready. She found him sitting on a bench, eating a piece of fried chicken. "I picked us up some lunch."

"Thank you." Penny sat beside him on the bench, making sure their bodies didn't touch. There was something about him that sent sparks flying across her flesh.

He nudged the brown-paper-wrapped package she'd set at her feet. "Find anything good?"

"Well." She tipped the brim of her cowboy hat back. It was the one concession she couldn't make. There was no way she was trading the shade of her wide-brimmed hat for a bonnet, no matter how she might appear. "I wouldn't go as far as good but I was able to find a few off-the-rack garments to fit."

"Good." His deep brown gaze settled on her breasts. "One of those wouldn't have happened to be a corset, would it?"

Penny took the last bite of her chicken leg, chewing slowly while counting so as not to blast him with angry words. The man was absolutely infuriating! After swallowing, she stood. "Not that it is any of your business but I ordered two corsets." The smug smile on his face didn't last too long when she added for good measure, "Haven't made up my mind whether I will wear them or not." She bent down to pick up her package, tapping the paper lightly with her finger. "I haven't decided if I will even wear skirts. I tend to be geared more toward denims so I picked up a few new ones of them as well."

With that she took off down the wood plank sidewalk toward where Will's horse was hitched.

She looked very good all ruffled up like a bandy rooster. However, he didn't like the thought of her parading around in denims for other men to see, just as he also didn't like her out in the open with nothing covering her magnificent breasts. He would see to it she not only forgot about her affinity for wearing men's trousers but she also wore one of the corsets she'd purchased.

Hell, if given half the chance he would be glad to lace her in or out of it. There was something about fucking a corseted woman that did it for him. Spanning his hands around her slender waist, watching the white mounds of her breasts spill over the top as she struggled for breath while he pounded into her repeatedly, was one of the many fantasies to play through his mind since dropping her off to shop.

Will cursed the stiffness of his cock as he hurried after Penny. He wouldn't put it past her to take off on his horse since she had no clue whether he had been able to procure a new mount for her or not. Of course, given her likeness for the beasts, he should have known better. By the time he reached her, she was nose to nose with the gelding he'd purchased for her, scratching his ears and cooing to him as if he were her best friend.

"What's his name?"

Will tilted his head. He'd asked the same question because he'd known she would want to know only to be told the horse didn't have a name. They called him No Name. When he said as much to Penny, she frowned.

"Well, he has to have a name," she grouched, muttering on and on about the pitfalls of not naming horses or treating them well.

"I guess it's up to you then, as to what his name will be. Any ideas?" He figured she would be as willy-nilly as any other female when it came to decision making, so was a bit shocked when she answered without delay.

"Poncho."

Will couldn't help it. He chuckled. "Poncho. Any special reason why?"

She stared at him as she untied the reins. "Nope. He just looks like a Poncho to me."

When her package was stowed in the saddlebags he'd bought along with Poncho, she mounted in one swift move, seemingly unaware she had given him a glimpse of smooth, bare flesh all the way up to her thigh. Of course the knowledge he'd seen as much warned him it was very possible others might have seen the same and he once again found himself seething at her audacity.

"We're going to have to work on that." His tone was low, his voice stern.

"What's that?" Her innocent eyes widened.

Could she really be so clueless? "How a lady mounts a horse."

Her eyes narrowed even as her lips flattened and pinched in what he assumed was irritation. "No need. I've never pretended to be a lady." With that, she clucked Poncho into a walk, leaving Will still standing and staring in her wake.

By the time they arrived back at Penelope's he was fit to be tied or fit to tie her. Either way worked. After seeing to the horses, they made their way through the back door, through the bustling kitchen and into the main bar area.

"What time do all the festivities start?"

Will pulled his pocket watch, a gift passed on from his father, out of the front pocket of his pants and glanced at it before answering. "We get busier as the sun sets." It was two o'clock now so they still had time to get a few things settled before things got crazy at about five or so.

"Good, that leaves time. I'd like to make an appointment to see the lawyer soon, but in the meantime, until I figure out what my plans are, how much did my mother leave me?"

Ahh. They were finally going to get to the gist of things. "Enough to allow you to never have to work again if you choose to do so."

Her eyebrows rose nearly to her hairline at his words. "That much," she gasped.

He nodded. There were no words he could find that wouldn't show the disappointment he felt at knowing it all came down to money to her.

"What time do the girls come down?"

Will looked to the stairs then back to Penny. Someone was usually downstairs already. "Any time now. They usually trickle down to eat before bathing for the night. Your ma was always a stickler about good eating habits and cleanliness."

"Then I'll wait here." She made no comment on his mention of her mother or the way she had done things. "You go ahead and go on about your business."

Had she dismissed him as if he were the hired help? "I think I'll wait too." He'd already done everything that needed to be done during the morning hours. He had an overwhelming urge to drag her up to his room, paddle her ass and then fuck it raw. He wanted to claim her as his and lay down the law before men started filing through the door for the night. He knew once that happened, the fight was on and he had no intention of losing.

Doing so without scaring her off or getting them into the argument to end all arguments seemed impossible though. So he might have to forgo the fucking-raw part and possibly even the paddling part until he could see how things were going to go. For now they would have to talk. That was the part Will was not looking forward to at all. He tended to be a man of action. Words could just as easily be lies. Compromising chafed but it was something he would have to do if he planned to get anywhere with the strong-willed, stubborn woman who was now perched on a stool at his bar, looking as if she had not a care in the world.

A couple of the girls descended the stairs, their hair upswept but still in disarray, in some instances their silky robes barely covered the parts that ought to be kept covered in mixed company.

Lona, one of the older women, bustled past the others. "Holy hell, little Penny, is that you?" She grasped Penny by the shoulders and held her at arm's length. "You might not look just like your ma but you've sure got her eyes." Then hers filled with tears that refused to fall. She seemed embarrassed and let her arms fall from Penny's shoulders.

Penny's smile was genuine. "Thank you, that means a lot. Miss Lona, right?"

The look on Lona's face was one of astonished disbelief. "My god! You remember me?"

It was then that Penny did something Will, and evidently going by the look on their faces, the others who were now all in attendance didn't expect, she pulled the aging whore into a warm hug. "Of course I remember you. You used to buy me sweets and keep me occupied while Mother was busy." Penny blushed then at realizing exactly what must have been keeping her mother busy.

Will watched as she rounded the girls up and then sat back down on the stool she had been occupying before. He had no clue what she was planning to say and was just as curious as the rest of them.

"I'm not sure what my plans are yet, so I can't say whether I will be staying for good or leaving. One thing I do know is I won't leave until I am sure everyone who is a working girl at Penelope's is here by choice."

Disgruntled objections flew around the room, including Will's. Penny took it all in stride, waving her hand in an exaggerate motion as if to shoo away an unwanted pest. "Now hold on a minute and let me finish. I didn't mean that I thought my mother had forced any of you into your positions." She looked from one girl to the next until she had the attention of everyone in the room. "But I know sometimes circumstances can land us where we least expect it. I also know we might even enjoy those circumstances for a time and then decide we're ready for a change only to realize the means of getting that change is not there." This time she looked at Will and damned if he didn't feel guilty for thinking her excitement over the amount of money she'd been left was due to selfishness. "Alls I'm saying is if any of you decide you'd like to make your way in life a bit different all you need to do is talk to me and I'll see you've got enough to get you a start far away from here."

Murmured words filled the room but no one stepped forward. Will knew it was because, for the most part, the women who worked at Penelope's were like a family, even more close-knit than most. They had only each other. Will was going to quietly suggest as much to Penny when she continued. "I don't know how long I'll be here so give it some thought and let me know soon."

After her speech, she spoke quietly to each girl, learning their names and introducing herself personally. Her actions made Will feel the need to revamp his previous thoughts about her. It appeared, now more than ever, she had indeed turned out a lot like her mother.

"I want to meet anyone else who works here now if you don't have anything else you need to do." Penny turned toward him, her gaze steady and serious.

He didn't, not really, and so was pleased to give her a tour. The introductions went well. Everyone seemed surprised by her attitude. Most had voiced fear about having a proper lady coming to a place like Penelope's Pleasure Emporium. Will originally had a few of those very same worries. It wasn't until Penelope told him how Penny had been living her life his worry began to lessen. Now he had entirely different worries. Namely, how he was going to keep her close and change her from the opinionated, independent woman she was into the more biddable yet spirited type he preferred.

## Chapter Three

The night was going well, with the exception of Will shadowing her every step. Every time she wandered around the near-to-bursting rooms to make sure the girls were as safe as they could possibly be, he was right there beside her. It was getting rather irritating.

Fisticuffs broke out in the gambling parlor. Upon hearing the commotion, Penny headed that way only to be jerked back by Will, who pointed toward the bar and told her to go sit as if she were a dog. His tone irked her. Considering the fact she wore her gun holstered at her hip, something he'd laughed about at first, and that she'd also switched to a shorter whip, she felt as safe as ever.

*Probably safer, considering you have an overbearing man trailing you.* The tiny voice in her head had a tendency to go off each and every time Will was near. Just another thing to aggravate her, Penny deliberated mulishly.

There was no way in hell she was staying in the bar while knuckle-headed men tore up the place, she thought as she headed toward the back room. The look on Will's face as she peered around the doorframe was priceless. He couldn't reach her though the throng of angry, shouting gamblers.

A short, balding man, with his back to the door and therefore her, pulled a gun. "I wouldn't do that if I were you." Penny's voice was calm, flat, and yet rang through the room as loud as a stampede, quieting it in seconds. It was much too close a space to use her whip so she had drawn her gun instead.

"Jesus Christ!" Will swore.

Without batting a lash, Penny answered, "He didn't have a thing to do with it. As far as I can tell, the only ones who did are the overzealous mortal men in this room."

She looked around the room, noting the different levels of confusion and surprise on the men's faces. "Now put that down before you hurt yourself or someone else."

There was no confusion as to who she was speaking to since there was only one other person besides herself brandishing a weapon. Although, it looked as though others could appear in the blink of an eye, Will's included.

The balding man turned toward her, gun still in hand. His face had gone red, his jowls wobbling with indignation. "No whore's gonna to tell me what to do."

A low rumbling growl left Will's throat. Penny had no clue what it meant, but the hair on the back of her neck stood on end, alerting her things had gone from somewhat calm to raising-hell riot time in the blink of an eye. It was a test, one Penny knew she would need to pass if she decided to stay on and take her mother's place. She hoped there would be time to get to know some of Penelope's patrons before someone tried her.

In less time than it took Will to cross the room, Penny aimed and took her shot. The gun Baldy had been holding flew from his grip, landing on the floor beside him. He yowled in pain, his gaze locked on hers. Will stopped dead in his tracks. His face was blanched nearly white. The only sign he was angry was the way in which he stood.

Although his limbs appeared to be relaxed, his hands clenched and unclenched, his fists white-knuckled. There was a quietness about him that told a story all its own. Gone was the ready smile or the mischievous twinkle in his wide-set brown eyes. Penny made a habit out of gauging people, and right now, she would bet Will was about to blow his top. She almost felt sorry for Baldy but wouldn't allow sympathy to sway her.

Looking from Will to the still-sniveling man, she said, "Whore or not, you have no right to come into my place and cause trouble. Now make good on whatever you owe in here then get out. If you can't behave properly, don't plan to come back."

At the mention of it being her place, every eye in the room widened, except Will's. He still watched her through narrowed slits. Baldy studied her for a minute before nodding. He gathered his things, leaving behind a small stack of money, before making



his way past her and out the door. Penny sighed in relief, nearly patting herself on the back for a job well-done.

“As you were.” She motioned to the room at large before turning on her heel to head back up the hall and into the main room where music was playing and drinks were flowing freely.

“What in god’s name did you think you were doing in there, woman?” Will grabbed her to stop her retreat, his voice a hiss at her ear, his bruising grip tight on her arm.

When she opened her mouth to answer, he gave her a look she imagined might very well turn an ordinary man to stone. It didn’t deter her in the least. “I was helping where it was needed.” It seemed a simple enough answer to Penny, but for some reason, Will acted shocked by it. So stunned, that instead of thanking her he flipped her over his shoulder as if she were a sack of grain and headed up the stairs.

Hoots and hollers as well as a few ribald remarks even Penny had never heard followed in their wake, making her cheeks burn in embarrassment. Instead of taking her to her room as she assumed he would do, Will marched past it and farther down the long, narrow hallway until he reached the last door. His. Once ensconced inside, he lowered her to her feet and flipped the lock.

His next move was so unexpected Penny had no time to react or prepare herself. His kiss nearly stole her breath. Frustrations radiated off him as he plundered the depths of her mouth, taking until Penny thought her lungs might burst from lack of air. As if reading her mind, Will lifted his head but did not untangle the hand he held in her hair to hold her right where he wanted her.

His eyes were bright, the pupils dilated so wide she could barely tell what color they were. When he lowered his head again, she was more prepared for the erotic assault. Or so she’d thought. She attempted to keep her mouth closed and wiggle out of his grasp, but it did not work. One resulted in her scalp burning and the other only caused him to use his hand at her jaw to see she did as he wished.

This time around, the sensations almost overwhelmed her. Penny thought she was ready for his next onslaught but she wasn't. The feel of his tongue in her mouth did horribly wonderful things to the rest of her body. Sensations fluttered across her breasts, down her spine and straight to her pussy. It was something she'd never experienced before. Not even the time she'd actually had sex with a man. So why now that she was only kissing? Hell, not even that; she was being kissed and the way he was doing it so thoroughly only went to prove there was a huge difference between the two.

Penny decided that although he was being extremely forward and way too high-handed for her tastes, the experience was still a good one, one she was going to reciprocate. She tentatively touched his tongue with hers, slanting her head to the side as much as his hand in her hair allowed, in order to get the right angle for meshing their mouths together in a way that only made her want more.

Will groaned. His free hand slipped to the spot just beneath her still-unfettered breast and Penny thought she'd see stars. He made her want to do things, daring things, with her hands and mouth. Wonderful, naughty stuff she had only heard men talk of over the years. The feelings sweeping through her were amazing.

He backed up a few steps, taking Penny with him, never once breaking their kiss. It wasn't until she pried an eye open and spotted the bed behind him that reality began to seep in and she became nervous. There was no time to struggle against his hold or to voice her thoughts on the matter before he sat and she was upended over his rock-hard thighs.

"What the hell! Let me up from here."

The first impact of his hand on the bare flesh of her bottom was the only indication he had even raised her skirt. It stung bright, stealing her breath in a way completely different than his kiss had. She soon realized her mistake in not wearing any of the uncomfortable underdrawers beneath her skirt.

The next several landed in quick concession, each one as hard if not harder than the first. "Ow! So help me if you don't stop—" Her words were stolen along with her next breath, leaving only a gasp behind. Will still remained silent.

It seemed as if they went on forever. Penny soon realized the more she struggled, the harder and quicker his hand landed. Soon she lay completely still and silent across his lap. Her ass was on fire, probably bruised. Her ego even more so. Embarrassment caused her to turn her back toward Will when he finally allowed her up.

"Now let's try again." Penny turned and watched silently as Will stood then crossed the room. "What did you think you were doing back there?"

It was hard but Penny fought to keep the tears in her eyes from flowing free. She would just as soon choke than cry. This man had kissed her senseless and then spanked her as if she were a misbehaving child. Her insides were in turmoil, her nerves fighting to stay in some semblance of balance, and he expected her to talk.

When she kept her lips tightly closed, he stalked toward her, removing his belt. The look on his face warned he would have no problem using it if he felt the need.

"I told you, I was helping."

This time when he swore, the sound filled the empty space between them. He thrust his hand through the curling length of his hair then settled his hands on his hips. "Where you're concerned, I don't need that type of help."

"This is my place too." Although leery of arguing, Penny felt the need to remind him.

"True, but I promised your ma I would keep an eye on things. I can't very well do so with you running around, getting in the way of men with guns. For god's sake, Penny, you could have been shot!"

"But I wasn't. I was perfectly safe, Will. As I have stated before. I am quite capable of taking care of myself."

Her cheeks were as flushed as the last view of her ass had been. He was still surprised by her actions as well as his. She should have never put herself in danger and he never should have laid a hand on her. Not because he had any regrets about delivering the stinging spanking she deserved. His regrets came in a completely different form. Now that he'd had his hands on her, there was no way he was going to sit around on the sidelines, waiting for an invitation for it to happen again.

"I'm sure you are, but that doesn't change things one bit. I made a promise and I intend to keep it."

The color on her cheeks deepened, rising high. "You said your promise was to watch out for me as long as I stay on here." She lifted her chin then to a seriously stubborn angle as she made her way toward the door. "Guess that means I won't be sticking around. Thank you. You've just made up my mind for me."

"I don't think so." There was no way in hell he was going to let her go now that he'd tasted her, even if only her mouth.

"Doesn't really matter what you think. I'll see someone first thing in the morning to have the appropriate paperwork drawn up. You can buy me out and we'll be done."

"I won't buy your half of Penelope's." The words surprised him nearly as much as they did her if the way her jaw dropped wide open was any indication.

"Then I'll hire someone."

She was being stubborn as a mule. If she wanted a challenge, Will was up for it. "I'll run off anyone who steps foot through the door in your stead." Will rested his hand on the butt of his gun so there would be no chance of his words being misconstrued.

"Oh for heaven's sake!" Now she was flustered. "What is it that you want, Will? Surely you can't want to tend me for the rest of your life."

Never before had he given consideration to settling down with just one woman, much less ventured toward thoughts of marriage, but for some reason, that was exactly where his mind was taking him. His feet, however, had plans all their own. Before he

realized what he was doing, Will crossed the room until once again they stood face-to-face.

"What I want is you." He rested his open palm along the curve of her jaw. "There's something between us, Penny." He dipped down for a brief taste of her lips, half-hoping she would melt into him yet expecting she wouldn't.

He wasn't surprised when she stepped back, as if burned by his touch. "Yeah, I feel it too. It's called irritation mixed up with a good dose of lust." She snorted then, the sound cynical, reminding him she had not lived a sheltered life. "Don't get me wrong, cowboy. I think you're above average in looks but you're also arrogant and high-handed, neither of which I'd look for if I were looking for a man."

"Too bad. You're stuck with me anyway." Will didn't much care Penny found him lacking. Until she gave him the time of day and got to know him, really know him, then he wasn't going to pay much attention to her mood or threats to leave. If after spending time with him she still wanted to leave, he wouldn't stand in her way. He was a man used to getting what he wanted and today was no exception. From her expression, she knew he meant business. His words were not just idle threats.

Penny flipped the lock and yanked the door open so hard it hit the wall behind it with a thud. He heard her mumbled curses all the way down the hall and smiled. He couldn't wait to have her in his bed and across his lap again. The next time it would be for a nice, long warm-up spanking and petting session before he plunged into her depths and marked her as his. Forever.

Will smiled all the way down the stairs. The curve of his lips didn't wane as he wandered the main room, making sure everything was okay with the girls. Lona sidled up beside him, her matching grin knowing. "Saw the boss lady and she looked none too pleased."

"We had a disagreement."

Lona guffawed, the sound shrill to his ears. "Trying to run her off, are you?"

His smile fled then. "Just the opposite, Lona. I plan to keep her right here."

"So that's how it is?" The older woman knew Will well. He might be an arrogant hard-ass but he'd never been one to force himself where he wasn't wanted.

"Yes, ma'am. That's exactly how it is."

If at all possible, her smile widened, causing the lines bracketing her mouth to deepen into dimples. "Good." She patted him on the shoulder. "You take care of our girl then."

"I'm trying," he mumbled to her retreating back.

Several minutes passed before Penny came back down the stairs. When she did, it was with purpose. She zeroed in on him and didn't allow anyone to stand in the way of her destination.

"Here."

The wad of money she thrust at him was thick. "I told you I won't accept a buyout from you." He said the words slow to be sure she understood. His tone brooked no argument but he didn't figure that would stop her if she was in the mood to do so.

"It's for Poncho."

He waved it away. "Consider him a gift."

Her free hand balled into a white-knuckled fist at her side, and for a second, Will thought she was going to haul off and hit him. She kept the money held out for him. "I have no desire to be beholden to you, so take the money."

Will inclined his head then took the wad of bills. "It won't make much of a difference once we're married, so I'll just hold on to this until then if it will settle you down." It was a good compromise as far as he was concerned, though Penny appeared to be in the throes of apoplexy.

"Settle dow – married? Are you god damn kidding me?"

It was the first time Will could remember hearing Penny curse and didn't much like it. The sound was rough to his ears so unlike her voice or the angelic way her hair

curled around her jaw, framing her face. He could imagine she had done so often while out on the trail, but it wasn't something she was going to do in his presence.

Might as well start as he meant to go on, Will thought to himself as he lowered his head to her mouth for a harsh, nipping kiss. "Watch your mouth, woman." His tone was a mock growl but his message had gotten across loud and clear.

In the space of a few seconds he had not only corrected something he considered to be a flaw, setting her on the right path, but he'd also let anyone within viewing distance know she belonged only to him. And for those who were not close enough to see, word of mouth traveled fast.

\* \* \* \* \*

It had been a long day and Penny was exhausted. Getting used to such different hours was going to take time. Normally up at dawn, preparing her team for a long road trip, this whole up-all-night thing was going to be the death of her. She'd been seated at the bar in a near doze when Will had come in with a smile on his face.

"Off to bed with you."

Too tired to be irritated, Penny idly wondered if he treated all women like children or if it was only her. "I need to stay and help."

He chuckled then. "The bar seems to be holding itself up fine, so you go on."

"I'll go when I'm good and ready." Now he was just being obnoxious. Penny figured two could play at that game.

Will leaned into her then, sending her senses into overdrive. She was tired and confused in both body and mind and not at all ready for the contact. His voice, full of promise and retribution, only added to her already-frayed nerves. "You can either take yourself up now or I can carry you again. Your choice."

Penny wanted to snarl, to jump in his face and claw away the smug look worn there. Instead of getting mad, she'd decided to get even. He was going to pay for treating her as he had today and she was going to thoroughly enjoy it when he did.

“You, Mr. Langtry, are an insufferable brute!”

His laughter followed her all the way up the stairs. Penny could still hear the low timbre as she walked the length of the hall. The man was outrageous. Marriage? Hell, the mere thought of it made her chuckle. They would kill each other inside of a week were they to get hitched.

A sound much different than the normal low moans and gasps a brothel exuded reached Penny’s ears, sending a frisson of alarm down her spine. Flesh hitting flesh and muffled screams caught her attention again and Penny saw red. She wouldn’t just stand by and allow anyone to hurt her girls.

It took a minute and another volley of painful sounds to reach her before Penny found the right room. Will must have been watching and noticed she’d not yet made it to her room because he was on his way up the stairs, his face grim. Penny didn’t have time to wait. Another muffled scream rose above the muffled sounds of the main room at the same time she tried the door latch only to find it locked. With all her body weight behind the move, she shouldered the door open. What she found, however, was not at all what she’d expected.

Instead of a beaten woman as she’d feared, she found Kitty, one of the younger girls, all trussed up like a hog to slaughter. There was a fine sheen of sweat covering her face, a face radiating pleasure, not fear.

The girl was mumbling behind what appeared to be a silk tie wrapped snugly around her head, gagging her. The man, who had obviously been working the girl over, hopped off the bed and was now standing in front of Kitty, attempting to shield her. He was as naked as the day he’d been born and staring at Penny as if she’d lost her mind, which she was coming to believe might be true.

She couldn’t remember a time when she’d been more embarrassed. Not even Will’s treatment of her earlier compared to this. The sound of Will’s booted feet heavy on the wooden floor snapped Penny out of her troubled thoughts, a groan slipping from between her too-dry lips.



"Forgive me," she addressed them both then felt the need to explain. "I thought she was being harmed."

The large man still standing in front of the bed seemed to relax a little. He actually chuckled then. He'd opened his mouth to speak when Will finally made it to the open doorway. She couldn't bear to look at him or anyone else for that matter. "I'm going to retire for the night. Will, please see this man gets his money back."

Penny could hear words being murmured as she walked away but didn't want to think too much about what was being said. She felt like an idiot and didn't care for it one bit. Penny wasn't used to failing or feeling sorry for herself. It seemed she was doing both right now.

Will's knock was curt. He didn't wait for her to answer before opening the door and allowing himself entrance to her room. Instead of berating her right away as she expected, he turned and stared at the door for a minute.

"Next time I come up here this had better be locked."

Penny rammed a hand into her hair, giving it a pull at the temple. He was going to drive her mad, she was sure of it. Why couldn't he be like other men? Why did he have to act as if he cared when the only reason he even bothered was because he'd made a promise to her mother?

"I'm not going to have this argument with you, Will." He opened his mouth to speak but she cut him off. "It's bad enough I interrupted..." She waved her hands in the air unsure of what it was she'd broken up.

"Not everyone has sex the same way, Penny."

"Is that what they were doing?" She knew it was, but for some reason couldn't quite wrap her mind around the hows or whys of it. Neither could she understand how seeing Kitty all bound and at the big man's mercy made her insides flutter with excitement and her skin tingle.

Will chuckled. "Some people like being helpless during sex, some like either being in complete control or giving it up, and some even like pain with their pleasure. I would have to say Kitty likes most of it."

"I'm not sure I understand." Hell, Penny wasn't sure she wanted to. She had been fine in thinking she was the nonsexual type.

When Will sat beside her on the bed, his scent and warmth radiating around her, she was sure frigid wasn't at all what she felt. "How did you feel when I spanked you?"

"Angry."

His mouth crooked at the corner. "Besides that. How did your skin feel where my hand had landed?"

Penny thought about for a second. "Hot."

Something in his face changed. Had she not been watching him, she never would have noticed. He was looking at her as if she were a meal to be offered up before royalty and he just happened to be the king. Hastily she added, "I don't think Kitty was experiencing the same sensations I was when you attacked me earlier." There, that should put him in his place, she thought with a bit of smug satisfaction.

Will didn't take the bait as she'd hoped. "An erotic spanking isn't nearly the same as the one you got for putting yourself in danger today. Although, I bet if you were really honest with yourself you would see even as punishment the spanking I gave you was exciting." He leaned closer, nipping her lower lip. His breath was hot and moist against her lips when he pulled back enough to speak. "I bet if I had checked you would have been wet and ready for me."

Indignation reared its ugly head. She wanted to deny his claim just on moral grounds alone but knew she would be lying to the both of them so fell back on anger instead. "Well, you didn't and there won't be another chance so you might as well forget it."

He rose slowly from his seated position on the edge of her bed. His legs unfolded, long and lean, before her eyes only to be replaced by his groin. It was obvious he was

hard and ready. Penny didn't know where to look, which didn't matter since she couldn't seem to pull her gaze from his turgid length anyway. "We'll see, baby. We'll see," he warned as he left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Will followed her with his gaze as he worked scrubbing down the bar. She flitted around the room, preparing things for opening, and yet again he wondered exactly what it was about her that made him want her more than his next meal. Never before had he really considered settling down. For years he'd been paying on a small spread outside of town but never with the thought of settling a wife there or rearing children as most would do. Instead he'd paid someone to oversee the place while he stayed on at Penelope's. Under normal circumstances, he only made the trip to see firsthand how things were going five or six times a year.

Now though, he had an overwhelming urge to see Penny ripe with his child growing inside her belly while she busied herself in the kitchen of their ranch house. He wanted to wake next to her every morning and fall asleep, skin to skin, beside her every night. All of a sudden he wanted it all.

"Stop looking at me like that." Irritation laced her voice. Will couldn't help but smile.

"Like what?"

This time she rolled her eyes. Beautiful eyes. Anyone who had thought for a moment she was a man had to be absolutely insane. When she finally answered, her cheeks were pink and her voice a mere whisper. "Like you're hungry for me."

Will moved slowly toward her. When they were toe-to-toe, he reached out and with one finger and tilted her chin. Her swift intake of breath reverberated down his spine, racing out to every nerve ending. "That's because I am hungry for you, Penny. More than you can even imagine."

"Why?"

She was always so direct and to the point. Unlike most women, there was not a coy, lash-fluttering bone in her curvy little body. Will decided the only way to be with her was complete honesty. "Damned if I know, sweetheart. What I can tell you though is it has nothing to do with any promise I made to your ma."

When Penny opened her mouth, Will motioned for her to keep quiet. "I'm not done. I made promises to your ma because I cared deeply for her as a friend, even a mother figure if you will. None of that has a thing to do with the reasons I want you to stay."

"Why then?" Her eyes were wide, unsure yet curious.

"I want you to stay because we like being around each other."

She tipped her head to the side, her curls falling against the soft flesh of her cheek as she did so. "You make it sound so simple."

Will leaned down, stopping only when his lips grazed hers. "That's because it is. All you have to do is agree."

It was as if his words snapped her out of some sort of trance. Penny backed away from him. "It wouldn't be fair to you if I did."

Now he was the one curious. There was nothing she could say that could make him think loving every inch of her bare flesh was a bad idea. "And why is that?"

A slight frown marred her pretty mouth. It was obvious to Will that Penny had no desire to move forward with the conversation. He didn't really care. Unless they continued, there was no way they could settle things. He waited.

Penny walked around him then sat on a chair at one of the empty tables. She didn't look up when he sat beside her. Instead, she continued to stare at her tightly clasped hands. Penny must have realized what she was doing because she unclasped her fingers and rested them on the arms of the chair then looked up at Will.

"I don't like how you constantly push for more than I'm willing to give." She didn't whine or sound angry. To him she was merely stating fact.

"I know." There was really nothing else he could say.

"And yet you keep doing so." She turned her head from him for a minute, as if gathering her thoughts. "I've cared for myself for a very long time and in a manner most women are not accustomed to, so I am not at all used to being coddled or treated as less than an equal." She took a deep breath before going on. "In that time, I have had experiences, enough to prove to me I have no desire to be intimate with a man much less submit myself to him in any other way."

Her last sentence had Will seeing red. He wanted to tear someone limb from limb. "You've been harmed? In a sexual way?" He could tell by the color of her cheeks she was suffering from embarrassment, but he had to know. He would also need to find out who so he could kill the man.

Penny's mouth formed a perfect little O. "Goodness no!" She seemed flustered.

Relief washed over Will, but now he was thoroughly confused. "You're going to have to spell it out for me, sweetheart. I understand you're used to caring for yourself and my high-handed ways put a kink in your knickers. That we can deal with. Beyond that, I haven't a clue what you mean."

She swallowed hard, her throat working and driving him mad with lust in the process. Will longed to bite the tender skin of her neck and listen to her whimper as he buried his cock balls-deep into her warmth.

"I'm frigid."

Will couldn't help it, he laughed. Penny looked at him, and for a moment, he was glad she had not yet donned either her gun or whip. He'd obviously angered her. "I'm sorry." He pushed his chair back and stood until he towered over where Penny was still seated. The simple movement had her pulse quickening. He could see it through the tanned skin at the base of her neck. "There is not a frigid bone in your body, Penny." He turned her, chair and all, until they were facing each other, causing Penny to gasp in alarm. With his hands grasping each chair arm, he effectively trapped her into her seat. "When we're close, your pupils get so big I can hardly see the color of your eyes and your breath comes quick."

Will leaned in for a kiss then, one to curl their toes, it was so thorough. His tongue tasted her mouth and lips. His teeth nipped the flesh of her neck just the way he'd been aching to do. He moved a hand, trailing it over her throat and collarbone until he reached the uppermost swell of her breast. He couldn't help but smile. She was wearing a corset and it did lovely things to her chest. He idly wondered who had laced her up. He planned to be the one to do so in the not-so-distant future. By the time he was finished, her trembling hands clutched his waist, pulling him in closer.

To slow things down, Will ran his hands up and down her arms, stopping often to raise her fingers to his lips for soothing kisses. When her eyes finally fluttered open to his gaze, he peered intently at her. Will wanted to be sure she was coherent enough to understand what he was about to say.

"Whoever said you were frigid must have been an idiot to let you go. You are a very sensual woman, sweetheart. Far from frigid. And I'm no idiot." With that said, he returned to scrubbing down the marred surface of the bar.

## **Chapter Four**

Penny's heart pounded against her ribs. To her ears it sounded as loud as a stampede over the grassy plains and felt just as wild. He was right even if she didn't want to admit it. He made her feel anything but frigid. He made her feel alive and carefree in a way she had never been allowed. His touch made her yearn for more and his taste had the ability to make her mouth water.

The sound of his voice as he talked, telling her he wanted her, had run over her skin like honey warmed by the sun. If he made her feel such wonderful things, why then could he also get her ire up like no one else?

He was a bossy, overbearing and a seemingly overprotective man, and she was beginning to want him as much as he professed to want her. Will kept his gaze pinned on her. Penny still sat where he'd left her only moments ago, her hands shaking like a woman unused to the advances of a man. Of course she was such a woman. Instead of dancing her nights away at parties and learning the finer points of seduction, she'd been living her life as a man on the dusty byways across the West with nothing more than a six team to keep her company.

In many ways, it was a better life. She'd had few troubles. Nothing more than keeping her beautiful crimson Concord Coach in tiptop shape and getting her passengers and cargo to the next destination. There was a responsibility to herself first and foremost. She wasn't attached to any one person or place. She'd always thought herself free because of it, but now she couldn't help but wonder.

Penny knew she would never make a good wife and being a mother was definitely not something she had ever envisioned herself as. But if she could enjoy and even be good at loving a man's body, then why shouldn't she go for it? After all, in the eyes of society at large, she was a whore because of her newly chosen profession.

Decision made, Penny scooted her chair back and stood. With a seductive sway to her step, she sauntered over to Will.

He straightened from the task at hand to watch her but said nothing. Just waited. Coy wasn't something Penny was any good at so she decided to go for blunt.

"I want you too."

Will remained calm at her words. He merely arched a bushy brow. After a moment of silence he spoke. "What do you think we should do about it?"

"I think we should do whatever feels good. I want you to teach me, to show me how to enjoy being with a man."

Something about her words changed his stance. The muscles in his arms flexed, his jaw growing taut. He leaned into her space then. He had a bad habit of doing so. "Not just any man, Penny. Me and only me. Do you understand?"

He got wound tight in a hurry where she was concerned. Penny wasn't sure whether to be flattered or disturbed over the fact. She touched his chest through the worn fabric of his shirt. "No promises, Will. It's not fair to either of us."

His arms banded around her waist, tightening when she would have put even a few inches between them. "Oh, we'll have promises all right. We'll have a lifetime of them said in front of a preacher. You mark my words."

Penny couldn't help but chuckle. He had a one-track mind. "I won't marry you, Will. I won't take the chance of locking you into a marriage with me without knowing if I can please you."

"You didn't say anything about my satisfying you."

The man had to be crazy. She looked over his face. His skin tanned dark, bushy brows over deep-set eyes that could be so intense as to stare a hole right through her. His lips were thin but soft and felt right against hers. "I have no doubts where you're concerned."



He winked, a smile crooking his mouth. "Thank you, sweetheart. I guess we're even then."

"So we're really going to do this then?"

"I'm ready when you are."

Her throat was dry, her breath coming fast and shallow. The thought of him touching her all over, thrusting himself deep within her, was enough to have Penny's insides clench with desire.

"I want you to promise me something." Her hands shook a bit at the thought of what she was about to ask.

"I'll try."

"I want you to teach me to please you. To do things with you and to you the way you like." She couldn't explain it even to herself, but something deep inside told Penny that Will didn't enjoy a plain ole romp in the dark. If they were going to do this she wanted to do it right so they could both enjoy the experience to the fullest.

A strange look came over his face. He loosened his grip, allowing her a bit of space. The hard length of his cock still lay between them, hot and thick even through the snug denims he wore. Penny wanted to crowd him, to all but climb his body just to feel it pressed against her again.

"And what if I like my lovin' different? What if I want to tie you up and spank your ass while I take you?"

Oh god! She was going to pass out for sure. She couldn't seem to catch her breath. Stupid corset! Was he saying what she thought he was saying? Did he really want to do some of the same things to her she'd witnessed last night in her rush to save Kitty?

"Do you?" The words were such a low whisper Penny had trouble hearing herself.

Will once again took her mouth, tasting her with his tongue then biting at her lips with his teeth. He tasted of darkness and light as if both warred inside him. When he

released her mouth, they were both breathless, Penny once again cursing the infernal corset she'd strapped herself into for the day.

"I do."

"What if I don't like it?" The words full of doubt slipped out without thought.

"You won't know unless you try." He smiled at her again, a reassuring curve of his mouth, full of charm and understanding. "I'm not worried."

"I won't be either then." It was a lie. The twinkle in Will's eyes told her he knew it as well as she did.

"Good girl."

"Tonight then?" She had to know, and at the same time, prayed he wouldn't make her wait or she might very well lose her nerve.

"You can count on it. We'll see how the night goes and when I'm ready I'll send you up to my room." Penny was going to argue. Why did he get to pick the time and place? She didn't get the chance to do so though before he swatted her behind. "Back to work."

*This could be a lot of fun if I don't kill him first,* Penny thought then did as he'd instructed.

Will could still clearly picture the irritated look on Penny's face as she'd stomped away. It was amusing as hell how much she fought anyone else having the upper hand and yet seemed to nearly melt at the thought of submitting to his every whim behind closed doors. They were going to have a very long and interesting life together.

The night seemed to be dragging on. He hoped like hell the place would clear out early. There was a chance he wasn't going to be able to wait if it didn't, which probably wouldn't go over too well if Will ended up carrying Penny up the stairs over his shoulder again.

From where he stood behind the bar, Will could see the entire room clearly. Penny was making rounds and checking on everything. She'd insisted. He warned her to stay within his sight. Of course, it was a warning she didn't heed. Damn stubborn woman!

As she came back into the main room, he drank her in with his gaze. She hadn't changed her clothes. It was sort of strange to see the madam of a place such as Penelope's work in day clothes instead of the finery Penelope used to don. Penny didn't seem the type to need nor enjoy frippery or baubles. Will was sure she would much rather be in a pair of denims and chambray shirt, as he was, instead of the serviceable calico skirts and blouse she had on now.

He'd personally like to see her in nothing but her birthday suit and planned to do just that very soon. Imagining his tanned, work-roughened hands against her pale inner thighs was something that had kept him awake nights since she'd arrived in town.

As if his thoughts beckoned to her, Penny turned toward him. A dimple winked at the corner of her mouth and her cheeks blushed a very becoming shade of pink. The way her hair curled around her face gave it a halo effect in the dimly lit interior. Will preferred her look over the severe buns most women wore. It was soft and silky, as if each curl might grasp on to his fingers as he buried his hands in it. From past experience, he knew how it would feel and he was getting antsy waiting.

Another hour passed and finally there were only a few stragglers left drinking and dancing. Will called over the professor, Jack Grange, who had just finished a song on the piano and was taking a break while chatting with Lona. Will noticed how her eyes sparked and she all but preened at Jack's attention. He couldn't help but wonder if there was something going on between the two of them.

Jack ambled over to Will in his slow but steady way that seemed in complete contrast with the starched white shirt he always wore. He was a strong man in both mind and body. Will had no idea what was in his past and didn't particularly care. Jack had a look about him that requested respect and promised retribution if not given. He was a very large, quiet person and a good employee. He played the piano as if born to it

and helped keep the girls safe. He'd been a blessing sent from above as far as Will was concerned. On more than one occasion, Will was glad they were on friendly terms. Jack was not a man he'd want as an enemy.

"What can I do for you, boss?"

"Close up after the last person leaves. I'll be down later to finish up."

Will didn't give any other information than needed and was asked no questions in return, even though it was obvious by the look in Jack's eyes he was curious. "Sure thing."

With that little problem solved, Will rounded the bar, picking up glasses off tables as he made his way across the room toward Penny. Before he'd even reached her he could smell the scent of her lilac soap. He was amazed that in a room full of smoke and bodies she could still smell as fresh as a spring morning.

Reaching into his pocket, Will retrieved the key to his room. He palmed it for a second while studying Penny's features. Her eyes shone with what he hoped was excitement. "Go on up and wait for me." He handed her the key, encompassing her hand in his until her gaze snapped up and he had her full attention. "And leave your clothes on. I want to watch you undress."

Her throat worked to swallow. The sight, her nervousness turned Will on more than he cared to admit. Penny didn't say anything at first. When he finally released her hand, she moved closer. Standing on her tiptoes, she leaned in close enough so only he could hear. "Only if I get to watch you undress too."

She was outrageously forward. Will was beginning to love that about her. "It would be my pleasure, darlin'." He knew the smile crossing his face was lascivious. He added in a wink in order to see her blush deepen. "Now go on with you. I'll be up shortly."

Will knew they could walk up together. Their interaction had been witnessed by everyone in the place and he was being greeted only by smiles. The problem was, if he followed Penny up the stairs he would take her up against the wall as soon as they crossed the threshold. That was how tight she had him wound. His cock ached for the

depths of her sweet pussy. It was going to take at least a lifetime of loving before he was able to get her out of his system. Now Will just needed to get Penny to agree to spend a lifetime with him.

After rinsing and drying the glasses he'd cleared off the tables, Will felt calm enough to head upstairs. He was nervous himself. A new feeling for a man who worked his entire adult life in a whorehouse. He entered his room to find Penny standing with her back to the door, staring out the window.

"If you've decided to change your mind now would be the time to tell me."

She turned at the sound of his voice, a small smile playing at one corner of her mouth. Her fingers went, as if drawn, to the top button of her blouse, sliding it loose from its mooring. "I've no desire to change my mind."

Penny walked toward him then, circling his body close enough so her scent swirled around him but not so close he could feel her touch. He stood stock-still, afraid to move too fast and scare her. When she was at his back, she stopped. The feel of her hands resting tentatively on his shoulders was a sensation he enjoyed very much.

Will felt her breath, warm and sweet, on the back of his neck, causing goose bumps to rise on his skin. "I don't understand why I want you when I've wanted no other but I'm not going to fight it."

She moved around to the front of him and Will could wait no more. He pulled her in, tucking her close to kiss her. He'd never really been one for kissing, but there was something about Penny's mouth that had him rethinking his ways. He liked the intimacy of feeling her lips pressed to his. Her taste was always sweet as if she'd just finished sucking on a stick of candy.

Thoughts of her cheeks hollowed out from sucking much more than a stick of candy hit Will full force. It was a good thing Penny had the presence of mind to break the kiss or he might have devoured her on the spot.

She backed away enough so he could see she'd been busily unbuttoning her blouse. The creamy tops of her breasts spilled over her corset. Her blouse was completely unbuttoned now but still tucked into the waistband of her skirt.

Her eyes were bright as she watched him watch her. "Shall I go on?"

He had a very sinful look to his eyes, Penny thought as she watched Will. He was a hungry man. Hungry for her, for what her clothes hid. It was a heady feeling, one she had not ever really experienced.

The only light in the room came from the oil lamp sitting on the small table beside Will's bed. It cast a shadow over the room, making him appear larger than any man she'd ever met. Penny wanted him in a way she had never wanted another man. He made her feel positively alive.

"No. Let me." Will moved forward, his hands outstretched in order to tug her shirt loose from the confines of her skirt. She could feel the warmth of his hands even through her clothes.

"I, ahh... I thought you wanted to watch me undress."

Will tilted his head to the side, a small smile crooking the corner of his mouth. "That was the plan, sweetheart. Problem is, I can't seem to keep my hands off you."

Penny could feel her cheeks heat. Will chuckled. "You look pretty in pink."

She couldn't help it, she giggled like a schoolgirl still in pigtails. "Stop that," she scolded, trying to sound stern.

It didn't work. Next he kissed the tip of her nose. "You taste good in pink too."

Penny began to tremble deep inside. She wanted to have a little fun, to be taught how to pleasure him and hopefully derive some for herself in the process, but this was shaping up to be more. Possibly much more. He made her feel things she'd never felt before and was not at all sure she'd ever wanted to experience.

Will didn't give her the time to say anything before he moved in so close their bodies touched intimately. The muscular length of his thigh was wedged high between her own legs, causing tiny spasms of pleasure to rock her insides. It took everything she had to keep her hands at her sides where they were.

His lips followed the line of her jaw. When he reached her neck, he began to nibble. Sometimes soft, sometimes sharp, he kept her on edge, never quite knowing which sensation might come next. He continued down the hollow of her throat, nipping and laving until she was nearly incoherent with need.

Penny felt his hands at her waist but couldn't quite care what he was doing. Soon her skirts were pooled at her feet, her overheated flesh bare. It did nothing to cool her ardor. She was still ablaze with need and desire.

Will lifted her out of the yards of fabric and placed her next to the bed. He watched her as he finally removed her shirt completely. When she reached behind her, struggling with the laces of her corset, he stayed her hand. "It stays on."

Why in the world would he want her to keep her corset on? Penny couldn't figure it out. Her state of confusion must have shown on her face.

"Turn around." Will didn't wait for her to comply before nudging her to do as he asked. She could feel him fiddling with the laces, but instead of loosening more, they tightened back up. "I love the way you look in a corset, your breasts all but spilling over." He placed his hands at her waist, turning her back toward him. When she was once again facing him, her corset laced snugly, he caressed the uppermost swell of her breasts then tugged until they both spilled free of their confines.

"Very nice."

Penny peered down at herself and figured she must be a lewd sight to see. It was rather unnerving how quickly he could push her off balance. If the look on Will's face was any indication he knew it as well.

"Kiss me."

For some reason Penny was shocked by the intensity in his voice. So far he had taken control of everything and now he wanted her to do the kissing. She wasn't quite sure where to start. It was going to be impossible to keep her hands to herself that much she knew for sure.

He was taller than she and so Penny had to go up on her tiptoes in order to reach his mouth. The position required she wrap her arms around his neck, which brought her nipples in direct contact with the fabric of his shirt. She pressed her lips to his, tentatively at first. He allowed her to explore him at her will.

His taste was magnificent, the texture of his tongue as he dueled with hers only added fuel to the fire. She needed more, so much more, but he was keeping his hands at his sides, just as she had earlier.

"Please touch me." Penny thought she would die if he didn't.

When he looked down into her eyes, his smile was warm and inviting. "I thought you'd never ask."

He backed her up a step until her boot-clad calves hit the bed, forcing her to sit. Penny wasn't sure what he would do next but kneeling between the thighs she was unconsciously squeezing closed was not it.

"Open for me, sweetheart."

He couldn't expect her to expose herself to him so blatantly. "You can't mean to —"

His look was direct, compelling. He cut her off. "Of course I can. Now open for me. I've been dying to taste you since the day you walked back in to Penelope's."

Penny didn't think she could do it. Her heart was racing, her mind going right along with it. It would make things much easier if he would do it for her, leaving her little choice in the matter, but he didn't. Instead, he just watched her, waiting, one dark brow arched. His eyes burned with the desire she felt, his mouth soothing her with a smile.



"You can do it, Penny. You know you want to give me everything. You wanted to learn how I like my lovin'. Well, I like my lovin' my way. Do as I ask and I can guarantee you'll never regret a moment of it."

The sound of his voice sent shivers up her spine. The deep timbre, the erotic words, they all worked together and before Penny was even aware of the movement, her thighs parted for his pleasure.

"Good girl, sweetheart."

He leaned in close, inhaling deep, taking in her scent. When he released his pent-up breath, its moist warmth shot over her quivering flesh. Even the thought of his mouth so close to her was too much. When he licked her slick folds in one long swipe, her hips bucked. Penny threw her head back as her insides spasmed, shocking her to her toes. He had hardly even touched her yet and she already knew more pleasure than ever before.

In that instant Penny knew she was in deep trouble.

She tasted better than he could have imagined. Warm and wet and ready for him, she exuded passion in every move of her body, every puffing breath she took. When she orgasmed from nothing more than their closeness and a swipe of his tongue, Will knew she was going to be a fun ride and very possibly even the death of him.

"Beautiful."

She looked up at him then, her face glowing with perspiration, her cheeks flushed with arousal. Tiny tendrils of hair stuck to the side of her cheek, making her appear even more wanton. It was a look he could get very used to seeing every day.

"Oh my." The words left her lips on a whisper when he lifted her thighs, settling her legs on his shoulders.

Will was still fully clothed, something he planned to remedy as soon as he had the chance to taste more of the pretty pink pussy before him.

Will used his thumbs to part her folds then stroked the flesh with his tongue. She gave a rumbling purr. He continued until she was writhing beneath him, gasping for breath. Whether from the excitement of his tongue, the tightness of her corset or both, he did not know. Either way, the sounds she made worked for him, making his cock harden and length in eagerness for the feel of her clasped around the turgid length.

Bypassing her clit time and again only made her squirm more. He moved closer and closer to the tiny bundle of nerves but never quite paid it the homage he was sure she wanted or needed to climax again.

“Now, Will. Do something!”

Demanding baggage. “Do what?” He murmured the words against her heated flesh. “How about this?” He plunged first one then two fingers knuckle-deep into her heated entrance.

“Oh yes. Yes. Yessss!”

She matched his fingers, stroke for stroke, any embarrassment or insecurity she’d felt early on was obviously long forgotten. There was something about a woman in the throes of passion, her body so needy and ready that she would do anything he wanted, that Will craved.

She ground herself on his fingers, three now, pumping up and down, searching for ecstasy. Will used her juices to lubricate a finger of his other hand then proceeded to rub the tiny pucker of her nether hole. She stiffened slightly at the new sensation, but the movement of his fingers still buried in her pussy didn’t allow her to stop.

“One day I’m going to have you here, Penny.” He inserted the tip of his finger then quickly retreated. Her pussy clamped down, tiny spasms rolling through her inner muscles. She was close. “First I’ll spank your ass until it glows red and then I’ll tie you up so you’ll barely be able to move an inch.” He swiped his tongue ever so lightly across her engorged clit before continuing. “And after I have you tied with your pretty pink ass high in the air, I’ll push my cock in slowly, inch by inch, until you scream my name.”

Every word he spoke brought her closer to the edge. Her pussy was flooding his fingers. She never stopped moving her hips, begging for more with each thrust. It was his mouth on her clit, sucking, which finally sent her over the edge.

Penny's keening cry filled the room and still he did not stop. It wasn't until she begged prettily that Will pulled his mouth from her core, licking his lips.

She didn't budge an inch when he removed her boots and settled her further on the bed. It wasn't until he began undressing that she even opened her eyes.

"Come help me off with my boots." He waited to see if she would balk at his command. When she roused her sated body to do as asked, Will knew the key to keeping her biddable. Sex. He said as much to Penny who scoffed and rolled her eyes.

"Certainly wouldn't hurt to give it a try though," she added from the bed again, a mischievous glint in her eye.

Will chuckled as he removed his clothing with Penny watching his every move. When finished, he stood there for a minute, stroking his cock, drinking in the sight of her naked body lounging upon his bed.

"So, cowboy, you standing there all night, or are you gonna fuck me?"

Good god! He'd never heard her curse before and even though her words turned him on, Will didn't like such filth coming from her mouth. "I'm going to fuck you all right. I'm going to spank you too if I ever hear that word cross your lips again. Not very ladylike at all, sweetheart."

She was laughing and shaking her head. "If there is one thing I'm not worried about, it's acting ladylike. Take me or leave me, your choice, but don't try to change me."

Will charged the bed, reveling in her squeal of shock when he toppled over on top of her, pinning her to the mattress with his weight. "I'm going to take you, Penelope Jean Parker, and I'm going to keep you."

He didn't give her time to argue. In one swift thrust, he was buried balls-deep in the overly tight confines of her warm and welcoming pussy. "By god, you're tight!" He stilled after sinking his full length, in order to allow her body to adjust. He was going to ask if she was okay but didn't have to. Her nails raked his back, her heels pushing into his ass as she moved beneath him.

Will flexed his hips, pressing her even farther into the mattress. Penny gasped. He was deep and hard inside her. As deep as he'd ever been in a woman. They fit together perfectly. He retreated then plunged home again. His body was struggling. He wanted to nail her hard and fast, to fuck her as if it didn't matter whether she enjoyed herself or not. Only he couldn't. He wanted to know everything she was thinking.

"How do you want me?" Will grunted the question.

She was still struggling beneath him, moving her hips, urging him on. Will grasped her hands then laid them flat on either side of her head, securing them with the weight of his own. When she still bucked against him, he bit her neck and growled low in his throat. His actions stopped her movements instantly. Her whimper of protest only caused his cock to ache more. He was coiled tight and ready to spring.

"How do you want me?" he repeated the question, unsure what he'd do if she wanted a slow, sweet fuck.

When Penny looked up at him, Will sucked in a breath. What he saw in her eyes was a mixture of excitement and trust. "I want all of you. I want you to show me, to teach me."

It was exactly what he'd wanted, hoped and prayed to hear. "Then hold on, sweetheart."

## **Chapter Five**

The man was unstoppable, Penny thought as she regrouped after yet another orgasm. Her body hummed with hunger even though she felt sated. He was hard and buried deep within her. This new position, with her knees all but pinned to her ears was her favorite so far.

Will leaned over her, his face glorious-looking in the flickering lamplight, while pinching her nipples with his very talented fingers. Every now and again he would apply too much pressure, enough so she gasped or screamed and tried to buck him off. It was a challenge Will seemed to revel in, one Penny learned only made the coming orgasm all the more intense.

The look on his face changed subtly. His brows furrowed and his body stilled. Penny wanted to cry. She had been so very close again.

"Nooo," she sobbed when he withdrew.

Will swatted her thigh, the blow stinging against her heated flesh. "My turn, greedy."

Penny hated not knowing what to do next. Her inexperience once again reared its ugly head. "What do you...umm..." She could feel a blush rising up her cheeks and cursed it.

"I want your mouth on me."

Penny couldn't help but be excited. She'd witnessed such an act on many occasions but had not ever participated personally. Then it struck her. "Will you...in my mouth, I mean?"

His stare bore into hers. "I will only spill my seed down your throat or on your body until you agree to marry me. I want no child of mine to be called bastard."

“Oh.” She hadn’t really thought too much about prevention.

“Now come here, woman. I want you on your back, your head hanging slightly over the end of the mattress.”

It seemed like a very strange position for such an act. Penny had only seen such goings-on in which the woman was on her knees in front of the man, but she did as he suggested. She snorted inwardly, suggested—hell, it had been a command, no way around it.

She moved into position then waited to see what Will planned. When he came up to her, Penny learned his bed was the perfect height. His cock was at the level of her mouth, which she opened, hungrily awaiting his length.

He felt hot and slightly damp to her lips. His essence was salty and she couldn’t help but wonder how much of what she tasted was her own essence.

“That’s it, sweetheart, relax and let me in.”

He could probably soothe a bear with a sore paw. His voice had a quality to it that spoke volumes. She hummed in her throat while concentrating to breathe through her nose. It was all so new, so different and exciting.

When he leaned over her, his length slipped deeper into her throat, gagging her for a moment. Penny felt her cheeks redden at the noises she made. Will’s only response was a low growl. Did that mean he liked them? Penny experimented again with a low grunt as the head of his shaft stroked her throat once again.

He did like them. It was quite a revelation such a little thing as the noises she made could make such a big impact on a man. Will’s next action had her making more than mere noise, the feel of his tongue softly stroking her nether lips had Penny wild with heat.

Never before had she realized it could be done this way. Them pleasuring one another with their mouths simultaneously. It was a fabulous feeling, but she couldn’t talk to tell him how much she was enjoying it with his cock pistoning in and out of her mouth.

Penny knew the minute Will's body tensed he was getting ready to spill his seed in her mouth. She was eager to taste him. It was something she had always been curious about but had never thought to have the chance to try.

"Take me, Penny." His voice was strained. "Wrap your sweet lips around my cock and take everything I have to give."

The way he moved became methodical, never missing a beat as he drilled into the back of her throat, stretching her lips, burying himself balls-deep into the moist heat of her mouth.

He stilled against her at the same time a burst of flavor coated her tongue. She continued swallowing until she was sure he had spent himself then inhaled deeply, trying to catch her breath.

It seemed Will was also finished but not quite yet done with her. He once again began licking her most intimate place, only this time it seemed he was more focused, intent on a specific goal. And from the way Penny's body hummed to life all over again, she couldn't be happier.

He pulled his flaccid shaft from her mouth, moving up higher on her body until his thighs nearly straddled her shoulders instead of her head. It put him in the perfect position for Penny to trail her fingertips across the ghost-white flesh of his behind.

She'd never really paid much attention to that part of a man's anatomy but knew from the way muscles rolled and bunched beneath skin that Will was a fine specimen indeed. And, boy, was he ever talented with his tongue. Going from light flicks to long licks, never quite keeping the same pace or pressure had her teetering on edge again.

"Oh god. Please, Will! More!"

His only response was to tighten his grip on her thighs. By the time the last in a long line of orgasms ripped through her shuddering body, Penny was unable to move.

"I think you've broken me."

Will chuckled. "Well, sweetheart, you look mighty fine for a broken woman." He gently lifted her just enough to center her on the bed.

Pouring water from a large-mouth pitcher into its matching basin, Will then dipped a square of cloth into the water. Penny watched him, her curiosity piqued. When he moved back toward the bed, a sinking feeling settled in the pit of her stomach.

He knelt on the bed beside her. There was no way in hell the man was going to wash her like a babe still in swaddling cloths. The only problem was, Penny couldn't seem to get her limbs to work.

"Hand it to me, and when you turn your back, I'll do it." Just as she feared, he didn't even bother to acknowledge she'd spoken so much as a word to him. "I can clean myself."

His hand stopped on its trek toward her. "I'm sure you can, but you won't. Now turn over onto your stomach so I can get you out of this corset." That she could do. The only thing she could see it was good for so far was making Will's gaze stray to her breasts.

After he was finished, he once again picked up the damp cloth. "Now put your hands over your head and leave them there until I'm done."

She wanted to bash his head in with the heaviest of cast iron skillets. Clenching her legs together the best she could, Penny made no move to do as asked. "I will not!"

The grasp of his hand on her ankle stopped her before she managed to move an inch. The steel in his voice as he spoke warned of more than even his words could.

"You will or I'll tie them. I dirtied you, I intend to clean you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Will never made it downstairs to finish his duties. Instead, he crawled from the warmth of his bed where Penny lay curled on her side, still gloriously nude at dawn the next morning. It was Sunday, the slowest day of the week. If anything at all happened it wouldn't be until late, giving Will time for an afternoon rest if he deemed it necessary.



Penny was on his every thought. She managed to turn everything into a battle of wills between them. At first, Will thought it might get old, could very well give him second thoughts on whether or not he really wanted to marry her.

The more they clashed, the more he felt challenged by her. He didn't want to bend her to his ways the way most men did, with force and fear. No, he wanted to see Penny's wild spirit, he wanted to see the struggle and feel her soften against him as the realization he was her man and would care for and protect her at all costs finally sank in.

He was well aware she could take care of herself. He, however, didn't want her to have to. As far as Will was concerned that was his job and anyone who tried to take it away from him would rue the day, including Penny herself.

Will rubbed his palms together in anticipation of their next vie for position. He could hardly wait.

Looking no worse for wear from their long night, Penny made her way down the stairs. "Morning." A blush accompanied her greeting.

Will wasn't about to let her act as if nothing had taken place between them. Pulling her into his arms, he kissed her lightly on the lips, rubbing the tip of her nose with his own. "Morning, sunshine. Coffee?"

"Yes, thank you."

She looked around the room then to him. "I heard someone moving around upstairs but don't see any of the girls."

Will really liked how protective Penny seemed of the girls who worked at Penelope's. It was fairly unheard of. Of course she was about as far from the average hoity-toity woman as a body could get. Her background also made her much less apt to judge than other women.

"They get all dressed up in their Sunday best and sit in that little patch of grass behind the church. Mostly just Lona and Kitty but sometimes the others join them. Kitty

loves listening to the music and so feels everyone else should as well. She's tried, at one time or another, to drag every girl over there."

He chuckled but could tell Penny was confused. It didn't take long before he knew why. "Whyever would they sit out back instead of going inside and joining in on the music?"

"Oh, come on now, sweetheart. You know damn good and well the townsfolk wouldn't like having a whore in their church."

Penny jumped to her feet, all but upending the chair she'd occupied to drink her coffee. After several long strides, she turned around to pace back. "Has the preacher said they can't do their praying in the church like everyone else?"

Damn! Will could feel a storm brewing. He needed to be careful with his words. It seemed once she sank her teeth into an idea, it was near impossible to get her to let loose. "From what I hear, there is a new preacher man in town. I've not had the pleasure of meeting him."

She didn't say a word in answer but an hour later when the girls made their way through the front door Will could tell she was still mulling his words over.

Kitty had on a pretty yellow calico dress and matching bonnet. Her face was scrubbed clean, making her appear much younger. Her hair was chestnut brown with wide-set almond eyes to match. Unlike many in the West, Kitty's life was an open book. She didn't much care if others knew she'd been orphaned as a youngster, bringing herself up on the streets the best she could.

"Enjoy the singin' this morning, you two?" Will enjoyed hearing them chatter, knowing they had enjoyed themselves.

"We sure did," Lona said, eyeing Penny a bit warily. It was obvious even to Lona something was going on.

"The singing was divine. I swear some of those women sound like angels." This was from Kitty, who had a wide smile on her lips.

"Then why don't you go on inside and enjoy the music firsthand?"

*Oh no, Will thought. Here we go.*

Kitty giggled and Lona guffawed. "Why, Miss Penny. I ain't never heard of no whore going to church."

Penny didn't seem amused. "If you could, would you go?"

Kitty had finally stopped giggling. Her answer was honest in a way that made Will sad for the young woman's plight. "When I was a child, I sometimes slept nights in a church pew. The preacher man where I grew up was a good, old fellow, gave me food when he could and a place to sleep when the nights were cold. He prayed with me and preached to me without preaching at me. His look on things was different than most, you see. He didn't believe god wished to be feared. I've met some since I wouldn't give a glass of water to if their hair was on fire." Kitty laughed at the thought. "Not very charitable, I know. I don't think I could go sit in that church and keep my chin up while all those folks look down on me, so I'm content enough to just listen from the back and pray to god on my own time and in my own way."

Will watched as Penny struggled to keep her emotions buried. Her plight was made harder when Kitty reached out a hand in thanks. Lona, having known Penny since she was a girl herself, had no problem pulling her into a hug. "You are as good a woman as your mother was, Penny."

They had no sooner headed up the stairs than Penny was out the door, whip at her side, wide-brimmed hat covering her head. Her booted feet rang loud on the wood plank sidewalk as she strode toward the stables.

"Where the hell are you going?" Will already knew but was praying he was wrong.

"To get Poncho."

"Going to see the preacher man, I assume."

Without looking over her shoulder, she answered, "You assume correctly."

Dust billowed from the hem of her skirts as she crossed the street. Surefooted and in a hurry, without slowing her pace at all, Penny headed toward the stables.

“Damn, I was afraid of that.”

## **Chapter Six**

It only took a few minutes before a stable lad had Poncho saddled and Penny was on her way to the church. She could have walked the distance easily and normally would have, but riding Poncho would get her there faster.

She'd seen much injustice in her life but that didn't mean she had to get used to it. Normally, she didn't allow herself to get riled up. Instead, she did what needed to be done in order to help and possibly even set things right. She wasn't so sure either would happen in this case, but she was damn sure going to try to find a middle ground somehow.

Will was behind her. Penny knew it without even looking. His presence could be felt in her gut. Like a beacon in the night, he attracted her. He'd probably have plenty to say about her storming off but she couldn't care just yet. There would be plenty of time to deal with him after the fact. Right now, she had a preacher man to talk to. All the way there, Penny prayed he wasn't the spitting fire-and-brimstone type.

People still milled around the front yard of the church. Some loading their families up in wagons, some walking arm in arm toward the park, picnic baskets in hand. Penny sat astride Poncho and waited patiently until every last soul was gone except for the preacher, who stood at the door, his hand up high, blocking the sun.

After dismounting, she tied Poncho to a hitching post at the side of the church and motioned for Will to stay where he was. His scowl was uncomfortably obvious and would more than likely only get worse. Penny sighed. Damn stubborn men.

"You look like a woman with a lot on your mind." The preacher's voice was raspy, not at all what she would have expected. He was of average height with a lanky build and had the reddest hair she'd ever seen. It wasn't his hair, however, that caught her

attention. It was his eyes. They were clover green and old in a way that did not match his age.

A slight scar marred his left cheek just below the eye but didn't take away from his looks. He wasn't handsome in a traditional way by any stretch of the imagination but he was attractive. His lips curved into some semblance of a smile, almost as if unused to such an act.

"Is there something I can help you with, miss?"

Penny stopped her perusal of the man. There was something about him, something different, but something told her he could be trusted and would be fair when it came to dealing with her girls. "The name is Penny Parker but please call me Penny."

"Well enough. I'm Pastor Nelson Wilson." He stuck out his hand for Penny to shake. It wasn't smooth like that of a man who spent all his time thumbing through a bible. It was calloused and work-roughened as much as any old cowhand she'd ever met.

"Nice to meet you." And it was a true pleasure. She immediately liked the man and didn't hesitate to show him with a smile. Instead of the anger she felt before reaching the church, Penny became calm and felt assured things would work out fine.

"Likewise. Now why don't you tell me what's troubling you?"

There was no sense in beating around the bush. "I'm part owner of Penelope's Pleasure Emporium." She could tell her words surprised him but there was no censure in his gaze and he didn't say a word. "Some of my girls head over every Sunday and listen to the preaching and singing from behind the church."

"And you'd prefer if they were invited inside?" His eyes crinkled at the corner and Penny had a feeling this was as close to a laugh as he had.

"I would, but I don't think the girls would accept the offer." He didn't ask why but she could tell he was thinking.

"Did you have something else in mind then?" He was straightforward with his questions, a trait Penny respected.

"Well, I once heard of a church out West where they put up a partition for those who weren't included in society so they could still participate."

Pastor Wilson nodded his head and scratched his chin. "That could work. Another option could be for me to come to Penelope's and say my words there."

Now it was Penny's turn to be shocked. "You would do that?"

"I would." His spoke simply, his meaning clear. He wasn't a judgmental man and would share the gospel with anyone willing to listen.

"I'll talk to my girls. They like the singing so that might make a difference in their decision."

"I could bring a few hymnal books if that helps and you could ask your man to play the piano, but the decision is yours. Either way works for me. You just let me know."

Penny was ecstatic by what they had managed to accomplish. Grasping his hand, she pumped it enthusiastically. "Thank you so much. This will mean a great deal to my girls, especially Kitty."

His visage changed, going from somewhat cheerful to intense, in the blink of an eye. "A word of warning, if you will?" As a question it was obvious to Penny it was rhetorical. He was going to say what he had to say whether she liked it or not. "I will offer each and every one of your girls the opportunity to leave the life in which they currently live."

Now she knew it for sure. The man was a saint. "I wouldn't expect any less from you, Pastor Wilson. I actually did the same myself the first time I met the girls."

"Exactly how did you end up in the business, Penny? If I might say, you don't look like any brothel owner I've ever known."

Sadness crept in at the reminder of her mother's death. "I guess you could say I was born into it although Mother sent me away to school Back East as soon as I started growing."

He didn't say a word, merely nodded. Penny took the time to once again thank him before heading back to where Poncho stood, pawing the ground, anxiously waiting for her. After mounting, she urged Poncho to a walk and met up with Will.

"I can see you didn't have to use your whip." His scowl was even more fierce.

"Why, William Langtry! I would never take my whip to a man of god." How could he even speculate on such a thing?

"Don't get all indignant with me, sweetheart. You wouldn't hesitate to take your whip to anyone if you saw fit to do so." He urged his mount to a walk, grumbling the entire way back to Penelope's. Penny only caught a snippet here and there but they were often punctuated with curses about stubborn women.

She couldn't help but laugh.

She was enough to drive any man to drink and that was exactly what he planned to do as soon as he got close enough to the long, scarred bar dominating the main room. He passed by Lona and the girls without a glance. They were all huddled together, whispering as women were prone to.

"Damn it." Will grumbled once again, not worrying about keeping his voice low enough for those around him not to hear.

Hell, the stubborn-as-a-mule woman belonged to him whether she thought so or not. He poured two fingers of whiskey with a shaky hand. Staring down at the slight tremble, he felt his mood sour even further. Every time she tore off after someone, her temper in a fiery fierce torrent, he was going to react the same way and tear off after her. He assumed it was the way life was going to be from now on. Unless he could break her of such a terrible habit.



The only other thing he could think to do was to keep her beneath him all hours of the day and night. Possibly even tied to his bed, or hers—or better yet, theirs. Maybe then she'd be able to keep her ornery self out of trouble.

"I don't see why you're in such a mood," Penny huffed, watching him swallow the last of his whiskey then pour another.

"You wouldn't." He could feel a fight coming on. Welcomed it even as did his cock, which was already stirring behind the button fly of his britches.

"What in the hell is that supposed to mean!" Cheeks still flushed with indignation, his last comment only adding to it, Penny leaned over the bar toward him. Her chin was angled in a way he could only take as sheer stubbornness.

Will swigged his second serving of whiskey as if it were fresh lemonade before slamming the glass down on the bar, causing Penny to jump nearly out of her skin. He couldn't help it, he laughed. A full-blown belly laugh that drew the attention of every one of the girls. Penny was looking at him as if he'd lost his mind and he very well might have.

Leaning into the bar, Will gathered Penny's blouse at the throat just as he would a man he was about to punch. Only instead of punching her he used the fabric to tug her closer. Her gasp fueled his hunger and before she had the chance to protest his handling of her, his lips covered her mouth, taking, tormenting.

The only struggle to ensue was that of Penny trying to get closer only to come up against the width of the bar between them. Her lips tasted like fire and honey, damn near as good as her pussy had last night. Her tongue traced his, slick and wet. Their combined heat threatened to burn the place down.

When Penny tried to entwine her hands around his neck, nearly having to climb the bar to do so, Will put a stop to it. Grasping both her hands in his, he held them tight. It took every ounce of willpower he had, but after a few seconds, he managed to pull his mouth from hers. "You'll not touch me right now unless I give you permission to do so."

The pupils of her eyes were huge, her lips swollen and red. Nodding, she silently agreed. Will continued to hold on to her hands while at the same time working his way slowly down the length of the bar, leaving Penny no choice but to follow.

Once he'd rounded the bar, he glanced across the room only to find all eyes on them. The girls were all watching, waiting. Some seemingly tense. Lorna and Kitty had huge smiles on their faces. Will smiled back.

"After I have a private talk with your boss here, I'll have her come back and tell you what the preacher man said."

Their eyes grew wide at his words. A sheepish look took over Penny's face. It was almost as if she was only now realizing she had taken off in a fit of anger with the intention of confronting a man of god.

"Oh good lord, child. You didn't take your whip to him, did ya?" Lona asked.

Penny gave him a disgruntled look then turned her attention back to the girls who were waiting nervously for an answer. "No, Lona, I didn't take my whip to him. Will here is of the mind it was a possibility though." She tried and failed to tug her hand from his grasp.

"I wouldn't put nuthin' past you, woman. Now come on."

They had just made the top of the stairs when Lona hollered, "You all take your time talking." Snickering ensued before the woman could finish. "We'll take care of things down here."

She was dragging her feet every step of the way and with good cause. Will was irritated and horny as hell, quite a combination in a man at the very end of his patience. As soon as the door closed, he turned to her.

"Strip your clothes off."

Penny placed her hands on her hips, a gesture that made him want to bind her more than ever before.

"I thought you wanted to talk."

She was stubborn and beautiful. "Now, Penny."

"Or what?" Her retort was instant and full of attitude.

Will stalked closer, stopping when they were nearly nose to nose. "Believe me, sweetheart. You don't want to find out." She didn't want to push him this time. It wouldn't end up in a nice little swatting session. If she kept it up she wouldn't be sitting for a week and his wide leather belt was going to get quite the workout.

Penny must have recognized something in his voice because she finally relented, although not with much grace. Her fingers tugged mercilessly at the tiny buttons of her blouse, popping one off in the process. It was obvious she was in a snit.

By the time she stood before him, completely nude and trembling, Will was even more on edge than he'd been to start with. She was beautiful and defiant. He wanted to snatch her up and cart her off and never let her go. The yearning pulled at him like an anchor wrapped around his heart. Never before had he grown to care for a woman in the way he already felt for Penny. And in such a short time.

"Move your hands to the side so I can see all of you." He made the request a command, one she could not confuse for anything other than what it was. He wanted her to feel as uncomfortable and on display as he did. He wanted her to know not only was she in his room but she was there for whatever purpose he saw fit. He wanted her. Period. All of her.

Will moved around her, circling his prey. When she tried to turn enough to see what he was doing, he reached out to smack her outer thigh with the back of his hand. The popping sound of flesh on flesh met his ears a mere second before her outraged gasp did. He gave no quarter. Allowed her no time to say a word.

"Stay still and keep quiet."

Why he felt the need to possess every inch of her he didn't know. Why her taking off in a bout of anger to visit the preacher man sent him teetering on the edge he also did not understand and at this point he didn't even care.

## **Chapter Seven**

He was different, his whole demeanor. Dangerous, but in a way that thrilled instead of scared her. She was completely nude and he was fully clothed, studying every inch of her burning flesh as if preparing to pounce. Penny had no doubt he would if she so much as took a step and was half tempted to do so in order to see what his reaction would be.

Something about her temper set him off. She inwardly mused how that could make their affair an exciting thing to behold since she often lost her temper when around the stubborn mule of a man.

"I don't like it when you place yourself in danger." He stalked up to her, forcing Penny to take step back or be run over.

"I wasn't in any danger and you damn well know it."

His nostrils flared. Penny knew taunting him now could be risky business. She'd never considered herself a gambler, but at the moment, she very well might take up the pastime. He was utterly magnificent and highly aroused if the bulge beneath the fly of his denims was any indication.

"I would not advise pushing me right now." His words mirrored her thoughts.

Penny, however, was feeling sassy and free in a way she'd yet to experience. "And why is that?" This time she took a step toward him. Instead of holding her hands idly at her sides, she ran her fingertips of one hand up the arch of her hip. His eyes followed, narrowing on her.

The lead she had didn't last long before Will grasped the hand she was using to torture him and yanked, showing her exactly who was boss. Before she could even think to protest, not that she actually planned to, he had her spun around and bent over

the low iron footboard of his bed. It dug into her flesh, cold and unyielding. Pressure between her shoulder blades ensured she stayed put.

“Because you might just get more than you bargained for.”

It was the devil in her that made Penny arch her back and wiggle her behind in a way she hoped was provocative instead of unsightly. “What if I bargained for it all and think you’ve been holding out on me?”

She couldn’t see him with her face pressed sideways into the mattress beneath her, but at her words, the room had gone utterly still. The air around them refused to move. Not even his breath could be heard. Had she gone too far? Penny attempted to straighten herself only to have it made blatantly clear she was going nowhere.

“Tell me you want me.”

That one was easy. “I want you, Will. I want you so much right now I’m going to explode if you don’t touch me.”

He didn’t chuckle the way she’d hoped. “Not only for right now, Penny. Tell me you want me to come inside you, to spill my seed deep in your body. My body.” There was no way to explain how his last comment made her feel. He wanted to possess her, to own her, to keep her for all time. And for some reason, Penny didn’t feel like fighting the idea anymore. But was she really ready? Could she marry him and keep him happy, or were they both fooling themselves by even the thought of it?

His hand moved down her spine, trailing lightly. She still couldn’t give him the words he so obviously wanted to hear. His talented fingers continued moving lower and lower only to stop and circle the tight hole of her anus. Surely he didn’t mean to?

Penny struggled to move back or turn over, to somehow deter his interest in such an area of her body. She knew it was possible and people even seemed to enjoy it, but she couldn’t quite seem to wrap her mind around having such a thing done to her.

“Stay still.” He was still not going to give an inch.

What he was doing, merely running his fingertip in circles around the tight ring of muscle, did not hurt but did make her feel decidedly uncomfortable and wet. Very, very wet. The knowledge was embarrassing and made Penny struggle even more so.

When he lifted his finger from the cleft of her bottom, Penny almost missed the sensation. She must be going crazy. At least that was what she told herself. His hand on the back of her neck, guiding her up and off the footboard of his bed, gave her no choice but to do as he expected.

"Mmm, pretty and flushed. I'd venture a guess and say you liked that." His words and tone mocked her earlier struggles and made her angry.

Penny opened her mouth then snapped it shut when his hand tightened on the back of her neck. With little pressure, he walked her over to the bedside table as if she were a dog on a leash. Her head spun and her pussy wept. His treatment of her should have her ready to flay him alive with her whip. Instead, all she could think about was the two of them in bed, their bodies tangled together, doing whatever made them feel good.

"Reach over and grab that jar for me."

Did he have muscle aches? Was he going to rub himself with smelly liniment before taking her body for both their pleasure? For some reason the thought made her smile and nearly burst into laughter. It was too asinine to even think of.

When he offered no reason, she couldn't help but to ask, "What is in the jar and why do you need it?"

When he turned her toward him, it was to see a predatory smile curving his lips. His sharp teeth gleamed white against the tan flesh of his face. Even the corners of his eyes crinkled as if she were the butt of a joke. How he had the ability to pique her anger when she was usually a calm person, Penny had no idea. The fact was, he managed it without even trying.

"It's not me who needs what is in this jar, sweetheart. You will."

He made no sense whatsoever. Once she had the little glass jar in hand, he steered her back over to his bed with his hand at her nape. This time he bent her over the side of the bed, which was much more comfortable than her previous position over the foot.

"I will?" She set the jar down beside her on the mattress.

"Oh yeah."

He pulled some rope out of the saddlebag resting on the floor and proceeded to tie her hands behind her back and her feet together at the ankles. His actions made her heart rate increase until her pulse pounded in her temples and her stomach felt all fluttery with excitement. When he lifted the jar from the mattress beside her, Penny squirmed, trying to see what he had planned.

His hand landed hard and heavy on her upturned ass. "Sit still."

He was driving her crazy with need. The feel of the ropes, rough against her skin, only added to her overflowing desires. "Why will I need it?"

Will dipped a finger into the jar of herbal-scented lubricating grease. He wasn't so sure he should answer her question before giving her an idea of the pleasure she had coming her way. She was a sight for sore eyes, all trussed up by his rope, her naked body bent over his bed for his taking.

He'd purposefully tied her ankles together in order to keep her pretty pink pussy from being his objective. The woman had no clue how heady she was, nor of the power she held over him. If she did, he had no doubt she would become impossible to live with.

"You'll need it because it will make the passage of my cock go much smoother for you." He ran his now-lubed finger down the cleft of her ass and over the tight rosebud of her anus, applying enough pressure so she had no doubt as to his meaning.

"Oh!" Her exclamation came on a rush of exhaled breath as her body stiffened in preparation to rise.

Will was ready and kept her in place with a hand placed on her back. At the same time, he kept up the firm pressure on the pucker of her ass until the tip sank in. "Relax and it will go easier."

Penny said not a word. The only sound to come from her was ragged breathing as he continued to push and prod her tight entrance. She grunted and renewed her struggles when the digit disappeared down to the second knuckle.

The flesh of her ass was so pale and fair compared to his hand; Will couldn't seem to look away. He'd been thinking of what it would feel like to sink his cock into her virgin hole for some time now. He'd never initiated an anal virgin, usually preferring those who knew exactly what it was they'd signed up for. There was something different about Penny though. Something wild and untamed and explicable his.

She loosened fractionally around his finger, allowing easier entrance as he ever so slowly sank deeper. "Tell me how much you want my cock in your ass." He pulled out until just the tip rested inside her body before pressing home again.

Penny was shaking her head. He had no clue if she couldn't bring herself to speak such crude words or if she wanted him to stop. Will reached forward, burying his finger deeper in her nether hole as he tangled the other in her hair. Tugging her head back, he spoke again. "Tell me how much you want me, Penny."

From his vantage point, he didn't have a very clear shot of her face other than to see the pink flush covering her cheeks. When she didn't answer yet again, he pulled the digit from her body only long enough to add another to it before pushing home again.

"Oh god! Will!"

"Tell me." He scissored them, stretching her, preparing her to take every inch of his turgid length.

"I want you. Please!"

Her voice was warm and sweet but not nearly as sweet as her pleas sounded to his ears. Her ass hugged his fingers tight. Will could barely wait to feel her squeezing his shaft. The thought of coming in her that way added a thrill to the whole experience for



him. She was his. She belonged to him, and after tonight, Penny would know it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Say the words, sweetheart. Tell me you want to feel my cock in your ass."

"I...I can't."

Her tone was now as close to a whine as Will had ever heard her utter. Deciding to push her limits even more, he added a third to her ass. Her body stiffened as a result. God, she was fucking glorious.

"Fuck back on me, Penny." When she stayed still, he lowered his tone. "Do it now."

Her first movements were tentative, hesitant. He used every ounce of his willpower to stay still and allow her the time to get used to being so full before he spoke yet again.

"Good girl. You look beautiful, fucking me with your ass." Penny whimpered as she thrust back, finally taking all three of his fingers down to the knuckle. Her movements were frantic. It became clear to Will she was close to orgasm. He wasn't quite ready for that to happen.

Releasing the hand he'd held tangled in her hair, he once again planted it, palm down, in the middle of her back, effectively stilling her movements. From the sounds she made, she held no happiness over his actions.

"Tell me."

"Take me please!" She wiggled against his hold, attempting to press back farther in search of her release.

"Mmmm, very nice, but not exactly what I wanted to hear."

"Bastard!" She hissed the single word before giving him exactly what he wanted. "I want to feel your cock in my ass."

As slow as he possibly could in the state he was, Will pulled his fingers from her ass, released his hold on her back and then untied her. "Come undress me."

It took her a minute to comply but eventually she was able to do as he asked. She shook as she worked the buttons of his shirt and then trembled even harder when it

came to unfastening his denims. Will loved knowing he affected her as severely as she affected him.

“Now bring the jar over here and rub some of it on my cock.”

Her gaze snapped to his. Her pupils were dilated and her cheeks were pink, making her appear more than desirable. The feel of her hand, cool and shaky, on his shaft was almost more than he could bear. He did not know how he was going to sink into her depths without shooting off like a callow youth.

“That’s nice, sweetheart. Thank you.” He swatted her lightly on the ass to see her reaction. “Now get up on the edge of the bed on your elbows and knees and make it pretty for me.”

Will knew he was being a bastard and pushing every limit she had. And he was loving every minute of it. He watched as she moved to the bed, looking askance over her shoulder. She climbed up onto the mattress and settled into the position he’d commanded as if a pro.

Her ass and pussy were on display for him. He loved the line her spine made and so couldn’t help but dip his tongue into the grove and lick up the length of her back. Penny shivered in response.

“Please, Will.” Her tremulous voice begged.

“Please what, sweetheart?”

She turned her head enough so he could see her eyes. Her gaze sizzled, myriad emotions crossing over her features. “Please don’t make me wait.”

## Chapter Eight

She had to look silly as all get out perched on the edge of the bed, bottom in the air the way she was but it didn't really matter. As things went, Penny was in desperate need. Her body craved the new sensations Will had foisted on her. She wanted to feel his touch, rough and demanding.

When he stepped up behind her, one of his strong hands resting on her hip, Penny thought she might lose it right then and there. Her pussy ached and her clit throbbed for more. Every nerve sizzled in readiness.

Penny could feel his hand against the fleshy part of her bottom and wiggled back in search of more. This time he did chuckle, the sound deep and scratchy, grating over her as erotically as his work-roughened hands.

"Oh please, Will."

He gave her what she wanted by delving deep into her arousal-slickened pussy. There were no further preliminaries or niceties, he plunged and retreated only to do so again and again. The position was different, pulling him deeper than ever before, almost painfully so. Penny held on to the coverlet for dear life. Her fingers were white with the effort of doing so. Although hurried, his movements were precise. Will moved in a way that rubbed her inside in all the right places. Before Penny knew what was happening, she was riding the precipice of what would surely be the most intense climax she'd experienced before.

"Noooo!" she wailed when Will slowed his rhythm. She'd been so close.

"Not yet, sweetheart."

Her body shook, her breath catching on each lung-burning exhalation as she tried to recover. When he suddenly penetrated her bottom with a finger Penny thought she would shoot off the bed. She was full, so full. He spent what seemed like forever teasing

and tormenting her but never allowing her to get quite where she needed to explode. She wanted to strangle him, beg him for more and love him all at the same time.

“Now, Will. Now!”

Her words must have spurred him on because in the next instant, Penny felt the engorged head of his shaft against her. It felt much larger than his fingers had, causing Penny’s body to stiffen. She couldn’t seem to will her muscles to relax no matter what.

Will continued forward all the while murmuring, his tone encouraging although she had no idea what he was saying. Heat bloomed throughout her bottom as the tight ring of muscle gave way. That heat changed from arousing to a searing burn that had Penny wondering what the hell she’d gotten herself into.

She moved a knee forward on the bed, her body ready to take flight, only to stop stock-still. Any movement completely changed the sensation and she wasn’t so sure she was willing to go from burning pain to possibly something worse. She groaned and grunted, unable to form enough words to ask him to stop or at the very least slow down. Her mind swirled with the pain and yes, even some pleasure. It was all so confusing and yet thrilling.

Giving in to the pain, breathing through the burn and relaxing into it finally happened, and when it did, insurmountable pleasure coursed throughout her body. “That’s it, sweetheart,” Will crooned as he stroked her hips with the rough pads of his fingertips. “Stay just like that a minute and get used to me.”

Penny wasn’t so sure she could stay still. Her body needed to move, to do something, but what, she had no idea. It was all so overwhelming and confusing. Did she want more or did she want less? All she could do was breathe deep and feel.

Will’s hands moved from her hips to stroke the line of her spine. If she wasn’t mistaken his fingers shook slightly. It was then she realized his body was tense as if each muscle was bunched tight. Was he holding himself back? For some reason the thought disturbed Penny. She wanted him as crazy with lust as she was. She wanted him to lose himself to the desires racking her body. She wanted all of him.

"Do something, Will. You're killing me." Penny thrust her bottom back ever so slightly, taking him another fraction of an inch deeper. She hoped her movements, her words, would break him free of the control he held himself so rigidly under.

"Stay still, sweetheart, or this won't go slow the way I'd planned for your first time."

So, she'd been right. He was holding back. "I don't want slow. I want you to fuck me." Penny felt his muscles stiffen at her words. She was not one to use such crude language freely but if it would get him to let go, she was willing to try. In doing so, she gave another tentative wiggle and realized she was growing used to the feel of him inside her ass and enjoying it.

"Penny." Will groaned her name in a tone she'd never heard come from him. "I can't hold back with you moving like that." His voice was apologetic.

In the next instant, his hands tightened on her hips once again. Only this time it was not to hold her in place, it was to give himself leverage as he powered home, burying the full length of his shaft deep within her.

Penny grunted, a small yelp escaping her lips at his movement. She burned in more ways than one. When he slowly retreated from the tight confines of her most-secret place only to delve back in, picking up tempo as he went, she knew he'd finally lost himself and she was happy.

Their mingled cries of pleasure filled the room, joined by nothing more than the sound of flesh slapping flesh. The sensations built, one riding right on top of the other, allowing Penny no time to think, no time to wonder or worry, only to feel and enjoy. She was wild and free and blatantly offering herself up as if a most prized whore and yet she didn't care. For this man she would do anything, allow him to do anything.

The realization was swift and hit hard. Never before had she felt about anyone else the way she felt about Will. The thought scared her.

"Put your hand between your legs and play with your pussy for me."

His command pulled Penny from her internal reverie. She did as told and instantly felt her body stiffen in preparation as tiny spasms shuddered through her. "Yes!"

"Not yet."

He had to be kidding. There was no way she could hold off such a firestorm. Will, however, made sure she did exactly that. Leaning forward, he added his full weight to her body, causing her to collapse beneath him onto the bed, effectively trapping her hand. The new position was definitely confining but she could still manage to move her fingers.

The feel of his weight on her only seemed to add to her heightened sense of arousal. When he buried a hand in her hair and tugged until her head was forced back so he could breathe in her ear, she was sure he was trying to kill her with pleasure. And still he kept moving. In and out, his rhythm steady and rough, pounding into her body in a way so animalistic Penny was surprised he wasn't growling.

"Oh god. Please, oh please!"

"Not. Yet." She was almost right where he wanted her. "Tell me how much you want me, Penny. Tell me how much you want all of me."

Struggling to lift her hips beneath his weight, she didn't hesitate to answer. "I want you, Will...all of you."

"Then come for me, baby, and take everything I have to give."

It was as if his words released an invisible hold on her. Will could feel her arm strain as she played with her pussy just as he'd told her to. He let go of her hair and leaned back enough to quicken his pace. The base of his spine tingled as his balls drew up tight. "Come for me, Penny. Now."

He'd not even finished the sentence before her body began to shudder and her keening cries filled the room. He could feel her ass grip his cock even tighter, squeezing

and releasing with her orgasm. Her pleasure had a domino effect, and without choice, Will followed her over the edge.

He filled her ass with his essence, claiming her, making her his. Will felt a smile tug at his lips. He was a very happy man with a woman who now belonged totally to him. For life.

He'd never really considered it before, about getting married and settling down. Until now, that is. He liked the thought much more than he'd ever imagined possible. Will was even excited about all the possibilities and could only hope Penny was too.

Lifting himself from her spent body on shaky legs was the last thing he wanted but was necessary. He'd taken her and used her rough, now it was up to him to clean and care for her. Penny slowly exhaled as his flaccid cock slipped free from her ass. As he moved from the bed, she scrambled off it as well.

"I can take care of myself." Her cheeks were flushed, whether from embarrassment, the latent effects of arousal or both, Will didn't know. What he did know was that there was no way in hell he was going to miss out on pampering the willful woman if he had to sit on her to accomplish it.

Of course, the thought of sitting on her or, better yet, her sitting on him raised more than his temperature. His cock stirred as if it had not just been buried balls-deep in her ass, filling her with his come.

"I don't think so, sweetheart. Now get back up on the bed and relax." He thoroughly enjoyed the way her chin jutted forward, turning her look mutinous. "You're mine now and I take care of what's mine."

With hands on nude hips and chin-length curls flying wildly around her cheeks, Penny attempted to burst his happy little bubble by shaking her head. "I belong only to myself and I'll damn well clean myself. Now move out of my way."

She attempted to bluster her way past him, which was funny in and of itself, considering the difference in their sizes. He was determined not to let her tirade mess with his good mood. He'd warned her from the beginning if she allowed him to spill his

seed within her body, she would be his. He had absolutely no plans to go back on his word.

With an arm around her waist, Will proceeded to lift Penny from her feet and unceremoniously plop her on her ass on the bed. "Now do as I told you before I fetch a strap to make sure of it."

Her cheeks went from pink to mottled red with what Will assumed was unbridled rage. She rose to her knees until they were nose to chest. "You wouldn't dare!"

Will couldn't help but laugh. He laughed harder than he could ever remember doing. Ducking down so their noses were nearly touching, he replied, "Try me." He was genuinely hoping she would test him in this. His hand itched to feel the weight of his leather strap in it. His mouth watered with the thought of hearing it slap flesh, of hearing her cries turn from those of pain to the beautiful sounds of confused pleasure as her body gave in to the sensations.

Maybe there was something about the look in his eyes that warned her, but for once she didn't push him. Will kissed the tip of her nose before straightening. "Good choice, sweetheart. Now sit back and relax. I'll be back soon."

Will took his time pouring clean water from a floral-print pitcher into its matching basin. He whistled while he used a soft cloth to wash himself. He could nearly feel her gaze burning a hole in his back. Her emotions radiated in waves around the room, they were so intense. Once finished, and thoroughly aroused again, he wet another soft cloth then wrung the excess water out of it and headed back across the room to where Penny sat ramrod straight on the bed.

"I need to take care of personal business." She looked anywhere but at him. "I'll take care of cleaning myself at the same time."

"Chamber pot's under the bed. You can use it as soon as I'm done."

"You, Will Langtry, are the most insensitive man I have ever had the displeasure of meeting." She was in a snit, that much would be obvious to a blind man.



"Might as well get used to it, sweetheart. I don't plan on changing anytime soon. Now lie back."

Will didn't wait for her to comply. Gentle pressure on her shoulder ensured she did as asked and stayed. She didn't say a word as he pressed the warm, wet cloth between her legs, carefully cleaning her since he was sure she was tender. He enjoyed every minute of the task and hoped in time she would find it to be much less embarrassing than she did now. He didn't intend for there to be secrets between them. She was his and he planned to know everything about her from the tip of her pinky toe to the top of her curly-haired head and every delicate place in between. He also realized though that pushing too hard too fast might very well accomplish the opposite of the strong, united bond he was going for.

When Will finished, he crossed the room again to toss the wet cloth into the wash basin. Turning back to Penny, he donned his pants and shirt. "I'll go downstairs so you can take care of your needs." When he got to the door, he turned back, a niggling sensation tugging the hairs at the base of his neck. "No running, Penny. If you've got something to say, we'll talk. You run and I might give you a little time but I will come looking for you."

With those ominous words ringing loudly through the room, Will slipped through the door, closing it with a snap behind him.

## **Chapter Nine**

Penny was sure she was going to go completely insane if Will didn't stop what he was doing. She was so frazzled she wouldn't have been able to explain exactly what it was to someone if they had asked.

It was in his look. The way his eyes gleamed with barely leashed passion and violence. His body was coiled and ready to strike, every muscle tensed. The one running up the side of his neck stood out stark against his tanned flesh and not for the first time, Penny wanted to feel it between her teeth. She wasn't sure what he wanted more, to throttle her, jump her in a purely sexual way or marry her. Maybe it was the combination of all that had him on edge.

Two weeks ago he'd warned her not to run and very near after, she'd done exactly that. She liked to tell herself she wasn't running. It was only she needed some time but she knew it for the lie it was and so chose not to attempt to delude herself anymore.

From the minute Will had come back up to his room he'd talked about nothing but marrying and settling down. He'd told her how she would no longer need to worry about the goings-on at Penelope's. Instead, she would be living out of town on the ranch he owned. Until that moment, Penny had no clue he even owned a ranch. It was all too much.

After a week of being stalked and yet not listened to, she'd had enough. Taking the majority of her belongings and garnering a lot of attention, she'd moved to a local boarding house. The woman who owned the place wasn't so keen on a woman of loose morals living beneath her roof and more than likely hid the good silver every night after Penny went to bed, but she'd looked upon Penny's money with a greedy eye and readily accepted it.

It was lonely even though she spent time every day at Penelope's. Will hadn't said more than a word or two to her since the morning she'd gathered some of her things and left. Penny could still remember the look on his face and the edgy tone of his voice when he'd walked into her room unannounced, interrupting her packing.

"And just where do you think you're going?"

She'd stopped, a breathy sigh escaping her lips. "I'm moving."

He'd stalked closer then, his hands balled into white-knuckled fists at his sides. "Where?"

Penny had known beyond the shadow of a doubt that had she not answered that she was remaining close, he would not have let her leave. There was something in the set of his eyes, the deep timbre of his voice that warned her.

"I'll be staying in a boarding house not too far from here."

As he moved closer, Penny had turned her back to the bed so she was facing him. She'd stood her ground even though her knees had been shaking. His closeness called to her body as it always did. The intensity of his gaze bore deep into her heart.

When he didn't stop, she'd had no choice but to sit on the edge of the bed, his height towering over her only for a second until he moved in, forcing her to lean back on her elbows. By the time Will had settled a hand on each side of her, they were pressed intimately together, heat radiating off them. She clearly remembered every word he'd spoke.

"You can move. Hell, I'll even help you pack if you'd like, but it won't change a damn thing because no matter what, sweetheart, you belong to me."

Penny didn't think for one moment he'd changed his mind about their marrying or given up, he'd said as much. What had driven her crazy every day since was that she had no idea what he was doing. It was the not knowing that made her so nervous.

Will swaggered into the room and said something to one of the kitchen boys then left through the front door. Penny waited several minutes before allowing herself to

relax. She was always a nervous wreck when he was around. The tension in the room would get so thick she felt as though she could scoop it with a spoon.

“When are you two gonna kiss and make up?” Lona asked the question from behind her. “He’s been stomping around this place, scaring off the customers for two weeks now. Got even worse after you gathered up your things and left.”

“He’ll get over it, Lona.” Penny didn’t believe the words herself but said them anyway to try to soothe her friend.

Lona stared at her for a minute before patting her shoulder and walking away. Penny wanted to cry or something. She wasn’t quite sure but the emotions of it all were nearly overwhelming. She’d fallen in love with Will, cared for him in a way that scared her witless, and yet couldn’t seem to give in to those emotions and marry the man.

She knew what the problem was. She was worried he didn’t care for her in the same way. Part of her argued it shouldn’t really matter if he returned her feelings. She should be content to be with someone who was protective of her safety and enjoyed their physical togetherness. The problem was, it did matter. Never before had Penny really thought about marriage and children as being a realistic option and now the possibility was knocking on her door and she was willing to throw it all away because words of love hadn’t been spoken.

*Then why don't you say the words first?*

The little voice in Penny’s head taunted her again and she so wanted to listen but couldn’t quite bring herself to. What would his reaction be if she professed her love for him? Hell, Penny snorted just thinking about it. He’d probably laugh until his belly hurt from the effort.

Everyone seemed to be doing their best not only to stay away from Will and his fierce scowl but to take a wide berth around her too. Was she as obvious in her lovesickness as Will was in his anger? She certainly hoped not. Penny pasted what she hoped would pass for a smile across her face as she made her way around the bar and into the kitchen.

She plucked a piece of freshly baked bread off a platter and slathered it with creamy butter. The place might not be one of the town's finest restaurants or even serve the public, but the cook she paid to make sure her girls ate healthy meals did a damn fine job. Penny watched as the young boy Will had been talking to gathered things off shelves. She didn't even pretend not to be listening as he spoke to the cook.

"He said he'd be gone two days."

The heavysset woman merely nodded as she continued on about her business. Once everything was set on the counter, she dropped her spoon onto a small plate set aside just for it and began piling things into a flour sack.

Penny nodded and smiled, complimenting the woman on the mouthful of bread she continued to chew before leaving the kitchen. So, Will would be gone for two days. Finally she would have some time to herself. Time in which she could spend the entire day and night at Penelope's if she so chose without worry he would come to her room and seduce her into agreeing to marry him.

She knew it for the lie it was even as the thought crossed her mind. He was in as much danger of being seduced by her as she was him. She certainly did miss the feel of his weight on her. The way his hands traveled her body, his fingertips always knowing exactly where to linger, where to apply just a tiny bit more pressure had the ability to make her beg for more. And as of yet, he was always obliged to give more.

Much more.

Penny remembered how his rope felt rough against her flesh. How knowing he was going to tie her up and have his way with her made her heart pound until she thought her head might explode from all the excitement. And no matter how much she tried, she had yet to get their last bout of lovemaking out of her mind.

She had submitted to his will, mind, body and soul. Penny was surprised she'd been able to walk away, even if it was for the best. He was a good man and didn't deserve to be saddled with a woman he didn't love, especially one who had lived most of her life as a man.

She had no idea how to go about rearing children even if she seemed to be becoming most adept at how the making of them went. Penny rubbed a hand over the flat plane of her abdomen and idly wondered what it might be like to carry a child. Of course if she did conceive, what then? How would they rear a child knowing nothing?

Could she live out at his ranch and be happy? Penny wasn't so sure. Would Will stay with her or would he settle her out there only returning every now and then in order to fill his duties as her husband? The thought made her furious and antsy.

Unable to stay still, Penny nodded then waved to Lona. "I'll be back right before opening time this evening." Then she walked out the front door.

\* \* \* \* \*

Will had to get away. There were no ifs, ands or buts about it. She was going to make him do something he would regret, such as dragging her off to the preacher, any preacher who would marry them without so much as a say-so from her. It might not be legal but there were definitely supposed men of god who would do so in a flash if they knew she'd been sleeping in his bed.

Unused to not getting his own way, Will was angry and utterly disappointed. Maybe he hadn't been right in using Penny's body against her in order to get her agreement, but damn it! He'd been desperate. What he felt for her was unlike anything he'd ever experienced before, for anyone. It still had the ability to shock him to his toes how fast she'd taken over his life. She captured his heart from the beginning with nothing more than her short curls and wide eyes. The fact she wasn't afraid to stand up to him, to challenge him, and spoke her mind unlike most women, only made things better.

She was exciting in a way he'd never known. She teased his senses and then gave as good as she got. He'd been with seasoned whores who didn't allow their bodies to be used the way Penny allowed him to touch her. She may have trust issues with becoming his wife, but she didn't have the same problems when it came to giving her

body to him. Now he needed to figure out what to do in order to get the rest of her in a forever sort of way.

Giving up wasn't an option and neither was letting her go. She belonged to him and Will planned to make her see the light, no matter what. By the time he made it out to the ranch his skin felt so tight he thought it might split clean down the middle.

The hair on the back of his neck stood on end and he had an overwhelming feeling to get back into town, to see what Penny was doing. He needed to make sure she was safe and behaving herself.

"Boss."

His thoughts were interrupted by his foreman as he dismounted his horse. "I'm not staying. Have him rubbed down, fed and watered if you would."

"Sure thing." The foreman took the reins from Will's hand without saying a word.

Will stalked into the house, through the rear door and into the kitchen where he poured himself a cup of always-at-the-ready coffee. The grizzled old man who worked as his cook gave him a sideways glance. "What's got you wound so tight, boy?"

"I need to get back to town."

"You just got yourself here. It'll be dark afore ya make it back."

Will wasn't in the mood to explain himself, but if there was one thing he knew about Samson, it was that he was worse than a mother hen any day of the week. And twice as bad if he felt something was wrong.

"Has to do with Penelope's daughter, don't it?"

"And how would you know that?" Will wondered aloud.

"Word has a way of getting 'round."

Will's sigh filled the room around him. "It is."

"And why you needing to get back to town for when you just got here?"

Will thought about it for a minute then paced across the room to stare out the kitchen window toward the barn. "I don't know. Something doesn't feel quite right to me is all."

Samson followed him to the sink. They stood there, elbow to elbow, staring out over the wide expanse of land beyond the ranch house. "Then I'd be getting back to town if I were you. Never been one to second-guess when my gut tells me something."

Time seemed to drag by and Will was about to pull his hair out when his foreman hollered up the back porch steps that his horse was saddled and ready. Without a backward glance to Samson, Will set his coffee mug in the sink and left out the same door he'd come through. He was mounted and on his way back to town in no time at all, and yet it was still too long for his peace of mind.

He couldn't imagine what Penny might get herself into that would have him feeling so on edge. Will hoped like hell to get back to town only to find her wandering from room to room, checking on the girls and making sure no fisticuffs over cards or girls broke out. When it came to troubles such as those, he had no doubt she could handle herself. He'd seen her do it before and even though it scared the hell out of him and made him want to wring her delicate little neck, he knew damn sure she was capable of it.

Why then did he feel the need to run his mount into the ground to get back and check on her? This he had no idea but planned to follow his instincts all the same.

"He ya!" Will urged his horse on, feeling the life-or-death need to run the animal hell-bent for leather all the way.



## Chapter Ten

Penny made her way through the throng of people, nerves making her a bit jumpy. A commotion broke out, catching her attention. Until she knew exactly what was happening, she wouldn't be able to relax.

"Oh god!" It was Lona who made the exclamation. Her face was white as flour, a streak of blood across the bodice of her low-cut dress. She was headed right for Penny.

"What's wrong?" Penny looked Lona over from head to toe, worried.

"We need to send someone for the doc. It's Kitty and she's in a bad way." Penny tried to ignore the tremble of her friend's normally strong voice but was unable to. Anger made her strides longer. Had someone dared to harm one of her girls?

With as much calm as she could muster, she dispatched someone to fetch the doctor then followed Lona toward the staircase. On their way, she nodded toward the piano, getting Jack's attention. Although no words passed between them, Penny knew by the look in the man's eye he understood her silent command to clear the room.

She'd just reached the bottom step when she spotted the blood. It dotted the dark, scuffed wood and was smeared along the balustrade as if in some sort of sick painting.

"Where is she?" Penny spoke calmly even though it was far from how she felt. She wished Will were there to help. He would know what to do but he wasn't and so it was up to her to fix things, to make sure Kitty received care and figure out exactly what happened.

"She's been taken up to her room. Oh Penny! It's bad. She's bad, he cut her up."

Not much had the ability to make her weak at the knees but those words certainly did. She didn't slow her ascent as she listened to Lona tell how she had run into Kitty staggering down the stairs, clinging to the rail with one hand while holding her face with the other.

Penny's heart sank at the thought of someone taking a knife to Kitty in general, but the thought of her face, so young-looking and nearly always smiling, being maimed was enough to make her stomach roil.

When they reached Kitty's door, she didn't hesitate before entering. The sight to greet her was one of chaos. Cries and whimpers filled the room but none came from Kitty herself who lay as still as death on her narrow bed.

"Everyone out!" Penny pulled her gaze from Kitty only long enough to make sure her words had been heard. "Lona, bring water and bandages and make sure someone sends the doctor up as soon as he gets here." Only silence ensued as the room cleared of people.

"You poor sweet thing," Penny crooned as she moved to the bed to assess the damage done to Kitty. She was covered in blood from nearly head to toe. Whether there were more wounds Penny couldn't tell due to it and her clothing. The one from the lobe of Kitty's ear nearly to the corner of her mouth was flayed wide open and deep.

It was bleeding profusely. Without thought, Penny grabbed one of Kitty's petticoats off a nearby chair and used the voluminous fabric to apply pressure and hopefully staunch the bleeding.

Kitty cried out, her arms flailing in defense. The sound was pitiful and tore at Penny's heart. White-hot searing anger spread through her system. Penny knew as soon as the doctor made it she would leave to find the man responsible for Kitty's pain and make him pay.

It was up to her to do so. The girls were now her responsibility and that was something she took seriously. Going to the law would do her no good. They wouldn't take the time to find a man even though he was capable of doing something as heinous as taking a knife to a woman, not when the woman in question was a whore.

It seemed as if hours passed before the doctor showed up, but Penny knew it hadn't been long at all. "Make sure she's cared for, Doc. Whatever she needs." Penny stalked to the door, heading for her room. "I'll cover it, whatever the cost."

She felt the familiar weight of her gun holstered at her side and was thankful she hadn't stopped wearing it. The whip coiled through its leather mooring attached to her gun belt only added to her determination. If the lowdown scum of a man who dared mess with one of her girls was lucky she would shoot him instead of flay the skin slowly from his body and leave him for the buzzards.

Penny closed the door of her room with a decisive click. She quickly changed from the serviceable calico skirts she had taken to wearing into pants and a button-up shirt. She didn't bother to bind her breasts or put her hair up. She was inexplicably thankful she hadn't donned a corset earlier. Taking the time to unlace the contraption would have only slowed her down.

It was with steely determination she exited her room. Slapping her wide-brimmed hat low on her head, Penny descended the stairs. Had she not been so focused and determined she might have noticed the nervous looks cast her way by Lona as she hurried across the room or how the leftover patrons parted like the Red Sea as she walked through their wake.

"You can't mean to go looking for that man alone."

Penny had known there would be an argument. She didn't intend to budge. "I do and will as soon as you tell me what you know about him."

She listened intently as Lona passed on everything she could remember about the man who had gone into Kitty's room, and then Penny headed toward the front door and ultimately the stables to have Poncho saddled.

"We can send someone to go get Will. He'll know what to do."

There was a pleading tone to Lona's voice. Penny didn't have time to explain or placate her. "I know what to do. I'm going to kill the bastard." She continued out the door. Once on the sidewalk, she turned back to Lona. "Send someone for Will. Explain to him what has happened. And Lona..."

Penny waited until she knew she had her friend's undivided attention before continuing. "Keep an eye on the girls and make sure the doctor does whatever he can for Kitty. I'll be back."

The short but brisk walk to the stables helped to clear her mind from the sight and smell of Kitty's blood. Penny called for her horse to be saddled and asked about anyone who looked as if they might be leaving town in a hurry. It was a long shot but she figured it wouldn't hurt to ask. She lucked out when the boy who brought her Poncho pointed east. His affirmative nod to the description she gave of the man she was looking for made her skin tingle. She had a lead and if she hurried there was a good chance she could catch up to the dead man.

\* \* \* \* \*

Will knew something was wrong before he stepped foot through the doors of Penelope's. It was the reason why he'd driven himself and his horse so hard to get back to town. Heads turned as he walked through the door. The look on Jack's face as he sat at the end of the bar was ominous.

"Tell me." The command was curt as Will sat astride a barstool.

The other man didn't seem surprised in the least to see him back or irritated by his tone. "Miss Penny set a boy after you but the doc needed him to fetch water so he's not yet left."

It was worse than Will could have imagined if the doctor was in residence and needed that much help. He was off his stool in the pace of a heartbeat. "What happened? Where's Penny?"

"Someone cut Kitty up right bad and Miss Penny's gone after him."

The hand he raked through his hair did absolutely nothing to clear his mind. "That damn fool woman is going to get herself killed." Will strode a few feet away before turning back to face Jack. "When did she leave and does anyone have any idea where she's gone?"

The corner of Jack's lip twisted up at the edge in a grin. "She's not been gone long. She came back after collecting her horse from the stables. Said a lad there mentioned a stranger fitting the man's description. Seems he was leaving town to the east, hell-bent for leather. She was heading that way after him."

Will was glad his horse still stood outside tethered to a hitching post. "Then I reckon I'm headed in the same direction. See to things here if you would." Will had only gone a few more feet when he stopped again. "How is Kitty faring?"

"She's going to live." It was all Will took the time to hear before he left.

The night was clear. Stars as far as the eye could see. He guessed it was as good a night as any to die and only hoped that neither Penny nor he would be the ones finding that out firsthand.

The moon was full in the sky, lighting the way. Every once in a while he'd been able to pick up tracks along the dusty trail and hoped they were the right ones. He was getting very antsy by the time he heard a horse whinny close-by. After stopping his mount, Will continued to listen. When sound of voices in the distance reached his ears, Will dismounted. Then leaving his horse free in case it needed to seek safety, he inched forward, entering a copse of trees, using the spindly trunks as cover.

One voice was raised in anger and the other deadly calm. It was the calm in Penny's voice that worried him most. She was a woman whose friend had been hurt. She should be crying and ranting and raving hysterically.

On foot, he continued forward until he could see them. Each had a gun drawn and each gun was pointed at the other. His heart beat wildly at the sight of Penny in such a precarious position.

"Don't be stupid, woman. She was just a whore."

With comments like that, the man was going about saving his life in the wrong way. Will nearly felt sorry for him.

"Doesn't matter what she is, mister. You had no right to hurt one of my girls and I intend to see that you pay for it."

He doubted very seriously the man in question could hear even the slightest quaver in Penny's voice, but Will heard it. She may have been through a lot and seen a lot during her time living as a man, but she was no killer.

Loud laughter broke through the man's spittled lips. "No woman alone gonna get the best of ole Bart."

"She's not alone." Will decided surprise was the best action to take as he stepped out of the shadows, gun in hand. He also realized Bart must be a skittish coward of a man to hurt a woman in such a way. However, what he didn't consider was even a skittish, cowardly man would shoot without even waiting to see who he was shooting at.

It was a good thing for Will in his haste and fear, Bart's shot went wide, missing Will by a hair. He'd dropped as if hit, anticipating another shot, the sound of the bullet whizzing by his head still ringing in Will's ear. The round of another gun firing filled the night along with Penny's agonized scream.

"Oh god! Will? Will! Answer me, dammit."

Will was trying to get up but she'd flattened him with her hands. Shakily, they were wandering up and down the length of his body.

"If you get off me I can move. If not and you keep running your hands over me like that we're going to be doing a whole lot more out here beneath the moon besides killing folks." As Will said the words, he craned his neck to look over to where Bart fell, presumably dead, in the dirt only to find the barrel of the man's gun pointed their way.

There was no time to think. As instinct took over, Will grabbed Penny and rolled her beneath him with one arm while trying to get a shot off with the gun he still held clutched in his free hand.

The impact to his shoulder surprised him but didn't stop him from squeezing the trigger. Will's shot was true, striking Bart right between the eyes. Even though he knew the man was now truly dead, he couldn't seem to pull himself away from Penny. He

didn't know whether it was a protective measure or because his arm hurt like the dickens.

"Are you okay? Did it go through? Tell me you're okay, Penny!" He sounded hysterical even to his own ears. He had to know she was fine, that he was the only target the bullet found.

"Did what go through? I'm okay, Will." She pushed against his chest, probably to dislodge his weight from her body. The movement caused white-hot shards of agonizing pain to shoot through his shoulder and down his arm. Will hissed a breath through clenched teeth as the fire spread. Penny's hand came away red.

He saw her look down at her hand sticky with his blood and then back up to him, her eyes blinking furiously. Her mouth worked but nothing came out. When she was finally able to speak and move, she was a flurry of activity.

"Oh Will! No!" His voice shook with emotion but it was evident by the way she thoroughly yet gently roamed his body with her hands that she was still completely capable of doing what needed to be done. "Sit down and let me see what we've got." She knelt beside him.

"I'm okay, sweetheart." He cursed beneath his breath when she unbuttoned his shirt and began to tug it from his arms. Even though she did so as slowly and as nicely as possible, it still caused the wound to throb something fierce.

"It's gone clean through, which is good." Penny stood back up and hiked up one leg of her pants. It was amazing how erotic a fully clothed woman could be when she was showing only a tiny bit of skin. It also amazed him that he could be wounded, shot even, and still be thinking about getting her beneath him.

The sound of fabric tearing pulled his brain back up above his belt buckle. Using his knife, she'd taken a strip off the bottom of her denims. "Here, press this tight over the wound." Will did as instructed.

As he watched, she folded his shirt until it formed a long, rectangular bandage, which she laid over the pad of denim he was holding. Her face was a mask of concentration as she slowly wrapped it under his arm and up over his shoulder.

He wasn't able to remain as quiet when she deftly knotted the fabric around his shoulder in order to keep the pad of denim in place. Her teary whispered "I'm sorry" nearly broke his heart.

Penny helped him to his feet. Her every movement was calculated and careful so as not to cause him any extra pain. That caring only proved to Will that she loved him as much as he loved her. When she turned to look at him, her eyes bright in the moonlight, he knew it for a fact.

"Come here, Penny."

"But your arm!" She took a step back.

"My arm will be fine. Right now I need to hold you."

She inched closer and then closer until the buttons on the front of her shirt gently brushed his bare skin. Once they were touching, he used his good hand to tug the back of her hair until she leaned her head back the way he preferred before kissing her.

Their tongues melded together, tangling, dueling. Her lips were warm and wet, salty-tasting. From tears or sweat Will didn't know or care. All he knew was that he needed the woman in his arms and would do anything to keep her safe and right where she belonged, with him.

Penny was the one who broke the kiss. "Let's get you back home. I want Doc to take a look at you. We'll send the sheriff back for him," she nodded toward good ole Bart, "and we'll be able to check on Kitty."

"Sounds good to me, sweetheart. Let's go home."



## Epilogue

"I still can't believe it. Three days?"

"Three long days." Penny looked as bad as he felt and yet she was the most gorgeous sight he'd ever seen.

Evidently, although the bullet had made a clean shot through, infection had set in, and with it, fever. He'd awoken to her sitting in a chair beside his bed, her head slumped forward in a way that would surely cause her to have muscle aches, sleeping fitfully. She'd cried when she opened her eyes to find him staring back at her.

"I love you." Her voice had been shaky with emotion, intense with the need for him to hear and understand the words she was saying. He'd heard every single one of them and knew she meant it.

Will sat propped up against the headboard. His shoulder ached still but not fiercely. What bothered him most was the way everyone had taken to coddling him. He was a man, for god's sake. Okay, so he was a man who was much weaker than normal, but he was still a man grown and had no intention of being kept in bed like a child.

Penny moved beside him, her body stretching sinuously against his and instantly Will rethought the issue of remaining in bed. It seemed like a damn fine idea at the moment. His cock twitched in agreement.

"How's Kitty doing?"

She looked up toward him, her head still resting on his chest. "She's doing well." The breath she released singed over his flesh. It was a sad sound. "She more than likely won't be able to work, not with the scar she'll have. I've told her not to worry about it that I would take care of her future but I've begun to think it might not be necessary."

"And why is that?" Will was intrigued. Something in the tone of her voice warned she had a story to tell.

"I think the preacher man is sweet on her." She smiled up at him, her eyes twinkling merrily.

"Is that so?" A preacher and a whore. Will was sure there were more unlikely pairs. He just couldn't seem to think of one at the moment.

"I believe it is." Penny rested her hand on his stomach, her finger making circular sweeps around his navel. The sensation had him rock-hard beneath the sheet in a matter of seconds.

"Well, we'll have to wait and see then, won't we?"

She rolled over until she was lying on her belly between his legs. "Good things come to those who wait." Her smile grew by leaps and bounds, the corners turning up mischievously.

"That they do, sweetheart. That they do."

Will ran his fingers through her hair. The motion pulled at his shoulder but he didn't care. He needed to feel the silky strands.

"Will you be my husband?" Her voice was quiet, almost shy.

He could hardly believe it. Her words were like music to his ears, keeping the pain in his shoulder at bay. "What made you change your mind?"

This time she blushed pink all the way to the roots of her hair. "You wouldn't have come to find me, getting shot in the process, if you didn't love me."

"Of course I love you, woman! I asked you to marry me, didn't I?" Had she really not known?

"But you never said."

"Neither did you," Will countered.

She seemed to ignore his statement. "So, will you marry me? Be my husband, boss me around, give me children?" She was so damn beautiful. An impish dimple bracketed the corner of her mouth. He wanted to kiss it something fierce.

"I'll do that and more, sweetheart."

"More? What more?"

"I'll follow you to the gates of hell." He chuckled then gently tugged her hair. "Come on up here." When she crawled up his body, settling her wet sex over the swollen head of his shaft, he whispered against her lips, "I'll even be your shotgun rider."

## About the Author

Maggie Casper's life could be called many things but boring isn't one of them. If asked, Maggie would tell you that blessed would more aptly describe her everyday existence. Being loved by four gorgeous daughters should be enough to make anybody feel blessed. Add to that a bit of challenge, a lot of fun and an undeniably close circle of friends and family and you'd be walking in her shoes.

A love of reading was passed on by Maggie's mother at a very early age, and so began her addiction to romance novels. Maggie admits to writing some in high school but when life got in the way, she put up her pen and paper. Seems that things changed over the years because when she finally decided it was time to put her story ideas on paper, the pen was out and the computer was in. Took her a while to catch up but she finally made it.

When not writing, Maggie can usually be found reading, doing genealogy research or watching NASCAR.

Maggie welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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