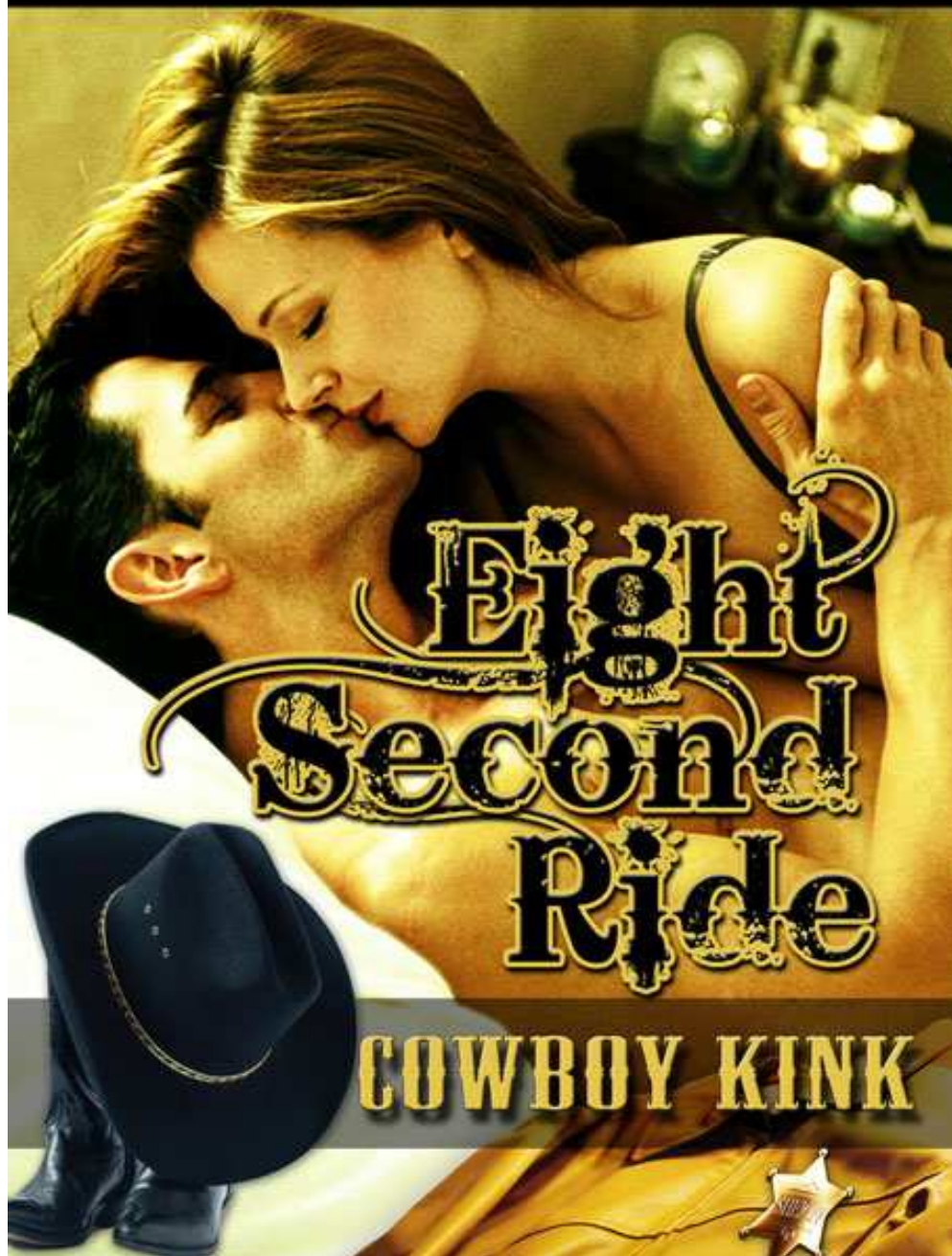


DESIREE HOLT



Eight Second Ride

by

Desiree Holt

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Eight Second Ride

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Dedication

This one is definitely for Rhonda,
who gave me the chance when no one else did,
and for Diana, editor extraordinaire, without whom
I'd never be writing my hot cowboys.
I love you, ladies.

PRAISE FOR AUTHOR

Desiree Holt

AND HER BOOKS

“Desiree Holt is a master storyteller when it comes to the sex scenes. At once, I’m transported, eagerly internally assuming the role of heroine, and I’m able to feel the hero’s caresses upon my skin.”

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“...quick as lightning, setting the tone for a wild ride. Both Molly and Chance have hidden behind what they want sexually, but both have very similar ideas about what pleases them...Chance’s character and the strong desire to have Molly accept him really made this story one of a kind.”

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Chapter One

Kyle Mitchell wanted to pry his eyes open but someone was pounding a drum inside his head so hard he was afraid to see daylight. Not only that, but whatever he was lying on was harder than a concrete floor and killing his back. He needed aspirin and coffee in large supply. He tried to raise his hands to press them against his aching temples but something jerked his right hand and prevented him from lifting it. *Now* he opened his eyes. And wished he hadn't.

Unfortunately this wasn't the first jail cell he'd been in, but he was pretty sure it was the worst. And he was pretty sure it hadn't been modernized in the last fifty years. One wall consisted of the usual arrangement of bars with a portion of it hinged for a door. The sleeping arrangement, rather than a crummy cot that would have been a vast improvement, was a flat piece of wood with a mattress on it so thin he was sure he'd be able to see through it. And it was the kind that pulled down from the wall on chains.

And speaking of chain, he yanked at his right hand again and discovered he was handcuffed to one length of chain.

Damn! What the hell had happened? What had he gotten himself into now?

Squinting against the brightness of the light from the ceiling lights he looked down the length of his body.

Boots. Check.

Jeans. Check.

He clapped his left hand over his waist in a sudden panic.

Champion belt buckle! Okay! Check.

Shirt. Check.

He rubbed a hand over his square jaw, feeling the stubble of yesterday's beard growth. Testing everywhere on his face he discovered his nose was tender but not broken, but the rest of his face felt as if a bull had stomped on it.

Wait. Was that what had happened? The last thing he remembered was lasting the full eight seconds on Sodbuster before landing in the dirt of the rodeo arena. Everything else was a blur.

"Well. It looks like you're finally awake."

The voice was pure music, soft, with a faint drawl. Squinting through the bars he thought for a minute his heart was going to stop beating. In the hallway looking in at him was about five-foot-four of the most breathtaking woman he'd ever seen. Dark blonde curls tumbled down to her shoulders, framing a lightly tanned face with emerald green eyes peeking out from thick, thick lashes. The stiff fabric of the uniform shirt she wore couldn't conceal the lush ripeness of her breasts any more than the pants hid her mouthwatering curves.

But what really shook him up was the star gleaming from its place of prominence on her shirt, right over one of those nicely rounded breasts.

Holy hell! This was the sheriff?

He looked at her and something inside turned over. He had an urgent need to see this woman naked in his bed, but not the way he did with the usual women he rolled in the sheets with. Not an eight-second ride and done. No, even in his pitiful condition he could imagine making slow, soul-searing love to her. Everything from his balls to his brain went on instant alert.

Kyle did his best to clear the frogs out of his

throat and twist his dry lips into a smile.

Have pity on me. Whatever I did, I want to spend the rest of my life making it up to you.

“Mornin’, ma’am. I’d tip my hat to you but it seems to have disappeared.”

“The only pleasantries I’d like from you, Mr. Mitchell, are an apology, your fine paid and to see the backside of you as you leave my jail.”

There was no humor on her face as she swung the door open, strode across the cell and reached to unlock the handcuff. Kyle didn’t know if it was his apparently scruffy appearance or the shit-eating grin on his face that made her stop just before she reached him.

“Swing yourself around and sit up, Mr. Mitchell. And keep your free hand to yourself. Don’t let my size or my sex fool you. I’m an expert in three kinds of hand-to-hand combat.”

He felt every one of his thirty-five years and his head still pounded like a jungle drum, but he couldn’t seem to wipe the smile off his face. He sure did like women with spirit, and this one obviously had more than her share.

“Can I ask why it was necessary to keep me cuffed all night? The way I feel, I couldn’t take on a baby.”

She looked at him with disgust. “The way you were swinging at my deputies, I was afraid you’d take out the whole squad. I guess anyone who could tame the famous Sodbuster could handle just about anyone.”

He managed a weak grin. It was slowly coming back to him. “Oh, yeah. Sodbuster. Got my eight seconds in this time.”

“And a whole lot more, as I understand.”

He slid a glance at her. “Don’t tell me you were there.”

“Didn’t have to be. While you were trying to beat

them up, my deputies were singing your praises. Half of them were there for the rodeo finals last night. Saw your eight-second ride on Sodbuster.”

His chuckle was a little rusty. “Are you impressed?”

She managed to unlock him with as little contact as possible, an amazing feat, then stood back, a good three feet away.

“Disgusted would be more like it. It takes a lot more than that to impress me. I’d think a big rodeo star like you would want to set a better example for others.”

“Example, huh?” Kyle stood slowly, taking inventory of his aching body. “If I promise to behave can you dig me up some aspirin?”

“I’ll have my deputy find some for you. Follow me.”

She turned and headed out of the cell, expecting Kyle to follow her. He scrambled off the bunk and caught up to her as quickly as he could. He started to reach for her arm before he remembered what she’d said about touching her.”Uh, ma’am? Excuse me, Sheriff?”

“Just follow me,” she snapped over her shoulder. “We’ll take care of business and you’ll be on your way.”

Kyle’s head throbbed with every thud of his boots on the concrete floor. He wondered if he closed his eyes and then opened them again real slow, he’d find himself in his room at the hotel, with the gorgeous buckle bunny who’d been hanging on him the night before, and all this would be just a nightmare.

The sheriff turned a sharp corner, her ass wiggling provocatively—more tempting because he was sure the wiggle was not deliberate—and he found himself in a small room with a table and three chairs. A man who looked to be somewhere in his

sixties sat on one side of the table. The sheriff closed the door and leaned against it, folding her arms across her tempting breasts.

"Sit down, Mr. Mitchell," she said. "This won't take five minutes. Judge Harley will take care of things, you can pay your fine and be out of my sight."

His stomach clenched, a combination of the aftereffects of the night before and the prospect of what dire things a judge might decide. "Did you say judge?" He looked from one to the other. "What do I need a judge for?"

"I think we'll get through this if you just do what the sheriff says," Judge Harley pointed out.

Kyle wondered if he'd fallen into an alternate universe. He lowered his aching body into one of the chairs.

"Your name Kyle Mitchell?" the man asked.

"Uh, I'd say you already know that," Kyle said.

"Just getting it down for the record. All right, then. Kyle Mitchell, you have been found guilty of being drunk and disorderly and causing damage to property. Fifty dollars for the fine and two hundred for repairs." He smacked a gavel on the table. "Dismissed. He's all yours, Jessie."

She unfolded her arms and opened the door. "Not mine, Sam. I'll be happy to see the last of him."

"Wait a minute." Kyle was trying to make sense of what was happening. "Wait just a damn minute. Drunk? Disorderly? Damage? What the hell is going on here? I don't even know what happened."

"Your friend's waiting outside for you," the feisty blonde told him. "He can explain everything. Come on. Let's get this over with."

Friend? What friend? Who had come to fetch him? And where the hell was he, anyway?

He followed the sheriff through a door into what looked like the main room of the sheriff's office. A

dispatcher sat at a communications center against one wall, four desks were arranged in the open space, and tucked into a far corner was a miniscule office that Kyle assumed belonged to the sheriff.

A uniformed deputy waited for him at one of the desks, and lounging in a chair beside it was Gary Handler, grinning like a fool.

"Enjoy your night out, Kyle?" he asked and winked at the sheriff.

Those full lips never cracked a smile. "Let's hope he doesn't enjoy any more like them any time soon."

"Gary, exactly where the fuck are we? And how did I get here?"

"Better watch your language in front of a lady," Gary told him, still grinning like an idiot. "You're in Watson's Creek."

Where?

"How did I get here? *Why* did I get here?"

Now Gary laughed, a loud sound that grated on Kyle's nerves.

"You told the little buckle bunny you'd follow her anywhere. This was where she took you."

"Huh?" He would have scratched his head, but it still hurt too badly. "Then how did I end up in jail?"

"You got in a fight with some...Neanderthal who apparently wanted to take charge of your...buckle bunny," the sheriff snapped. "It took four of my deputies to break up the fight and poor Charley Haggerty had to close the bar down." She looked at her deputy. "Judd, give Mr. Mitchell back his belongings so he can pay his fine and get out of my jurisdiction."

The deputy handed him a large plastic bag with his watch, his signet ring, his wallet and other odds and ends he'd had in his pockets. From a desk drawer, he removed Kyle's prized black Stetson and held it out carefully. Kyle clapped it on his head, wincing at even that slight pressure, opened his

wallet and fished out the required money.

"I want a receipt," he told the deputy.

"Got one right here."

As pulled together as he could be, he turned to the woman in charge. "I don't suppose you'd care to tell me your name, would you? Since I spent the night in your fine establishment."

She glared at him. "Jessica Wade. *Sheriff* Jessica Wade. But you won't be using it again."

Kyle grinned at her. Man, she sure was cute when she got her temper up. "Well, Sheriff Jessie—Can I call you Jessie? It suits your style a little more—it's a pleasure to meet you."

"You may call me Sheriff, and I wish I could say the same," she snapped. "Get out of here and don't come back to Watson's Creek, Mr. Mitchell. We can't afford your visits."

Gary tugged on his arm. "Come on, hot shot. Let's get out of here before they decide to stick you back in that cell."

"But—"

"No buts. Let's go." He literally pulled Kyle from the office, through the door and outside. "Get in," he ordered, opening the passenger door to his truck before jogging around to the other side of the vehicle. He cranked the engine over and pulled out of the parking lot, turning onto the street and heading toward the Interstate.

"Whew!" Kyle leaned back against the seat's headrest. "She's a pistol, isn't she? Mmm-mmm. A fine woman."

"Aren't you in enough trouble?" Gary asked. "Spending the night in a cell? I'd wipe her from my mind if I were you. Chasing tail's what got you into this predicament in the first place."

"I'm telling you, Kyle, you're gonna get your cock in a vise if you do this."

Gary lounged in a chair in Kyle's hotel room, watching him stuff his wallet into the pocket of fresh jeans. Kyle had showered, shaved and swallowed what looked like half a bottle of acetaminophen along with two pots of coffee. His hands still shook a little, but he was considerably better than he had been that morning.

"I made a bad impression on Sheriff Jessie," he said. "I intend to correct it."

And do a lot more.

In his entire life, he'd never been sucker-punched by the sight of a woman until Sheriff Jessica Wade had looked at him through the bars of that cell. Jessie, he reminded himself. She really looked like a Jessie. She was the first one in ages who hadn't been star-struck by his celebrity and fallen at his feet. Sometimes stark naked.

No, this woman presented a real challenge, one impossible to resist. He found himself imagining ways to get around those big tall walls she'd built around herself. He just hoped he wasn't going to crash and burn.

"She's not your run-of-the-mill buckle bunny like you're so fond of, hot shot," Gary warned. "It'll take a lot more than the patented Mitchell charm."

"Not to worry." He hoped his voice sounded as casual as he meant it to. It wouldn't do for Gary to know that this little episode was a tad more important than his usual escapades. "I'll sweep her off her feet."

"Well, you'd better stay away from the bourbon and out of Charley's. And remember, she carries a very big gun."

Kyle swallowed a bubble of trepidation, took a last look at himself in the mirror and turned to face his friend. "How the hell did I get so out of control last night, anyway?"

Gary shrugged. "An eight-second ride on

Sodbuster, a big fat check and enough points to take to Grand Nationals. And an armful of woman just looking to help you celebrate.”

“You know...” Kyle made a face. “I don’t even remember what she looked like.”

Gary pushed himself out of the chair. “I gotta tell you, pal. I haven’t seen you tie one on like that in years.”

And he hadn’t. Kyle had been riding bulls on the rodeo circuit for fifteen years. He wasn’t a green kid looking to make a splash. Stupid between the ears. He’d earned his stripes and picked up a lot of wisdom along the way. But a year ago Sodbuster had nearly ended his career and his life. Finishing the eight-second ride on the back of that monster was cause for celebration, but he’d been dumb enough to let it get out of hand.

Sheriff Jessie Wade had looked at him like he was dirt beneath her feet. After what he’d done, he couldn’t blame her. But that woman reached out to him in a way no woman had in years. Not just to his cock but to every part of his body. Somehow he had to get in her good graces. Because he wanted Sheriff Jessie Ward. *Really* wanted her.

“So.” He checked himself in the mirror once more, making sure he’d showered and scrubbed and polished away every vestige of the bum he’d looked like. “Where the hell is Watson’s Creek and how do I get there?”

Gary pushed himself up from the chair, laughing.

“It’s not as far as you think. Thirty miles west on the Interstate. There’s only one exit sign for it so be sure not to miss it.”

Kyle jingled his keys nervously. “You think I’m liable to run into that hanger-on who took me for a ride last night?”

“Maybe. You’ll just have to finagle your way

around that one. And I won't be around to keep an eye on things for you."

Kyle laughed. "Fat lot of good you did me last night."

"Hey!" Gary held up his hands. "I wasn't about to let one of your fists mess up *my* pretty face. You were swinging like a gorilla."

Kyle winced. "Yeah, that'd be a bitch to get past." Then he smiled. "But I definitely plan to do it."

Gary opened the door. "The Houston rodeo opens in five days, you know. You still planning to leave when I do and get there early?"

Kyle nodded. "The company that owns Sodbuster is trailering him there. I want to get there early enough to study him a little beforehand and see what I have to do to make sure I draw him again."

"You sure you want another crack at him? You got by this time with no broken bones."

"Gotta let him know who's boss."

Gary shrugged. "Your funeral. Well, I have stuff to do today but I plan to hit the road in two days." He slapped Kyle on the back. "Good luck. Oh, and a few peace offerings wouldn't hurt, either."

"Sheriff?" Jonas Beck, her youngest deputy, stuck his head through the open door of Jessie's office. "That...uh...*guy* is here."

Jessie dropped the folder she was leafing through on her desk and raised her eyes, frowning. "Guy? What guy?"

"You know. The one that busted up Charley's place."

Jessie felt her eyebrows rise almost to her hairline. "He's here? In the office?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What does he want?" A knot twisted in her

stomach. Had he come back to make a scene? She hoped not. She wasn't up to another clash.

"I don't know, Sheriff. But...uh...I think you'd better come out here."

Feeling dread in every muscle of her body, Jessie pushed away from the desk and stepped into the big bullpen area...and stopped. Stared. What the hell?

The last time she'd seen Kyle Mitchell he'd looked worse than something the cat dragged in and smelled like yesterday's garbage. The man standing at the front of the office was six foot plus of gorgeous, good-looking male, his dark brown hair curling just beneath his Stetson, chocolate eyes watching her with a hint of humor and...what? Something else. But what really got to her was what he was holding—a huge bouquet of flowers and a giant box of what could only be chocolates.

What was going on here?

Something close to emotion stole over her, warping her nerve endings and wriggling into her usually unaffected heart. Stunned and dismayed, she couldn't tear her eyes from the man grinning at her. Her breath was trapped in her throat and that same usually dependable heart was suddenly beating in triple time. Holy hell. She *never* reacted to a man like that, even the ones she played her "games" with.

And she certainly didn't intend to react to Kyle Mitchell. At thirty-two, she'd had more experience with his type than she cared to think about. She knew his type exactly. Hot hands, hard ride, then off in a cloud of dust. Been there, done that, had the scars to prove it. And she wasn't interested in revisiting the unhappiness. No, Kyle Mitchell should be wearing a big red sign that said "Danger! Keep away!"

Ignoring the unfortunate tingling now invading

her nipples and the sudden rush of liquid in her throbbing pussy, she squared her shoulders and strode to where Kyle Mitchell waited expectantly.

The best defense is a good offense.

“Did you comeback to finish off what’s left of poor Charley’s place?” she asked, deliberately belligerent. She needed something to counteract her body’s instant reaction to this man.

He shook his head. “Not at all. I came to offer my humble apologies and try to set things right.”

“Humble, huh?” Damn. Why did he have to look so sexy. “Why am I having a hard time believing you could ever be humble?”

“Only in your presence,” he said solemnly, holding out the flowers and candy. “For you. Peace offerings.” His eyes sparkled with mischief as he added, “It will break my heart if you refuse them.”

Jessie dug her nails into her palms, trying to still the heat rising in her body. An image flashed before her eyes of a naked Kyle Mitchell bound to the bed with her handcuffs, his cock at attention while she teased him unmercifully.

Jessie! Stop that! Your own backyard is no place for the sex games you like to play. Especially with someone like Mr. Macho Bullrider.

Of course, she hadn’t been playing with anyone *anywhere* for longer than she cared to remember. Pickings in Watson’s Creek were very slim, gossip spread faster than the measles, and trolling in San Antonio or Austin just wasn’t her style. She’d been working hard to convince herself she could live very well without sex in her life. And certainly not the kind that teased at her emotions. All it took was every bit of discipline she could dredge up on a daily basis. Not much fun but at least it kept her safe.

But the erotically tempting idea of playing her particular brand of games with this man had danger written all over it. Most especially with him, since he

also seemed to have set her hormones to doing a crazy tap dance.

“Sheriff?”

She realized he was watching her, his hands with the gifts still extended toward her. And that everyone in her office also had their eyes fastened on her.

Damn!

“That’s very nice of you, Mr. Mitchell. I wouldn’t be minding my manners if I didn’t say thank you. Is that all?”

“I’ll find something to put those flowers in.” Inez Pereira, her dispatcher, hurried over and deftly snatched the bouquet from Kyle’s hand. “Sheriff, you should at least give the man five minutes of your time. He got himself all cleaned up and drove down here just to see you.”

Jessie’s skin itched from all the eyes fastened on her.

“Fine. Five minutes in my office. Will that be enough time for your apology?”

Kyle’s grin almost melted her panties. “It’s a start.”

She was acutely aware of him behind her, following her to her office, as if a blanket of testosterone shimmered over him and reached out to her. She was glad the door to her office didn’t have a window in it. At least she’d be safe from everyone’s prying eyes. Not that she wouldn’t be subjected to scrutiny after the fact.

Sitting down in her chair, the desk as a barrier between them, she leaned forward on her elbows.

“Thank you very much for the gifts, Mr. Mitchell,” she began.

“Kyle,” he interrupted, in a voice that sounded like warm honey. “I’d like it if you called me Kyle.” He flashed that killer grin. “It would make it so much easier to apologize.”

“Fine. Kyle. Thank you.”

He handed the box of chocolates to her, but when she reached for them he wrapped his hand over her smaller one and the heat factor rose off the charts.

“I was really hoping you’d let me take you to dinner,” he drawled. “I can apologize much better over good food.”

Dinner? With Mr. Sexy?

“I’m sorry. I don’t think that would be appropriate. But thank you for the invitation.”

“Give me five minutes to change your mind.”

Chapter Two

Jessie had expected him to take her to someplace local. That meant deciding what to wear had her mind twisted into a knot. She didn't want to go casual, but too dressy and he might get the wrong idea. And what if he decided to take her someplace else, like Highpoint or Crater Lake, where the restaurants were a little more high class? She didn't want to give him the wrong idea, either. If he thought she was dressing up for him, he'd think he'd won her over, made a good impression, and that most definitely was not the case.

Finally she settled on linen slacks and a sleeveless silk shell with comfortable flats. Instead of leaving her hair loose, she pulled it back with a wide gold clip. More businesslike, she assured herself.

Yeah, right.

A minimum of makeup and she was ready when he rang the bell exactly at seven. If she'd really been interested in him, she would have had a hard time resisting the approval in his eyes when they raked over her, or the heat that blazed in them.

Steady, Jessie. It's just dinner. He's a player and you don't need that kind of aggravation.

"If I said you looked good enough to eat, would you slap my face?" he grinned, helping her into his truck.

"Maybe," she answered, fastening her seat belt.

"Okay. Then I won't tell you." Before she had time to react, he traced his fingers along the curve of her jaw. "You sure are beautiful, Sheriff Jessie."

Then he grinned and closed the door.

She was surprised when they ended up in a small restaurant at the far north end of San Antonio, less than half an hour from Watson's Creek. It was a place her friends had told her about, but she'd never been there. It more than met the rave reviews she'd heard.

Thick carpeting on the floor muffled footsteps and dark wood formed rich paneling on the walls. The only light in the room came from chandeliers set on dim and candles shimmering on the tables. They were seated in a corner at the curve of the room, by a window that looked out over a pond decorated with patio lights. When she looked across the table at Kyle, that same look simmered in his eyes. The ambience alone was enough to seduce her.

"I thought a first-class lady deserved a first-class place," he told her.

"Have you come here before?" *Brought other women here?* She wanted to smack herself for that errant thought. It was none of her business. She didn't want it to be her business.

But he shook his head. "The wife of one of my buddies told me it was a great place to bring a lady. I just haven't had one I wanted to do it with before tonight."

She shifted in her chair. "Listen, Kyle..." He reached across the table and touched her lips with one finger. She was shocked at the heat it generated and the acceleration of her pulse.

"No objections, okay? Let's enjoy dinner and let me show you I can really be a fine gentleman."

Oh, god, how will I get through this? I don't want to feel anything from him but he's worse than a drug. I never should have agreed to this.

He ordered a bottle of wine, asking her what kind she preferred and checking with the waiter to see what was recommended. When she protested

that she didn't want anything stronger than water, he just grinned at her.

"One little taste, okay?" he said. "Then, if you don't want any more, I'll finish the bottle myself."

"And drive home?"

"I think I can handle the wine." His slow smile nearly curled her toes.

The waiter brought them a bottle of Sister Creek Muscat Canelli, a light white from a Texas winery and one of her favorites. When their glasses were full he touched his to hers, the *ping* of crystal resonating in the air.

"To a pleasant evening," he said.

"A pleasant evening."

The backs of his fingers just brushed hers and that same sizzle raced through her. Oh, yeah, she was in trouble here. And the worst part was, she seemed helpless to resist it. When he licked a drop of wine from his lips she wanted to replace his tongue with her own. When he gave her a slow smile, as if he knew exactly what she was thinking, she squirmed in her chair, feeling moisture seep into her crotch. God, this man was lethal.

She only meant to take a little sip of the wine, but somehow her glass was suddenly empty and Kyle refilled it, teasing her that a tough sheriff like her should be able to hold a little alcohol. The problem was the wine was delicious and took the edge off her nerves that snapped and crackled with Kyle Mitchell just across the table from her.

He kept up a conversation throughout the meal, his voice low and soothing, his interest in her obviously more than just polite. When she finished her salad, he leaned across the table and brushed his thumb across her bottom lip.

"A touch of salad dressing, darlin'." Then he slowly and deliberately licked his thumb.

Jessie squeezed her thighs together.

When he chewed and swallowed, she couldn't stop looking at the movement of his jaw and the muscles in his throat. Whenever he refilled her wine glass, he managed to caress her fingers with his own, touch her skin lightly. She was unwillingly mesmerized, hating herself for it but unable to drag her eyes away from him.

They ordered a slice of Decadent Chocolate Surprise for dessert.

"To share," he said, and told the waiter, "Two forks, please."

"Oh, I think I'm too full for dessert," she protested. She was buzzed from the wine and not exactly in possession of all her faculties. Getting home before she got into trouble was an urgent priority.

"Just a few bites," he insisted, and flashed that killer grin. "You know what they say. Chocolate can be better than sex."

Sex. Not a word she could afford to associate with Kyle Mitchell.

When the plate arrived, Kyle handed her one of the forks, his fingers brushing her hand. She was sure a lightning bolt had shot through her arm and directly to her cunt. *Holy shit!*

But if touching was bad, eating the dessert was positively lethal. When she didn't immediately dig her fork into what was really a decadent dessert, Kyle broke off a piece with his fork and reached across the table, sliding it into her astonished mouth. He took a bite himself, then slowly and deliberately licked a speck from his lower lip.

Jessie was having trouble with her breathing and her pulse was beating in every erogenous zone in her body. But she knew Kyle wasn't as detached as he pretended. The dark flush on his cheeks and the glitter in his eyes told her exactly how aroused he was.

"You know what I'd like to do to you, Sheriff Jessie?"

She wasn't sure she wanted to hear it. His low, smoky drawl was an aphrodisiac itself, making liquid heat rush through her.

"I think I have an idea," she heard herself say, the tone of her voice unfamiliar to her.

"Oh, darlin', I don't think so." That very wicked grin tilted his lips. "You'd be shocked at the thoughts running through my mind."

"Maybe I wouldn't be shocked at all," she teased. *Oh, god, what am I turning into?*

"Oh, yeah? Well, first I'd like to strip you naked, turn you over my knee and spank that sexy ass until it turns a beautiful shade of red. I'd reach between your thighs and feel just how hot and wet it made you."

Spank her? Really? Wasn't that one of her secret fantasies? Would he be the one who was shocked if she told him that? Wait a minute. This was just supposed to be dinner, right?

Get yourself together, girl.

But her inner slut was shoving to break free and Jessie didn't seem to have the willpower to restrain her.

She squirmed in her chair. It was already making her hot and wet and all she'd done was listen to him.

"Then maybe I'd tie you to the bed, legs spread wide, and tease your little cunt until you couldn't stand it anymore." He lowered his voice even more. "And believe me, sugar, I'm an expert at it."

Jessie shivered. She had no doubt he was telling the truth. She lifted her water with a hand that trembled slightly and took a healthy swallow, her mouth suddenly dry.

"Oh, really," was all she could think of to say, as the vivid image exploded in her mind.

“Oh, really,” he repeated, grinning again. “You’d be at my mercy, sugar. I could do anything I want to you. And you know what, Sheriff Jessie? You’d enjoy the hell out of it.”

Oh, yes. He was definitely sure of that.

“Maybe you’re all talk,” she taunted, then wondered what had gotten into her? Oh, wait, she wanted *him* getting into her. A shiver raced across her skin.

“By the time you feel my cock in you—in your pussy, in your mouth, even in your ass—you’d be begging so hard you’d do anything for it.”

She nearly dropped the water glass as she tried to set it back down on the table.

“Um...” Her ability to speak seemed to have left her as more images danced before her.

“What do you say we get out of here right now? I think we need to take this someplace much more private.” He winked. “Unless you’re into public exhibitions, of course.”

“Yes. I mean, no.” She cleared her throat. “I mean...I mean, yes, we should go. Right now.”

When she rose from her chair to leave, she was surprised she could actually stand. Kyle gave her a knowing smile and wrapped his arm around her.

“I can’t wait to get you back to your house,” he murmured, his warm breath caressing her ear.

“Kyle, I...”

Again he touched his finger to her lips as they walked to the exit. “We’ll start out with one kiss when I get you home, sugar. Just one little kiss.” They were out of the restaurant by now. “Just enough so I can taste those sweet, sweet lips. Maybe lick them a little with my tongue.”

She shivered and tried to tear her mind away from the image and the sensations it created.

“I’ll bet your mouth tastes like honey,” he continued, helping her into the truck and buckling

her seat belt. He leaned forward and brushed his mouth across hers, the tip of his tongue tracing the line of the seam. "Yup. Just like honey. Only I need a better taste." He slid one hand up the inside of her thigh and pressed his palm against her cunt. "Then we'll see where we go from there."

It's the wine. That's the only explanation. I knew I shouldn't have had any.

What other reason could there be for this lassitude that enveloped her, but a lethargy that had sexual tension humming beneath it. Why didn't she push him away when he kissed her again, his hand cupping her jaw, his tongue slipping into her mouth as if it was a familiar path? What was the matter with her? She was so turned on by his words in the restaurant that she could come just from thinking about them. This so wasn't like her. Was she losing her mind?

Yes, definitely losing my mind. How on earth did this happen? How did I get here? Where's my brain when I need it?

But worse than that was the electric connection that sparked the moment he touched her. One minute Jessie found herself somehow persuaded into dinner and coaxed into splitting a bottle of wine. The next, before she could blink, they were in her bedroom, half naked, and she wanted nothing more than to rip his clothes off. Hers, too. Feel that hard body naked against hers. And fuck his brains out. She tunneled her fingers through Kyle's mink-brown hair, feeling its rich softness as his mouth feathered light kisses along the column of her neck.

It had to be the wine. What else could melt the big wall she'd built so carefully around herself? Make her want to jump into bed with a man who only that morning she'd been barely willing to wipe her boots on?

Put a lid on it, Jessie. You don't bring your playmates home with you.

But she knew it was way too late for that. The genie was out of the bottle and there was no putting it back. At the first touch of his tongue in her mouth, her breasts swelled and her thighs trembled, moisture collecting in her panties and every pulse in her body throbbing with a primal beat. She'd exploded like an incendiary device, all reason and caution blown away. She forgot she resented him, hated his type of macho personality. All that mattered was him. Now. And how long it had been since she'd felt even a glimmer of this kind of arousal. So here she was, nearly naked in her bedroom with him, leaning back against his hard, muscular body and imagining all the wicked things she wanted to do with him.

But what made it even worse was the little thread of something curling low inside her, a connection to Kyle Mitchell that had never happened before.

Shit, shit, shit.

His voice, close to her ear, destroyed her thought processes.

"So soft," he murmured, his hands slipping around to cup her breasts. Her blouse and bra lay discarded somewhere on the floor. "I love your nipples, Jessie. So ripe. So firm."

He dipped his head to pull one of them into his mouth, laving it with his tongue, grazing his teeth along its pebbled surface. She realized the soft moan she heard was coming from her.

Dragging her fingers down across his broad shoulders to his hard-muscled chest, she sifted through the crisp hair to find his flat male nipples. Dragging her fingernails across them drew a deep groan from Kyle and sent a fresh flood of cream to her pussy. Every desire, every need she'd tamped

down for so many months now came flooding to the forefront, rousing the dormant streak of wildness in her.

“Naked,” she gasped, pushing away from him. “Right now.”

He pulled her back. “Or what, sugar? You’ll arrest me?”

She bit his ear. “No, but I might handcuff you.”

“Oh, yeah? That’s some big threat there. Let’s see what you got.”

She barely paid attention as they ripped off the rest of their clothing, tossing the discarded garments aside, desperate to feel skin to skin. Jessie yanked back the covers on her bed, leaving just the silk fitted sheet and the bank of pillows she slept with.

“On the bed. Now.”

She was sure it was astonishment at her boldness that made him comply so easily, because he certainly could have resisted as she pushed him backwards onto the mattress. As he tumbled down, her eyes were drawn like a moth to light to his cock, jutting thick and proud from a nest of dark brown curls.

Holy shit!

Jessie swallowed. Could she actually take all of him inside her? The image sent fresh bolts of lust slicing through her.

Kyle’s lips curved in an absolutely lethal grin. “Like what you see, sugar?”

“Mmm,” was all she could say.

He was watching her with a combination of humor and rampant hunger in his eyes, obviously waiting to see what she’d do next. She took a moment to drink in the sight of his body. It was just as hard and lean as she’d imagined, his muscles like thick ropes beneath his skin. Broad shoulders and a wide chest tapered down to lean hips and long, muscular legs.

Beautiful! she breathed silently.

Barely able to restrain herself from leaping onto him, she reached in the nightstand drawer for the extra set of handcuffs she kept there and waved them in Kyle's face.

"Let's see if I can make you enjoy being restrained this time," she told him in a husky voice.

His eyes widened. "What? Wait..."

But with a minimum of movement she'd snapped a cuff around one wrist, threaded the connecting chain through the slat in her headboard and locked the other cuff around his opposite wrist.

There. That's what I want. And right now.

Barely acknowledging that she had lost all semblance of control, she straddled his body, leaned forward and licked his lips, loving the taste of the wine they'd shared that still lingered there. He opened his mouth with no urging, and she thrust her tongue inside. As she swept it around every inner surface, her hands drifted to his chest and again her fingers found his nipples. She scraped her nails across them, loving the sound of his indrawn breath and the flexing of the muscles in his stomach. She did it again, and again, taking her time, teasing each millimeter of the pebbled surface.

When she bent her head and licked each nipple over and over, he strained against the heat of her mouth. A light nip at each had him groaning and trying to heave his body upward.

Jessie looked at him, licking her lips. "Uh, uh, uh. My game, my rules."

"Unlock these handcuffs," Kyle said in a gritty voice. "And I'll show you whose rules we'll play by."

She gave him a wicked grin. "But I'm not through having fun yet."

Deliberately wiggling her ass along his body, she shimmied until she could kneel between his thighs. Watching him carefully, she cupped his balls with

one hand and wrapped the fingers of the other around his swollen shaft. When she delicately swiped her tongue across the velvet surface of the head, he jerked against his restraints and tightened his thighs against her.

“Jesus, Jessie. Careful. I think I’m nearly ready to come.”

“So soon?” she teased. “I haven’t really had time to play yet.”

She drew her tongue slowly along the length of his cock, up one side and down the other, feeling it jump and flex in her grasp. Very deliberately she traced the vein pulsing beneath the soft skin before dipping into the slit at the top of the head and scooping up the bead of liquid seeping from it. She repeated the motion over and over, never taking her eyes from Kyle’s face, her fingers stroking the soft sac of his testicles. His thighs tightened and his chest rose and fell as his breathing hitched erratically. The air in the room was redolent with the musk of their joint arousal, a fragrance that heightened every one of her senses.

“Jessie, Jessie, Jessie.” His voice was rough and raw as his body responded to her, his hands yanking again and again at the manacles. “Shit, Jessie. Your mouth is about to burn me alive. Let me touch you. Please.”

Jessie simply shook her head. A good part of the arousal racing through her body was the knowledge that he was restrained, unable to touch her, could only lie there at her mercy, for whatever she chose to do to him. It had been so long since she’d been able to do this. So long since she could let her dark desires take over.

For one brief moment she wondered what he thought of a woman who was this brazen, this aggressive, this outrageous. Usually she didn’t care. Playtime was all she was interested in. But Kyle

Mitchell had latched onto her in a secret place somewhere. But then she forced herself not to care, to focus only on the pleasure here and now.

When she raised one hand, delicately licked the fingers and then slipped them down in the cleft of his ass, he groaned loudly and bucked his hips.

“God, woman,” he rasped. “What the hell are you doing to me?”

“Making you feel good,” she said slyly and closed her lips over his cock, pulling him deep into her mouth.

The pleasure, the pleasure. Concentrate on the pleasure.

Her own body was in such a high state of arousal she was afraid she'd come while kneeling there. Holy Hannah, she hadn't been this turned on in months. And with Kyle Mitchell, the man she'd been in such a hurry to kick out of her jail? How could she have gone from practically hating the man one minute to wanting to devour him the next. She wondered what he'd say if she showed him some of her toys and asked him to play. Just the thought of that sent delicious shivers skittering over her skin.

As his cock continued to swell and flex in her mouth, she massaged the sensitive area of his cleft, pressing her moistened fingertips against the puckered opening of his anus.

What will he think if I do this? If I slide my finger inside his ass and find that male hot spot? Will he be angry? Demand I not do this?

Kyle jerked, his body tightening like a fist and another groan of pleasure rumbled up from his chest. Jessie was completely engrossed in what she was doing now. In fact, she *loved* what she was doing, pleasuring a man with her mouth and showing him that his rear opening could be just as sensitive and responsive as a woman's.

Without increasing her tempo, she continued to

draw the thick erection deeper into her mouth and press the tip of one finger into Kyle's hot rectum. Oh, yes, she definitely wanted to show him some of her toys. Explain how she could enhance his climax. Make him come harder than he ever had in his life. She shivered just thinking about it, the pulse in her vagina beating in triple time, her hungry cunt begging for something to fill it.

A long breath hissed from his mouth when her finger plunged to the first knuckle, his inner muscles clenching around her when her finger pushed all the way in. Yes, yes, yes. Pleasuring a man—the right man—made Jessie so horny she nearly lost her mind.

Then, as easily as she'd started, she stopped. Not too much, not too fast, she reminded herself. When she leaned back on her heels, lightly stroking Kyle's penis with one hand while the other continued to probe his rear entrance, she had to grit her teeth to keep from climbing on top of him and taking him inside her. Right now.

"You like that?" Her voice was husky, thick with her desire.

"God, yes." The words burst from his mouth. "Jessie, I don't know if I can hang on much longer, and I damn well want to be inside you."

A muscle twitched in his jaw, and she could see he was barely hanging onto his control. He yanked on the handcuffs again and his hard-as-steel muscles flexed against her.

"Not yet," she teased. "Not quite yet. I have something I want from you first."

Slipping her finger free, she straddled his chest again and hitched herself forward until her pussy was nearly touching his mouth.

"Lick me, Kyle. Let me feel your tongue on me."

Shaking with need, she opened the lips of her cunt and moved forward again just enough so his

tongue could reach her. When he glided it over her clit, she couldn't contain the shudders that sped through her or the fresh release of cream soaking her even more.

"You're wet, sugar." His voice was as hoarse as hers. "And you taste like heaven."

"More," she urged, almost pleading. "Lick me hard. I want your tongue inside me."

His eyes darkened as she murmured her erotic instructions to him, and he bent to his task avidly.

She really wanted to watch him do it. That was half of the enjoyment for her. But the pleasure was riding her so forcefully she had to close her eyes and give herself over to it.

Kyle Mitchell had a wicked, wicked tongue that was an educated instrument of pleasure. The tip rested lightly on her clit, teasing her. Carefully he licked every inch of her pussy lips, knowing exactly how to measure his strokes. Flicking her throbbing clit before stabbing inside her waiting cunt.

Oh, god!

When he curled his tongue and touched her sweet spot, so much pleasure sizzled through her she was sure she'd combust on the spot. She arched her back, thrusting her breasts out at him. And right there, straddling his hard chest, his tongue taking her to heaven, his willingness to give her satisfaction so obvious...She was in big, big trouble.

"If you unlocked my hands, I could play with those gorgeous tits and pinch those beautiful nipples," he told her, his voice heavy and rough. His desire was so strong she could almost feel it reaching out to her. "I could make you feel even better, sugar. Make those gorgeous nipples swell in my mouth. How about it?"

"Not yet," she gasped, riding his tongue. "Not yet, not yet, not yet."

She threw her head back, giving herself over to

the sweeping pleasure. His efforts were totally focused on giving her what she wanted. Driving her up the spiral that swirled low in her belly, silently showing her, telling her how much he loved doing this to her.

Funny. She'd thought her enjoyment would all come from what she wanted to do to *him*. He was the first man she could remember who ate at her with such obvious relish. But then she felt his teeth bite down gently on her clit, her eyes flew open and her body stiffened. God, she was going to come and she wanted him to be inside her when she did.

"Stop." Her breath seesawed out of her. "Stop now."

Again she shifted her body to give herself better access to his entire groin area, once more taking his cock inside her mouth. Her hand cupped his balls, and when she felt them start to tighten, she reached over and pulled out a condom from the nightstand. Rolling it onto him expertly, she took a deep breath and lowered herself onto that thick, swollen shaft.

With infinite care, she straddled him, guided the head of his thick penis to her opening and slid down the shaft, one teasing inch at a time. Every muscle in Kyle's body flexed as he strained to push himself completely inside her. Her flesh stretched to accommodate the delicious feeling of fullness.

And then he was *there*. All the way in. The head of his cock bumped erotically against the mouth of her womb. An involuntary shiver of pleasure skittered through her.

"Hell, Jessie," he gritted. "I can't hold on much longer. Have mercy, woman."

She grinned through the sensual haze that wrapped itself around her.

"This had better be more than an eight-second ride, cowboy." Although Jessie didn't know if *she'd* last more than ten seconds at this point.

“Then you’d better get going,” he told her, bucking his hips for emphasis.

Bracing herself, she began the up and down glide, slowly at first, then faster, harder. Her eyes locked with his, dark desire glittering in those pools of chocolate brown.

Up and down. Harder, Faster. More, more, more.

His big body tensed at the exact moment hers did, and then, like Fourth of July fireworks, they exploded simultaneously, the orgasm rocking them both, their cries of pleasuring mingling. He pulsed inside her, the muscles of her cunt clasp him and milking him as spasm after spasm rocked them both.

When the last aftershock had subsided, Jessie fell forward onto Kyle’s chest, their skin slick with sweat, lungs dragging for air, her heart thudding like a jackhammer against his ribs. When she’d finally recovered enough, she reached for the tiny key and unlocked the handcuffs. Kyle rubbed his wrists for a moment, then gripped her hips and gently lifted her from his shaft and set her aside.

“One minute,” he told her in an unsteady voice. He padded unsteadily to her bathroom, then seconds later he was back, crawling into bed and pulling her against him. “A shower’s probably in order, but right now, I don’t think I even have the strength to turn on the water.”

“Me, either,” she agreed, nestling the curve of her ass against his hard, lean body. “Later.”

“Jessie.” His voice was low and soft, the drawl as thick as warm molasses crawling uphill. “You are one damn fine woman. Someone should have snapped you up a long time ago.” He tucked her hair behind her ear and gently kissed her neck, then chuckled softly. “I hope you paid attention. I lasted more than eight seconds. We’re gonna do this again. Count on it.”

“Mmmhmm,” was all she could manage.

But as she drifted off to a satisfied sleep, a scary thought lodged in her brain. Kyle had awakened raw desire inside her. Desire only satisfied by the games she liked to play. She’d wanted a wild ride with the bullrider and gotten it. But she’d also gotten much more than that. She’d realized somewhere, when their bodies were connected, how easily she could fall for this man. And that frightened the hell out of her.

Chapter Three

An angry buzzing sounded in Jessie's ear and she slapped at the air, needing to chase away whatever insect was hassling her. But the buzzing continued, and when she pried her eyes open, she realized it was her alarm clock. That was the first thing she noticed. The second was the lean, sexy man sleeping in bed beside her.

In bed?

Beside her?

Kyle Mitchell. Dinner. Wine. She spotted the handcuffs on her nightstand, and her stomach somersaulted as the activities of the previous night came rolling back to her like a video on a replay loop. Her boldness. The unbelievable level of desire. And worse than that, a tendril of something emotional that had danger written all over it in big red letters. Hot and cold flashes skimmed through her. She'd actually brought *this man* into her home. And done *things* with him.

She was usually so careful about who she played with. And where. At least they'd had dinner in Sommerville, where she'd be less likely to be seen. And they'd had a table tucked into a corner so they'd be pretty much hidden from view. She sure didn't need gossip about the sheriff making its way around town.

She could almost hear her friend Tricia Danby now. "You're such a tight-ass, Jessie. Loosen up. You might even find out you're human. How long's it been since you had sex, anyway?"

Not nearly as long as you think.

Jessie kept her sex life very, very private. She hardly needed to have people gossiping about who she took to bed and what she did with them. Even Tricia didn't know all the details.

What a stupid thing it was to let Kyle Mitchell into her house and her bed. What if he was a talker and blabbed? What if someone drove by her house and saw his truck? At least she lived pretty far out of town, not exactly in the middle of a traffic pattern, so that wasn't too likely.

Shit, shit, shit.

Okay, no more time for what ifs. Leaping up, she yanked the covers back and smacked Kyle on his far-too-gorgeous ass.

"Get up," she shrieked at him. "Get up right now."

Oh, god, how did I let myself do this?

Kyle rolled over and stared at her, bleary-eyed. "What? What's the matter?"

"Get out of this bed right now." She smacked him again. "Up, up. Up."

She had to get him out of here before whatever emotions were brewing inside her came to a full boil. And certainly before anyone drove by her house. Thank god it was still early enough that she could get to the office on time. No one would be coming to look for her.

Kyle's strong fingers clamped down on her wrist. "You'd better not do that unless you mean business, sugar." His voice was still thick with sleep, but the drawl was as thick as ever.

"Okay. I mean business. Get up."

His mouth curved in a lazy smile. "Not that kind of business, Jessie." He yanked, and tumbled her onto the bed on top of him, his arms wrapping around her.

No, no, no. She couldn't do it again. She pushed at him, and when he wouldn't release her in

desperation, she bit one of his nipples. Hard.

"Ow!" His arms opened, and she jumped off the bed. "Damn, woman. That hurts."

"I meant it to. You have to get up and get out of here right this minute." She dragged her fingers through her hair. "Oh, god. Oh, hell. Kyle, this was a big mistake. Get out. Right now."

He rolled himself to a sitting position and stared at her. "What the hell is the matter with you? Last night you handcuffed me to this bed and had your way with me, and now you want to act like it never happened?"

"That's right." She dragged a sheet off the bed and wrapped it around herself. It was hard to have a fit when you were stark naked. "It was a big mistake. I'm sorry. Now go away."

Kyle rubbed his hands over his face as if scrubbing away cobwebs, then looked at Jessie again. "You want to tell me what's going on here?"

"Nothing's going on," she snapped. "Ever again. I'm going to take a shower and get dressed. Be out of here by the time I'm finished."

"Wait just a damn minute," he protested. "I want some answers here. I wasn't the only one having a good time last night. Or feeling what I felt."

"No answer, no good time," she called over her shoulder. "And no feelings of any kind. Just go."

She slammed the bathroom door and leaned against it, shaking. How could she possibly have done something this stupid? Bringing this man home with her. *This* man. Of all people. What was the matter with her, anyway?

That's what happens when you swear off men, Jessie.

"I don't need a man," she muttered under her breath.

But you do need one, the voice in her head whispered.

No, I don't.

She certainly hadn't wanted Kyle. Not at first. But somehow, with those eyes like pools of melted chocolate, with a drawl that wrapped itself around her like black velvet, with blatant masculinity that woke every hormone in her body, he'd seduced her into dinner. Before she knew it, a raging need exploded inside her. She'd barely been able to wait until they were inside her house before getting them both naked.

And then, as if the joke the fates had played on her hadn't been bad enough, this man—this *rodeo bum*—awakened something deep inside her, feelings she'd ruthlessly buried. Feelings that couldn't surface for Sheriff Jessica Wade, who had a tough-as-nails image to maintain.

Oh, god. What have I done?

She tried to listen through the door for sounds of him moving around. Dressing. Leaving. If she was lucky, she wouldn't have to see him again for a hundred years. She could just imagine what he thought of her, the tight-assed sheriff who took him home and fucked his brains out.

What was that noise? Oh, hell, he wasn't looking in her nightstand drawer, was he? The one where she kept all her toys?

Shit, shit, shit.

"Jessie?"

His voice was loud, and so close to the door it made her jump.

"You listen to me, Jessie Wade. I may be leaving now, but we aren't through here. Don't think we are. That was a lot more than just hot sex last night." He paused. "You hear me, Jess? I'll be back."

The stomp of his boots faded as he moved away. Jessie dropped down on the edge of the tub, still clutching the sheet around her. She was ashamed, humiliated, embarrassed. A whole lot of things. But

Kyle Mitchell had said something she had a hard time brushing off. They *had* connected on a level that went beyond the physical. And that scared her even more.

If she was lucky, he'd be insulted enough to take himself back to San Antonio and never show his face around here again. Because if he did, she had no idea how she'd handle it.

Kyle pulled his truck up to one of the pumps at Wharton's Ready Mart and climbed out of the cab. While he pumped the gasoline, his mind was busy in a dozen different directions. There were at least three things that topped his list.

First of all, Sheriff Jessie Wade had an untapped well of erotic desires that went very deep. Second, the uptight little sheriff had astonished him with the kind of games she liked to play. Games that he enjoyed but usually had to be careful who he chose to play them with. And third, she'd awakened feelings in him he hadn't even known had been simmering inside him. And he wasn't too sure he was all that happy about them. Especially after the way she'd unceremoniously kicked him out of her bed and out of her house this morning.

He was happy to see the last of most women. Glad to move on. He reveled in the life of a rodeo rider, moving from place to place. Nothing tying him down. He'd been stashing most of his winnings away, saving to buy himself a spread one of these days and raise his own bulls to train for the rodeo circuit. But not yet.

Until last night. He'd definitely expected he could charm his way past the defenses that Sheriff Jessie Wade set up. What he hadn't expected was that it felt like more than a one-night stand to him. That it suddenly had him thinking about a home, one with a big front porch and wide open spaces. Of

children running around and...

Stop! Get your mind out of there! Run, run, run!

But he couldn't. Somehow, during the night of the most unbelievable sex he could remember, something inside him had opened up and he couldn't seem to put a lid on it. What they shared had gone beyond the physical. And he was sure she felt it, too, although he'd probably have to torture her to get her to admit it.

He smiled to himself as he thought of all the pleasurable ways he could torment her, then mentally shook his head. What the hell was he thinking?

Still, no matter how he tried to twist his brain around, it seemed to be headed in that direction. He had no idea why except the woman had unlocked parts of him he'd kept stashed away since he was eighteen. And it wasn't just the sex, which had been damn good. Off the charts. Last night had been enjoyment beyond anything he could imagine.

Once he'd charmed his way past her initial arguments, he was sure she enjoyed it as much as he did. Not just the sex, either. Jessie Wade was smart, funny, and interesting. She had an indefinable essence that drew him in like a net wrapping around him. Just being with her gave him a dose of unexpected pleasure. He was sure she felt the same way. She'd certainly been uninhibited in bed. He actually felt a surge of heat as he remembered some of the things they'd done. That thing with her finger...

Lust curled in his belly and his balls tightened. If he wasn't careful, he wouldn't even be able to go inside to get that coffee he was dying for. She sure had thrown him out in a hurry this morning. He'd been looking forward to cuddling with that sweet body. Maybe bringing her breakfast in bed. He bet no one ever did that for Sheriff Jessie Wade. Maybe

they could even have shared the same cup of coffee. He'd tell her about his life on the rodeo circuit and she'd—

Damn again!

He still didn't know what he'd done to piss her off so badly.

When the pump dinged that the tank was full, he put the cap back on and headed inside to buy a cup of the strong coffee his body was craving. About four or five people were wandering around inside, looking no more awake than he was. A redhead in shorts and a Watson's Creek t-shirt was leaning on the counter talking to the woman behind it.

"I'm telling you, Sherry, I drove by Jessie's house this morning and there was a strange truck there."

Sherry laughed. "Tricia, Jessie's house isn't exactly on your way into town. What were you looking for?"

The redhead leaned over the counter and lowered her voice. Kyle stood as close as he could without being obvious, ears straining to hear what she was saying.

"Okay, here it is. Carol Sue and Doug Martin were over in Sommerville last night, and they saw Jessie with that gorgeous bullrider she had in her jail. What do you think about that?"

"I think you ought to mind your own business," Sherry told her. "Jessie wouldn't be too happy to have her private life spread all over Watson's Creek."

"I'm just looking out for my best friend," Tricia protested. "She needs to have some fun in life. I don't think she even remembers what that means."

"Morning, ladies." Kyle finally stepped up to the counter with his Styrofoam cup of coffee. He grinned at both of them.

Tricia's eyes widened when she recognized him.

“Ohmigod. You’re *him*.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Excuse me?”

“The bullrider. I saw you ride two nights ago in San Antonio. You were fabulous.”

“Thank you.” He paid for his coffee, then turned to Tricia, pulling out his famous smile. “I couldn’t help overhearing you just now.”

Tricia blushed. “I should learn to keep my big mouth shut. I’m not usually such a gossip. It’s just...”

“It’s just that you’re concerned about your friend.” He winked. “So am I, as a matter of fact. Could you walk outside with me and give me a few minutes of your time?”

Tricia frowned. “This is nothing bad about Jessie, is it? Because if it is—”

“Not at all,” he cut her off. “In fact, I’m hoping it’s good.”

“Well...okay, then.” She followed him outside. “So what is it you want to know?”

Driving back to the city on the Interstate, he mulled over in his mind the brief conversation he’d just had with Jessie’s friend. Who, by the way had been only too happy to answer his questions, mischief sparkling in her eyes. She seemed to be on some kind of mission to spice up Jessie’s life.

Well, that was his plan, too, he admitted to himself.

He smacked his hand on the steering wheel. He should be giving thanks that she’d tossed him out on his ass, with nothing more wounded than his pride. So why did he have this terrible itch to see her again? Maybe it was because, on top of being the first woman who’d touched him emotionally, she also played the kind of games he liked. His dick got hard just thinking about it. Next time Jessie Wade would be the one cuffed to the bed while he teased and tormented her. Maybe give her a good spanking first

for being such a bad girl, just as he'd described at dinner.

He grinned to himself. Oh, yeah. He really loved bad girls. Especially ones like Jessie. He pulled at his jeans, suddenly too tight for him as his cock swelled.

He couldn't just walk into her office again. She'd be on the alert this time. But thanks to Tricia, a plan was forming in his mind and he grinned. He had a fifty-fifty chance of succeeding, but that was better than anything else he could think of. He just needed to do some shopping. And keep Gary's nose out of it.

Turning on the radio, he found a country western music station that was playing a familiar tune and started singing along with it.

"Jessie, I understand you've been hell on wheels around here today."

Jessie looked up from her desk to find her best friend, Tricia Danby, standing in the doorway to her office.

Jessie leaned back in her chair and tossed her pen onto the desk. "Did those big strong men have to call you for help?"

"Uh huh." She moved into the office, closed the door and dropped into a chair. "Actually, I ran into Deputy Judd at the Daylight Diner and he unloaded on me. Said everyone would appreciate it if I could take the burr out from under your saddle. So what's the deal?"

Jessie sipped at her lukewarm coffee while she tried to gather her thoughts. She and Tricia usually shared all their secrets, but this one she was playing close to the vest.

"It wouldn't have anything to do with that rodeo cowboy who brought you flowers and chocolates, would it?" Tricia grinned.

"Damn." Jessie slammed her mug down on the

desk. "Who told you about that?"

"Adorable Deputy Judd was only too happy to share the details with me." She leaned forward, her face serious. "Jessie, Kyle Mitchell is the ultimate sex on the hoof. He's just what you need to loosen up."

If you only knew how loose he made me.

"That's a pretty sweeping statement. You don't even know him."

Tricia laughed. "Honey, any woman who can still breathe knows who Kyle Mitchell is. And they'd all give everything they own to get him in their beds."

"Why?" Jessie wrinkled her forehead. "What's so special about him?"

"Besides the fact that he's the bullriding king of the rodeo? If you have to ask, then you're in worse shape than I thought. Please don't tell me you turned him away. Not when he came bearing gifts and that come-fuck-me grin."

"That's just the trouble." She raked her fingers through her curls. "He probably just expects every woman to fall naked at his feet."

"And most of them would," Tricia agreed. "I expect you're something brand new to him. Oblivious to his charms and a lady sheriff to boot." She frowned. "You were oblivious to his charms, right? And you're kicking yourself, so that's why you're so crabby today."

Jessie swallowed more coffee, making a face at the taste.

"Earth to Jess. Am I right?" When the silence just stretched out, Tricia let out a soft laugh. "Well, I'll be damned. He got to you, and that's what you're so mad about."

"I was stupid," Jessie spit out. "I have an image to maintain. I can't give an inch or all the macho law enforcement assholes I have to deal with will cut me

to ribbons.”

“Nobody’s cutting you to ribbons, honey. You’ve more than earned their respect. It’s time to cut yourself a little slack.” She paused. “So, are you planning to see him again?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Don’t tell me you threw him out.” Tricia snorted. “Only you would toss away a lip-smacking treat like Kyle Mitchell.”

Oh, Tricia, if you only knew.

More silence. Finally her friend rose.

“I’d smack you up side the head if I thought it would help. One of these days you’re going to take a fall, and if you aren’t looking, it’s going to be a damn hard one.”

I think it already is.

“Tell those crybabies I promise to be nicer to them,” she said, forcing a grin. “And I’ll call you later.”

After Tricia left, she sat staring at nothing for a long time. She’d always liked her sex kinky. And in her position, she had to be very careful about choosing her partners. Strangers who kept their mouths shut were the best. And she didn’t have to let her feelings be involved. So what was it about Kyle that had made her break all her rules? She just hoped he was headed out of town, because she wasn’t sure she’d be able to walk away from him a second time.

She managed to make it through the rest of the day gritting her teeth until she was sure they’d crack and pasting a smile on her face for anyone who was around. Luckily they had a spate of malicious mischief calls at the end of the day that took up her staff’s time. High school kids itching for freedom as the school year wound down. Nothing too serious, but it was her job to make sure it didn’t get to be.

By the time she headed home, it was dark. What

she needed was a hot bath, a glass of wine and a good old pity party. By tomorrow she'd be back to herself again.

But is that what you want?

An image of Kyle's naked muscular body, thick cock jutting from a nest of brown curls only slightly darker than the hair on his head, warm chocolate eyes blazing with heat flashed before her so vividly she almost ran her truck off the road.

Damn, Jessie. Get hold of yourself.

She was glad when her house finally came in sight. Out here the homes were scattered pretty far apart. It made for loneliness on the one hand but privacy on the other, something she cherished after spending her working hours under everyone's scrutiny.

She turned into her driveway, grateful she'd remembered to leave on an outside light and a lamp in the living room. Oh, wait. Had she really remembered? Of course she had. How else would they be on? She pulled into the garage, gathered her purse and let herself into the house through the side door.

The first thing that tickled her senses was the faint sound of music. Jessie tensed. She knew for damn sure she hadn't left the radio on that morning. Pulling her gun from her holster, she tiptoed through the house, heading toward the sound. It seemed to come from her bathroom. As she got nearer, not only did the music get louder but there was a distinct scent of roses in the air.

What the hell is going on?

Cautiously, she moved through her bedroom, eyes widening at the trail of rose petals that led to her bathroom. She stopped about five feet from the partially closed door, moved out of the line of any possible fire and called out, "I know you're in there. I have a gun. Come out with your hands up and I'll try

not to shoot you.”

The last thing she expected was a grinning Kyle Mitchell, both hands in the air, a small pink shopping bag dangling from the fingers of one of them. And he was stark naked. She was so shocked she nearly dropped her gun.

“Damn it,” she snapped. “What are you doing in here? And how did you get in? If you picked my lock, I’ll arrest you for breaking and entering.”

“I don’t know about breaking.” He chuckled. “But I’m sure thinking about the entering. Three guesses where.” He looked at the gun she was holding. “Think you can put that thing away? It’s making me nervous.”

“Good. I hope nervous enough to get out of my house. And put some damn clothes on.” She was having a hard time taking her eyes away from the magnificent erection jutting from his body.

“Now Sheriff, honey, that’s not very friendly. And after all the trouble I went to.”

Jessie gritted her teeth but holstered her gun. It would be kind of foolish to shoot this man. How would she ever explain it? Especially in his state of undress. Besides, it was obvious someone had let him in and she wanted to know who.

“Fine.” She took the gun and holster off and turned to place it on her dresser. Her eyes widened as she spotted a tray of fresh strawberries and chocolate sitting there with champagne icing in a bucket next to it. “Where did all this come from? How did it get in here?”

He was right next to her before she realized he was moving. One hand cupped her chin, his hot gaze immobilizing her, his hotter mouth brushing hers gently, his tongue licking the sensitive surface. And his thick cock pressing into her soft body.

Damn. It was happening again. Jessie could feel her bones melting and her pussy dampening. The

suddenly fierce throbbing in her body was so intense she was sure Kyle could hear it. What was it about this man that made all her carefully built defenses crumble and her body erupt up in flames?

"You have to leave," she whispered against his mouth.

"Maybe. That's still up for negotiation."

She would have moved, but her feet seemed rooted to the floor. "How did you get in here, anyway?"

"I'll tell you, but you have to promise not to throw a fit."

Jessie tensed. "What do you mean?"

"Hanging out at the convenience store is very educational." He grinned against her lips. "You meet the most interesting people. Like your best friend Tricia Danby. And believe me, she has all of your best interests at heart."

"Tricia's a damn romantic." *Who I'm going to kill the minute I see her.*

"She was more than happy to help me set this all up." His expression turned serious. "Jessie, last night was more than just a good time for me. I loved the things we did together, only I want more. A lot more. And I think you would, too, if you'd just let yourself go."

Her giggle had a slightly hysterical sound. "You don't think I let myself go last night?"

"Oh, I think we just scratched the surface."

Yes, yes, yes. But then her damn voice of reason intruded. She didn't do this. *Couldn't* do this.

"You have to leave." But she knew her words had no bite to them, especially with his naked body so tight against hers.

"Leave? Don't you want to see the rest of your presents?" he asked.

"Presents?" She blinked, trying to focus, something becoming more and more impossible.

“What presents?”

“Good thing I did a little checking around here before I left this morning. Did some shopping this morning to add to your collection.”

“My collection?” Her face flamed with heat as his words sank in. So he *had* snooped this morning. God. She tried to break away from him, but his hand moved to her arm, gripping it gently but firmly.

“Thought we might check these out tonight.”

He reached into the little pink shopping bag on the bed and placed two boxes and a hot pink baggie on the bed. Jessie didn’t know which was burning hotter, her face or her cunt. There, on her carefully turned-back bed, was a dildo with a lifelike head, a tiny bullet vibrator, and a set of matching butterflies that she knew from having seen them before were a clit vibrator and nipple clamps.

Her knees suddenly weak, she grabbed for Kyle to hold onto.

“I’d say you know what these are, Jessie, darlin’. And tonight we’re going to use them. Tonight *I’m* gonna be the one in charge and drive you up that high wall of pleasure.” He turned her to face him. “So how about it? Still want to throw me out?”

Chapter Four

Jessie's head was spinning. She'd had playmates that wined her and dined her, taken her to the most expensive restaurants and hotels...then were as happy to call it quits as she was. She always brought her own toys to play, and the men she played with seemed content to let her bring the tools and set the ground rules. Now she realized it was because they backed away from any indication of involvement as much as she did.

But Kyle Mitchell seemed intent on making this personal and gave strong indications that he wasn't riding off into the sunrise when morning rolled around. She was stunned that he'd actually gone into an adult toy store and bought her presents that he hoped would give her pleasure.

"Jessie?" His tone held a thread of anxiety. "Did I get the wrong things?"

She shook herself out of her frozen state. "N-No. These are...I mean..." She turned to face him. "Kyle, why did you do this?"

He pulled her close, and when he spoke, his breath was fanning her face. "I wanted to please you, Sheriff Jessie. I wanted to make good." His fingers stroked her cheek. "I know you think I'm just an asshole macho rodeo bum, but like I said before, last night meant something to me. Damned if I know why, but there it is. I want to find out if it was just the wine or if there's really something beginning here."

"B-but I threw you out this morning."

He chuckled. "I never did follow instructions too

well.” He unbuttoned her shirt and pulled it from her uniform trousers. “I’ve got a bath waiting for you, with some of that rose scent Tricia said you like so much.”

I’m going to kill Tricia when I see her. No. Wait. Maybe I’m not.

Just the touch of his fingers against her skin set the muscles in her cunt to quaking and her nipples to tingling. He seemed to have the ability to make her lose all sense of reason.

“And tonight, Sheriff Jessie, darlin’, *I’m* in charge.” He slid her blouse from her body and tossed it aside. “Got a couple of other things in that bag, too. But, bath first.”

She stood immobilized while he undressed her, unable to do anything but tremble with anticipation. When she was naked, he lifted her in his arms and carried her into the bathroom. Sure enough, her big tub was filled with steaming water and the essence of roses carried on the steam to fill the air.

“Into the tub.” Kyle was right next to her, lightly running his hands over her shoulders, her arms, her hips and the cheeks of her ass. Unexpectedly he gave her a light slap on her buttocks. It startled her and she jerked.

“Kyle?” She turned her head to look at the expression on his face.

“Told you I wanted to spank that pretty little ass.”

Smack!

He did it again. Then twice more. One hand drifted around to her tummy, slid past her soft curls and into the folds of her sex.

“Aah. Good. Drenched. Just as I expected.” He rubbed lightly over her clit. “That turns you on, doesn’t it, sugar?”

Jessie nodded, unable to speak. She had all she could do to remain upright with the lightning

sensations bombarding her.

“Come on.” He took her hand. “I’m going to bathe you.”

She sank into the water, feeling the silky touch of it wash over her skin. The tension that had ridden her all day eased away, her muscles relaxing, her nerves smoothing out. Kyle knelt beside the tub, his naked body so close she had to resist the temptation to reach out and run her hands over it, and picked up a bath sponge that she’d never seen before.

“Where did that come from?”

He grinned. “A little hint from Tricia. She said it feels real good on the body.”

“Tricia has a big fat mouth,” Jessie told him, but she felt so good she was having trouble working up a good fit of anger.

One time she had met a real Dominant and spent the weekend with him, just to see if it was a lifestyle she was searching for. She’d decided afterward that she really just liked some of the games and toys, but one of the things that had been so sensuously pleasurable was when he had bathed her. She’d felt cherished and treasured, and the same feelings washed over her now.

Kyle dipped the sponge that looked like an open blossom into the tub and began sluicing water over her. He stroked it gradually along the lines of her neck and down her arms, taking care not to miss one inch of skin, and moving even more slowly across the swell of her breasts. Her nipples hardened instantly, swelling even more when he rubbed the sponge over them in lazy swirls.

She couldn’t help herself. A low hum drifted from her throat and she heard Kyle chuckle again. Lordy, that man had a chuckle that made a woman think of eighteen kinds of sin.

“Feel good, sugar? I sure do love the way those luscious pink nipples swell up for me. They’ll look

even better when we get those nipple clamps on them.” He leaned his head close to hers and whispered in her ear, “When I’ve got them poking out, all fat and swollen, I’m going to suck on them until you come just from my mouth.”

Jessie shifted in the bath water, a throbbing in her pussy pulsating all the way through her.

The sponge moved slowly down the slight swell of her tummy, swishing back and forth in the water. He took so long moving down to the ache between her legs that she finally bent her knees and parted her thighs, silently urging him to move faster.

But Kyle deliberately avoided touching her pussy at all, instead gliding the sponge in the same slow strokes over each leg, even lifting her feet one at a time and bathing her toes. When his hand moved to rest lightly at the top of her mound, she closed her eyes and let her thighs fall even wider apart.

“I’m gonna make that little puss of yours feel really, really good tonight, Jessie. Really good.”

He slid the sponge lightly over her clit, rubbing it back and forth in a gentle motion that ramped up the need building inside her. The muscles of her belly tightened as her pussy clenched in desperate need. The slightly rough surface of the sponge chafed over the sensitive knot of her clit, the tiny nerves in that swollen bundle of flesh screaming in response. Back and forth it moved, Kyle’s mouth close to her ear, his tongue lightly tasting the sensitive spot just behind her ear. Shivers of sensuous anticipation skated over her.

She moaned when Kyle moved the sponge away, lifted one leg at a time and used the porous flower to caress the responsive spot behind each knee. She was at once completely relaxed and totally on edge, anticipation singing every nerve. Her eyes flew open when she heard the drain lever flip up and the

gurgles of the water beginning to drain.

“What...?”

He helped her to stand and climb out of the tub onto the bath mat. A large towel lay folded on the vanity and he used it to pat her dry.

“Don’t move,” he ordered.

He hurried into the bedroom and quickly returned carrying the box with the nipple clamps nestled on a bed of cotton. Lifting one breast, he pulled the nipple into his mouth, closing his lips over it and sucking deeply. Her knees were suddenly so weak, Jessie had to grab his upper arms to balance herself.

Very slowly, circling the bud once more with his tongue, Kyle released the throbbing nub and turned his attention to the other one. When they were plumped and swollen to his satisfaction, he carefully pulled each one into the restraints of a ring and tightened both of them. He stared at her breasts with a hot look in his eyes and made a small sound of satisfaction.

“Look.” He turned her around so she faced the mirror over the vanity. “See how beautiful those nipples look, sugar. See how swollen and red they are. Just looking at them makes me so hard I could come right now.” He nipped one earlobe. “But I’m not going to. I’m saving that for later. A very special later.”

Arrows of pleasure stabbed through her at the erotic intention in his low, husky voice. When he turned her back to face him and pressed his lips to hers, stabbing his tongue into her mouth, she whimpered with pleasure. Then he lifted her so she was seated on the vanity and closed his mouth over one of her clamped nipples. When his teeth scraped over the sensitive surface, she dug her nails into his shoulders.

He worshipped her nipple, that was the only

word to describe it. Sucking, licking, tugging with teeth that grazed gently against the tender surface. She looked down at his face, saw his cheeks hollow as he sucked and pulled with his mouth. He slid his tongue over the very swollen tip imprisoned in the nipple ring, then nipped again. Teasing, tormenting, in the same way she'd played with him the night before.

Her hands gripped the edge of the vanity as streak after streak of heat surged directly from her breast to her cunt and set up a wave of tiny tremors. She closed her eyes, letting sensation sweep over her.

When he moved to her other nipple, he moved thumb and forefinger to the one he'd been worshipping, squeezing it and pulling gently. Jessie nearly couldn't breathe.

She wanted to clench her thighs together to contain the thrumming in her sex, but Kyle was standing between them, keeping her legs wide open. He dropped a hand to the lips of her pussy, lightly stroking the wet folds, ramping up the spasms building inside her. He worked her nipples harder, one always in his mouth while the other was captured by a thumb and forefinger.

The orgasm hit without warning, shaking her, vibrating through her, all the more intense because she couldn't satisfy the desperate need to feel something inside her.

Kyle slid his hands up to her shoulders, his fingers warm on her skin.

"See?" His mouth was a millimeter away from hers, his eyes flashing heat. "I knew I could make you come just by sucking on your nipples. Those rings are a great invention."

Jessie was still shaking. She leaned into him as she attempted to even out her breathing.

"And we're just getting started," he told her

“My turn to play sheriff,” Kyle said, a hungry smile on his face. He’d looked forward to this all day long, imagining all the possible scenarios. He’d been prepared for her to give him a real hard time, but whatever it was they had connected with last night was still working. Her objections had disappeared like so much smoke.

When he cuffed her to the bed with the pink fleece-lined cuffs he’d bought, he saw the bright flame in her eyes, the anticipation of what was to come. He fed her sips of wine and pieces of fresh fruit, carrying the snacks to her mouth with his teeth, the juice from the strawberries dribbling into her mouth and his at the same time. He had to force himself to keep his eyes away from her sweet little cunt or he’d have lost it right then and there, and he had big plans for that part of her anatomy.

When they finished two glasses of wine, some of which he’d dribbled onto those gorgeously-compressed nipples and licked up with his tongue, and demolished part of the fruit tray, he unlocked the handcuffs from the headboard, lifted her and turned her so she was on her knees. As soon as he had her hands cuffed again, this time behind her, he pulled all the pillows into a pile and helped her lean onto them. He definitely wanted her comfortable for what was about to happen.

Nudging her thighs apart, he gently rubbed the lips of her pussy.

“So sweet,” he breathed. “Hell, Jessie, I’ve been dreaming about this all day.”

“All day?” She turned her head on the pillows, trying to see him.

“You bet. You didn’t think I was gonna let what happened this morning chase me away, did you?”

“Apparently not.” Her voice was strangled, probably because he was still lightly caressing the folds of her sex.

He reached into the pink bag on the nightstand, pulled out a small plastic bottle and held it in front of her. "The lady that sold me this said it would give you the big bang." He chuckled.

A deep blush crept up her neck and her cheeks. "Excuse me?"

"What does that television commercial say? Intensifies the reaction?" He kissed her cheek. "I plan to intensify the hell out of it."

He took his time rubbing the scented gel on every inch of her cunt, inside and out, paying special attention to her clit. Her juices mingled with the gel, and her scent reached out to him, his cock stiffening even more, if possible. He just hoped he could hold it together for a while longer. Touching Jessie was like sticking his hand in fire.

When he finished, he capped the bottle, took the little butterfly from its box and spread the tiny clamp with his fingers.

"Little pinch, sugar."

She flinched slightly when he settled the butterfly on her clit. "What is that, Kyle?"

"It's something to make you feel really, really good, Jessie."

Taking the tiny remote from the box, he pressed the switch and the little adornment began to hum, the wings fluttering.

"Ohmigod. Ohmigod, Kyle." She wriggled her hips and tried to push her thighs together, but Kyle stopped her with his hands.

"Not yet. We're only half ready, sugar."

"W-What do you mean?"

He dipped his hand into the bag again and brought out another little box. Opening it, he held it in front of her eyes to show her the two little decorated metal balls inside.

"Ben Wah balls. I saw some when I peeked in your drawer this morning, but I wanted to get you a

special set just from me. And these have little vibrating tongues inside them.”

He turned off the butterfly while he gently slid the little spheres into her well-lubricated cunt. When he had them in place, he gently bit one cheek of her ass, then turned on the butterfly again. He had to wrap his fingers around his cock at the sight of her body shimmying in the grip of the double stimulations.

“Kyle!” she yelled, pressing herself into the mound of pillows.

“It’s all right, sugar.” He continued to stroke himself slowly, willing his control, unable to tear his eyes away from the sight of her pulsating cunt. He bent closer to her. “Feel all that, Jessie?” he asked in a very low voice. “Feel that all the way through you?”

“Y-Yes. Oh, god, yes. I want...I want...”

“What do you want?” He leaned closer and licked her neck. “You want to come again?”

“Yes.” Her answer was a long, drawn-out whimper. “Please. Please, please, please.” Strong tremors shook her slender frame, her hips rocking as the butterfly and the little balls did their work.

“All right,” he whispered in her ear, and turned up the switch on the butterfly.

She came hard and fast, his name echoing on a long, breath-stealing scream, her entire body shaking with the forces of it. And as she came Kyle delivered a cadence of slaps to her quivering buttocks. He ground his teeth to keep from coming himself and released his hold on his shaft.

Not yet, not yet.

Finally he pushed the remote for the butterfly to its lowest setting, then turned it off completely. The spasms wracking her body slowed, subsided, and she sighed into the pillows. Her skin was covered with a fine sheen of perspiration. Giving in to temptation,

he leaned down and licked a long path from the base of her spine to her neck. She shivered beneath his touch.

Kyle knew he was getting close to the point of no return. Pulling a small tube from the little pink sack, he climbed onto the bed and positioned himself between Jessie's thighs. Impulsively, he leaned down and nipped one of her nicely rounded ass cheeks.

"Who do you belong to tonight?" he rumbled, his mouth against her silken skin. When she didn't answer, he delivered two well-placed slaps to her rear. "Answer me, Jess."

"Y-You." Her answer came out on a sigh of breath. "T-To you."

"And don't you forget it."

Squeezing a ribbon of lube onto his index finger, he circled the tight rim of her anus, pressing the tip into the tight opening. He pulled back, added more lube and slowly pushed his finger inside. She tensed and sucked in a deep breath, then let it out slowly as he pushed further inside.

"I loved how you made me feel last night when you did this to me," he said, working his finger further inside. "God, I nearly came right then. You're the first woman I've ever let do that." He bent and licked one cheek of her ass again. "And the only one, sugar."

He pulled his finger back, rolled a condom onto his painfully hard cock and placed the head of his erection at the little opening he'd just greased.

"Deep breath, Jessie. Real deep breath. I'm taking you to paradise with this."

"Yes," she gasped. "Yes, yes, yes. Do it. Now."

He fed his cock into her inch by inch, pressing against the thin membrane separating her two channels. He pushed inside her, and the little metal balls in her pussy rolled together. He could feel them against his cock, sending icy shivers racing through

him and ratcheting up his pulse. As he eased himself into her hot, dark tunnel, he turned the little butterfly back on and her body began to shake from the stimulation.

“Oh, god, Kyle. Ohgodohgodohgod.”

He could feel the vibration through the thin membrane separating her two passages, and his shaft thickened even more. He wasn't going to last long and he knew it. He pushed the switch higher on the butterfly, rolled his hips and hammered into her.

“Come now, Jessie,” he shouted. “Right now. Come, sugar.”

Despite the consuming orgasm that had just wracked her, she exploded with him, rocking her hips back and forth against the invasion of his cock, the heat of his semen scorching her tissues through the latex glove. Every muscle in his body tensed, his balls tightened and he spurted again and again.

When the tension on his body eased, he had enough presence of mind to unfasten the handcuffs and ease Jessie's arms down to her sides. He retrieved the little Ben Wah balls and detached the butterfly, tossing them all onto the nightstand. Finally, he rolled her to her back and as gently as possible eased the little rings from her nipple, sucking the rosy buds gently as the blood flow returned and with it stings of pain.

He hadn't used the dildo tonight. God, he'd really been looking forward to seeing her cunt swallow it up. Maybe even her ass. But he'd really gotten carried away, aroused beyond the point of reason. So that toy would have to wait for another time. He sure hoped there'd be one.

He had to get rid of the condom and bathe Jessie. Bathe both of them. But for the moment, he just wanted to lie there, exhausted, holding her in his arms. Stretching the moment. Capturing it. And stunned that the sense of contentment washing over

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him had as much to do with emotion as with everything they'd just done.

Chapter Five

The minute Jessie opened her eyes, she knew Kyle was already awake. His arms were wrapped tightly around her, holding her against him. She moved tentatively, her body sore in places she didn't know had feelings yet at the same time she was completely sated. No other man had ever given her such a sense of fulfillment.

When he had finally gathered his strength last night, Kyle filled the tub again and bathed her with incredible tenderness. He paid special attention to her tender, aching nipples and her sore but satisfied cunt. Then he dried her with a warm towel and carried her back to bed, tucking her up against him. She fell into a soft pool of velvet, a dreamless sleep that had wrapped around her like a cloud.

Feeling the solid weight of his body against her, an unfamiliar emotion shifted inside her. She tried to ignore it, pretend it was just morning-after sentiment. Except she seldom hung around for the morning-after and sentiment wasn't a word she ever used with her play dates.

Closing her eyes again, she willed it away, but it clung like tentacles around her soul.

No, no, no.

She tensed, gathering herself to get up and get Kyle Mitchell moving. Out of her bed, her house and her life.

"You're not throwing me out this morning." He kissed the sensitive spot behind her ear. "Quit fighting it, Jessie. I'm not leaving and we're going to talk."

She lay rigid in his arms, her Sheriff-Jessie-Ward-armor clanking into place. "Kyle? Listen to me. Whatever you're thinking, we had a good time last night. For two nights. But that's all it was. All it can be. We just met two days ago. We hardly know anything about each other. I have a responsible job and you...you..."

"Hobo around the country with the rodeo," he finished for her.

"Well, yes." She tried to move again, but he just held her tightly.

"It's not exactly like that. Besides, you've never even seen me compete."

"See?" She managed to wiggle around in his arms so she was facing him. "That's exactly what I mean. And you don't know what I do on my job."

He grinned at her, that wicked Kyle Mitchell grin. "I know you arrest bullriders who get into fights in your county."

"I have a *job*," she emphasized. "That's just a little part of it. And by the way, it's a part I thankfully don't have to do too often. But the minute we get out of this bed, that job becomes a reality again. And so does yours."

He cupped her cheek with his palm. "Did you enjoy last night, Jessie? No, don't throw bullshit at me. Just answer the question."

Heat surged through her body, and she lowered her lashes. "Yes," she told him in a low voice. "You know I did."

"Wouldn't you like to do it a lot more?" She tried again to move away from him, unwilling to answer his questions, but he refused to let her. "I don't know what you do with your social life, Jessie, but I'm guessing you don't spend it around here. Or with anyone you might get attached to. Right?"

Of course he was right. Kyle Mitchell was unlike anyone she'd ever met, and she wanted nothing

more than a whole lot more nights like the last two. But didn't he see how impossible that was? They had nothing in common except great sex. He wasn't at all what she had in mind for herself. If, indeed, she had a type in mind at all.

That soft laugh was a killer to her senses. "I can almost hear your brain frying, sugar, it's working so hard." His fingers stroked her cheek, her forehead, her neck. "Give it up, Jessie. We've got something going here. I know it. You know it. Don't you want to see if it's worth taking a risk for?"

"But—"

He touched a finger to her lips. "But nothing. Let's take a bath together, Jess. In that big tub of yours. With some of that sweet-smelling stuff you love so much. Just for this morning, call in late. Tell them you have something important to take care of."

He was impossible. "I can't. I—"

"Yes. You can. Then we'll have breakfast, we'll get dressed. You'll go to work and I'll go back to San Antonio."

She frowned. "I thought you said..." Said what? What exactly had his words meant, anyway? Was she just confused?

"And then I'll be back tonight. I've got two more days before I have to be in Houston for the next stop on the tour. Let's use them to see if we've got anything here."

She finally managed to push herself upright. "And if we do? Not that I'm saying you're right, but what happens then? I can't follow you around the country and you aren't about to give it all up and settle down here in Watson's Creek."

His face sobered. "You sure about that, Jessie? Don't you want to find out, one way or another?"

She looked away from him. "I don't know." And she really meant it. She'd lived behind her invisible walls for so long, she didn't know if she could get

past them or even wanted to.

His fingers danced idly on her arm. "Give us a chance, Jessie. That's all I'm asking. A chance."

What could she lose? If it turned out to be nothing, he'd be gone and just a pleasant memory in her mental scrapbook. And at least he wouldn't be hanging around blabbing to everyone.

Take a chance, Jessie. What can you lose?

"Okay." Her breath came out on a long sigh. "You win. Tonight. And we'll see what's what."

"I want to take you out to dinner." He grabbed her wrist as she tried to slide off the bed. "Someplace with a little romance."

Jessie couldn't help it. Her jaw dropped. "Romance?"

He chuckled softly. "I hear there is such a thing. Don't know a lot about it, but I'll bet they've got books in the library."

She shook herself mentally. "Kyle. I think we're letting things get a little out of hand here. If you want another night of sex and games, I'm more than happy to drive into San Antonio and meet you. But romance?" She shook her head. "I don't think so."

He rubbed his fingers lightly over her hands. "I'm guessing if I looked at your to-do list I wouldn't find romance anywhere on it." He touched her lips when she started to speak. "Hush. Just listen. I can't even tell you why in hell I want to do this, except I really want to find out if we're both just extremely horny or there's something more. Come on, Jessie. One dinner. What can it hurt? And you can meet me in the city if you want. If it will make you feel more in control." He leaned over and put his mouth close to her ear. "But don't forget to bring the toys."

She blinked. "I thought you said just dinner."

"It's always good to be prepared."

Jessie couldn't believe she actually called in and told the dispatcher she'd be late. She'd never done

anything like that, even when she was a deputy. Except the one time she'd had the flu.

Breakfast was simple—bacon, eggs and toast—but Kyle ate as if it was the finest gourmet meal in the world. Jessie felt awkward at first, trying to make conversation. She wished he'd just eat and go, give her some space to mull everything over in her mind. Things were moving much too fast and taking her to a place she'd never been before.

When he finally left, she breathed a huge sigh of relief. She'd agreed to meet him at eight for a late dinner, at a Riverwalk restaurant she was very familiar with. A romantic setting, all right. She'd gotten the name of his hotel out of him, although he told her if she called and cancelled, he'd just have to come back out to Watson's Creek and fetch her. Maybe make a scene.

"And you know what kind of scene I can make," he teased.

The minute he left, she closed the front door, leaned against it and banged her head against the wood.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Why on earth had she ever agreed to this stupid date?

But she knew the answer. Kyle Mitchell was right. Romance had never been something she allowed into her life. Everyone deserved a little taste of it now and then, right? And here was a chance for her to find out what Tricia and her other friends were always babbling about with very little risk. After all, her eight-second rider would be gone by tomorrow and she could go back to her life pretending none of this ever happened.

Yeah, right.

Sighing, she headed for the showers, hoping she hadn't just agreed to something really, really stupid.

Jessie was amazed at how enjoyable dinner was. Kyle was not only attentive, he was charming, funny, and far more intelligent than she expected. Over frozen margaritas and really good Tex Mex, with a mariachi band in the background and the tourist barges floating down the San Antonio River, he entertained her with stories about his career in the rodeo, about growing up on a ranch. About the different people he'd met. He even, in passing, mentioned he hoped some day to settle on a ranch of his own.

And without her realizing it, he drew out her own personal details. Her family, now living in Arizona. Her dream even as a child to be a sheriff.

"Too much Wonder Woman, I think," she told him with a shy laugh.

Originally, she had every intention of thanking him for a very nice meal, shaking hands and driving back to Watson's Creek. But by the time the waiter brought the check, she was sorry the meal was over. Sorry Kyle was leaving town. Sorry she might never see him again. And what was up with that?

Which was probably why she found herself in his hotel room, naked except for her sandals, on her knees in front of him with his fantastic cock in her mouth. Her hands were cuffed behind her back—yes, she'd brought the toys from the little pink bag, arguing with herself all the way into town—and his strong fingers were threaded through her hair, holding her head, moving it for maximum angle.

"Your mouth is pure, wet heaven," he groaned, rocking his hips back and forth. "Holy hell, Jessie. You could make a man forget everything with just that hot, little mouth. That's it, sugar, suck harder. Yeah, just like that. Shit, I'm gonna come. Swallow it, sugar. Let me feel it shoot down your throat."

And she did, sucking in the hot, thick fluid, her throat working as she swallowed every bit of it.

When at last his cock softened against her tongue, he pulled back and dropped to his knees in front of her. His hands stroked her cheeks tenderly.

“You are really something, Sheriff Jessie, with the very talented mouth. You know that?” He stood, lifting her in his arms. “Come on, we have some unfinished business from last night.”

Once again she was on her knees, propped on a mound of pillows, while Kyle’s expert hands caressed the cheeks of her buttocks. Stroked the inside of her thighs. Lightly brushed his fingertips against her drenched folds. Jessie couldn’t believe how quickly she’d become aroused and to such a fever pitch.

When she felt the cool thickness of the gel at her anus and Kyle’s finger pressing inside to rub it into her heated tissues, the familiar icy heat skated over her skin and she shivered with anticipation. She held her breath, waiting for the pressure of his cock, but instead she felt the smooth head of the dildo and she tensed.

“It’s okay, sugar.” His voice was low and warm, crawling over her like warm honey. “You took my cock last night, you can take this. You know how. Just take a deep breath and let it out slowly. That’s it. Oh yeah. That’s the way.”

He pushed it in slowly, his other hand between her legs, stroking her pussy and teasing the hot nub of her clit. Then she felt the hot, rough silk of his tongue taking slow licks along the skin of her buttocks, and the walls of her pussy quivered with need.

“There you go,” he said when the dildo was fully inside her.

Settling himself between her thighs, he continued to fondle and tease her cunt and rub her clit. She was so hot she was sure she’d combust at any moment. He kept the fire deep inside her smoldering, the flame leaping a little higher each

time he rubbed harder, easing back when his strokes softened. She was so close. So close. She wanted him inside her right now.

When she was sure she couldn't stand it one more minute, she heard the crinkle of foil and the snap of latex and his hot erection pressed against the opening of her vagina. Kyle eased himself into her, his big hands cradling her hips, his movement slow. With the dildo in her ass, the space was compressed, and when he was finally all the way in, she felt fuller than she'd ever thought possible.

"Hang on for the ride, Jessie. It's gonna be a ballbuster."

And it was, his cock driving into her again and again, slowly at first, then picking up speed. His fingers tightened on her skin and she sensed he was close. She rocked on her knees, clenching and unclenching her hands against the small of her back, matching herself to his movement.

"Ready, sugar?" His voice was so tight with forced control she almost didn't recognize it.

Ready? She was more than ready.

"Yes," she hissed, thrusting back even more.

He slammed into her, once, twice, three times. She was so close to the edge, the final thrust tipped her over and they came together, bodies shuddering as spasms wracked them. Face pressed to the pillow, she tumbled into space, explosions of light behind her eyelids while her pussy clenched and clenched and clenched around his thick, hot cock.

When the last aftershock had finally subsided, Kyle flipped the safety latch that unlocked the handcuffs, slowly withdrew both himself and the dildo from the grasp of her body, and rolled to the side, taking her with him. Jessie could hardly catch her breath, working hard to draw air into her lungs. Her heart thundered at the force of a climax more explosive even than the ones of the previous night.

And with something else, too. Something she didn't want to put a name to. Something that had blossomed inside her as Kyle emptied himself into the latex sheath inside her.

She lay there, reluctantly turning it over in her mind while he levered himself off the bed and headed to the bathroom to dispose of the condom. When he returned, he carried a warm cloth that he used to bathe her, wiping away the traces of the lube and pressing the heat into her aching folds. With graceful movements, he shifted her around, rearranged the pillows and crawled into bed next to her.

"Close your eyes, Jessie," he murmured, his lips grazing her ear. "Let me have one more night for you to sleep in my arms."

No way could she have found the strength to move anyway. They hadn't taken a lot of time tonight to do this, but it had been fiery, draining, wringing everything from her body. Besides, there was something about lying here next to him that made her feel better than she had in a long time. And *that* was something she needed to figure out.

Or walk away from.

It all came down to one word.

Trust.

Jessie not only had to trust Kyle, she had to trust herself. And she realized with a pang that the latter was something she'd managed to avoid for a long time. She'd seen too many relationships fail. Too many marriages end in divorce. And too many men who resented a strong woman and immediately set out to tame her.

But Kyle Mitchell didn't seem to fit that mold. That first night he'd let her do anything she wanted, even cuff him to her bed. Even invade his body. And when he'd turned the tables, it hadn't been a power

trip, rather a plan to give her as much pleasure as he could. The toys he bought had been for *her* pleasure. The things he'd done had put her satisfaction first.

And dinner. When he'd said romance, that was exactly what he meant. What could be more romantic than eating outside on a warm night with the colors and lights and sounds of San Antonio and a hunk of a cowboy dancing attention?

She also saw a depth to him that she hadn't expected. There was a lot more to this man than eight seconds on two thousand pounds of bull.

How did you resist a man like that?

"Opening night in Houston is two nights from now," he told her when she climbed into her car in the morning. "You think about everything we said to each other, Jessie." His long fingers caressed one cheek. "I know how I feel. At least I think I do. Now you have to decide how *you* feel."

"Kyle," she began.

"No." He touched her lips. "Don't say anything right now. You go home and think about everything we've done together, all the feelings wrapped up in it. And how well we fit together. I won't pressure you anymore. But if you think we've got a chance, be there to watch me ride on opening night."

He leaned into the window and kissed her thoroughly, his tongue stroking hers, his lips branding hers. Then he backed away. "Drive safely, Jessie. Oh, and one more thing?"

"Yes?" She stopped, about to coast into the street.

"I love you."

Then he turned and jogged back inside, leaving her sitting there with her mouth open and her heart racing.

The last forty-eight hours had been tumultuous

as she tried to sort out her conflicting feelings.

“Take a chance for once,” she kept saying. “You might get hurt, sure, but it doesn’t sound like it. Do it, Jessie. For once trust your heart instead of your head.”

Trust. Something she had in very small supply. For two days, she wrestled with herself, her heart and brain waging a fierce battle. Even that morning, when she’d struggled out of bed after a restless night, she hadn’t been sure what she’d do. But looking at herself in the bathroom mirror as she brushed her teeth, she saw how colorless her life would be if she didn’t for once take a leap of faith.

So here she was, at the big Houston Stock Show and Rodeo, wondering what the hell she was even doing here. Kyle had texted her and told her if she decided to come, he’d leave something for her at the box office. She expected a ticket. Instead the man behind one of the glass windows handed her a long white envelope and asked her to wait while he called someone.

Called someone? Surely not Kyle. He’d be busy getting ready for his events. She’d been to enough rodeos to know he’d be getting himself psyched up for his competition, which, according to the program she clutched desperately in her hand, was in about thirty minutes.

She opened the envelope, pulled out the single sheet of paper and unfolded it.

“I’ve been holding my breath waiting for you. I’ll be on that bull for eight seconds but after that I’m taking you for a longer ride. I love, you. Kyle.”

She was standing there, staring at the paper, when a voice at her elbow broke into her thoughts.

“Jessie?”

She looked up, recognizing the man who’d come to pick up Kyle at the jail. What was his name? She wished she could remember, but she’d been too busy

being pissed off that day.

“Gary Handler.” He held out his hand. “Nice to see you again, Sheriff. And under better circumstances.”

She shook his hand, dazed. “Yes. Of course.”

“Kyle’s been as bent out of shape as a pretzel, waiting to see if you’d show. Come on. His event comes up pretty soon. Let’s go.”

“Go?” She frowned at him. “Go where?”

“Back to the pens. He said if you showed, the box office would call back here and I should come and get you.” He touched her elbow. “We’d better hurry.”

Her mind still reeling, she followed Gary through a door, down a long corridor and into the staging area for the events. At once all her senses were assaulted by the mixture of sounds and aromas that signaled the working areas of a rodeo. The scent of animals and dirt drifting in the air, horses neighing, bulls stamping, and a chorus of voices talking at the same time.

Should I have come? Should I really be here?

But then they were at the area behind the chutes and there was Kyle, wearing jeans, his hand-tooled boots and a plaid shirt. Tension lined his body, but the minute he saw her, his face broke out into a huge grin. He lifted her off her feet, twirling her around like a kid.

“You came.” He set her down on her feet and kissed her so thoroughly she heard whistles and shouts coming at them, even some clapping.

“Kyle.” She finally managed to tear her mouth away and catch her breath. “This is a little public for something like that.”

He pulled her tight against him. “Sugar, that’s tame compared to what I plan to do when we’re in private.” He gave her another quick kiss. “Does this mean what I think it does? You’ll give us a real

chance?”

“How can I not?” It was that simple.

She stood on tiptoe and whispered in his ear, “I brought, um, your presents.”

He looked at her, a wicked gleam in his eyes. “Then I can’t wait to get out of here. I love you.”

She finally was able to say the words. “I love you, too. So don’t you dare get hurt out there.”

“Not a chance. I’ll be on that bull for eight seconds, Jessie, but then the ride I’m planning to take you on will last for the rest of our lives.”

About the Author

Desiree Holt has lived a life of excitement that brings the color to her writing. She was a summer fishing guide, a summer field hand where she was one of only three women working, a member of a beginning ski team that skied in competition (and no, no broken bones!). She spent several years in the music business representing every kind of artist from country singer to heavy metal rock bands. For several years she also ran her own public relations agency handling any client that interested her.

She is twice a finalist for an EPIC E-Book Award, a nominee for a Romantic Times Reviewers Choice Award, winner of the first 5 Heart Sweetheart of the Year Award at The Romance Studio as well as a CAPA Award, winner of two Holt Medallion Awards of Merit. Romance Junkies said of her work: "Desiree Holt is the most amazing erotica author of our time and each story is more fulfilling than the last."

Visit Desiree at
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Eight Second Ride

Also Available

Back In The Saddle

by

Desiree Holt

When Molly Hayes' marriage fell apart, she ran home to Hayes Ranch to lick her wounds. What she really wants to lick is foreman Chance McDaniel, the star of all her erotic fantasies. But he had never given her the time of day. Why would he give her his nights?

Kink is a mild term for the kind of sex Chance McDaniel enjoys. But he's learned the hard way not all women can handle his darker desires. He aches to give Molly the ride of her life but fears she'll shy away from his wilder ways.

Will the past become a stumbling block or will both Molly and Chance, once wounded, climb back in the saddle?

Chapter One

Molly Hayes parked the ranch pickup in the gravel lot of Rusty's and took a deep breath then let it out slowly.

What the hell am I doing here?

She'd probably have spent another night hiding from the world at home, as content as possible considering her miserable state. But her father had given her a parting shot before he left for Fort Worth.

"Get out of the house, Molly girl. You've been hiding long enough. Go out and have some fun."

Yeah, right. Fun.

"Quit letting that bastard ruin your life," he added on his way out the door.

That bastard being her faithless ex.

Thirty years old and she'd quit a damn good job and run home to her father's ranch to lick her wounds when her marriage to Boyd Whittaker self-destructed. Although, truth be told, her pride was damaged more than anything else. Underneath it all she had to admit the divorce hadn't much touched her heart.

Maybe Boyd realized she didn't love him the way she should. That he wasn't her first choice. That he wasn't the star of the outrageous erotic fantasies she had. Maybe it was his form of payback. Because soon enough, she'd discovered her husband had the most active zipper in Houston. His cock seemed to be busy in every bedroom but theirs.

Not that sex with Boyd had been any great shakes, unfortunately. She wondered now if his

other women found it more interesting and exciting than she did. Of course, with Boyd sex was always all about him, anyway, and his imagination in the bedroom wouldn't fit on the head of a pin.

She'd hung in there, ignoring the gossip as long as she could. But then came the day she'd arrived at his office to meet him for lunch and found him screwing one of his bimbos on the desk. The expression on their faces was so comical she would have laughed if she hadn't been so pissed off.

"You asshole," she'd shouted at him.

Sliding off the desk and calmly pulling up his pants, he'd shaken his head. "Language, Molly. There's a lady present."

She'd make a show of looking around the office. "Yeah? Where? I don't see anyone except this piece of trash spreading her legs for you."

She'd picked up the handiest item, Boyd's treasured golf trophy, and slung it at the desk. She'd missed both of them but gouged a nice chunk out of the rosewood.

"Look what you did to my damn desk," he'd shouted.

"Too bad it wasn't your dick," she'd shouted back.

Then she'd turned around, walked out the door, and hadn't stopped moving until she'd reached Hayes Ranch in Littleton.

Lord knew she'd done her best to make it work, but as much as he might have looked like Chance McDaniel, Boyd was a poor substitute.

Chance.

The man Molly had been in love with since she was a naïve fifteen, and he, at nineteen, was completely unattainable. All those summers he'd worked at Hayes Ranch, he'd barely given her the time of day. She might as well have been a horsefly for all the attention he'd given her. The fly might

even have gotten more.

All those outrageous erotic romances she read? She'd give anything to be living them with Chance. She might have been hiding in the house since her retreat from Houston, but through the huge window in the breakfast room she watched him each morning, supervising the men as they trained the cutting horses in the pen. Riding out to check the fence line, his body looking as if he were born in the saddle. Standing with the men at the end of the day, wiping the sweat from his forehead with the bandanna he wore around his neck, dusting his hands on the chaps he wore as much to protect himself from the cattle he herded as from the rub of the saddle.

So here she was, facing the world. Here, at Rusty's. The old hangout. Rusty's had been *the* place to hang out the minute you got to be of legal age. How many nights she'd spent here with her girl friends...and dates that meant nothing...tasting life. Trying to learn what it was all about.

Rusty's on a Tuesday night was usually fairly quiet. Maybe she wouldn't run into anyone. She could just have a quiet beer, listen to the juke box and crawl home in her unfortunately unwanted state.

Liar! You know why you're here.

Leave me alone, she told her inner voice. *I'm just here for a drink. Getting out.*

Yeah, right. And maybe to run into Chance McDaniel.

She was well aware that Chance often came here at night for a beer and to hang out with friends. On the drive from the ranch she'd been half afraid she'd run into him—and half afraid she wouldn't.

You know what you want. Admit it. Chance naked in a room with you, doing the most erotic things the imagination can conjure up.

Gritting her teeth, she pulled open the door and the familiar dark atmosphere enveloped her. A long bar ran against one wall, booths lined the opposite wall and tables and chairs were scattered between. In the back she could hear the clack of pool balls that signified a game in progress, and the juke box was playing some old country tune. Looking around, she breathed easier when she didn't spot anyone she knew and slid quietly into a corner booth.

She was trying to decide what to order, waiting for the one waitress to make her way over as usual, when someone slid a frosty mug of beer in front of her. In a moment, a second one joined it. Molly looked up, startled, and there he was, sliding into the booth opposite her.

Chance McDaniel in the lip-smacking flesh.

Older now, the boy had filled out to become a mouthwatering man. Broad shoulders tapered to a narrow waist, and the legs beneath the table were long and lean. The rolled up sleeves of his shirt exposed muscular arms dusted with dark hair that matched the thick black pelt on his head.

And in a tanned rugged face, the electric blue eyes were just as piercing as ever. Her hormones went into immediate overdrive.

"Hello, Molly." The drawl was slow and easy as warm molasses.

But times had changed. Now he was the foreman at Hayes Ranch and, according to her father, doing a damned good job at it. Despite everything that had happened in her life, she knew in her gut that one touch from him could send her up in flames. As careful as she'd always been to hide her feelings from him, right now she was so vulnerable all her defenses were down.

Another reason she'd stayed inside the house. What if she ran into him and he was coldly polite? Then boss's daughter. Or worse yet, obviously

avoided her altogether.

Well, here he is. Isn't this what you wanted?

Shut up! Just...shut up.

She wet her lips with the tip of her tongue. "I didn't order anything yet."

A slow smile tilted his lips. "I remember you always used to order this whenever you came in with your friends," he told her in his soft drawl. "You said a cold brew was better than water."

Her eyes widened. "You *remember*? I didn't think you even noticed."

His gaze was smoldering. "Oh, I noticed all right."

Her throat went so dry she had to take a sip of the beer before she could even swallow. Why couldn't she think of something intelligent to say to him? He probably thought she'd left her brain in Houston.

"It's great seeing you again," she finally got out.

"Same goes, Molly." He leaned forward, resting on his forearms. "I thought I'd bring you a drink. Have a beer with you. I know you've been going through a bad time, and that's something I can relate to. So...a beer or two is good, right?"

She knew he'd been married. The devastating news had been the major reason she'd hotfooted it to Houston as soon as she had her degree in hand. Seeing him on the ranch every day and knowing he belonged to someone else was more misery than she wanted to put herself through. But now, like her, he was divorced. She'd heard about it from her father and thought she'd done a good job pretending she didn't give two hoots about it. She had no idea what his wife had been like or what the problem had been with his marriage. But she wondered what was wrong with a woman who didn't fight to hang onto a man like him.

"Molly?" His warm drawl brought her back to the present. "Did I make a mistake coming over

here?”

She shook her head. “No, not at all. This sounds good. Thanks.”

“So, how are you really?”

“Fine, I’m fine. Thanks for asking.”

Angry at myself, embarrassed that I let that jerk make a fool of me. So hungry for you I’d love to jump over this table and rip off your clothes.

“Good. Glad to hear it.” That soft drawl sent shivers racing along the surface of her skin.

She took a sip of her beer, set the mug down. “And you? How are things with you, Chance?”

He shrugged. “Okay. Grateful to your dad for making me foreman.”

She smiled. “From what he says, you earned the job and you’re damn good at it.”

“He’s a good man to work for.”

The song playing on the juke box ended and another one swelled from the speakers. The whiskey-scented air drifted past her nose, and for a brief moment she was back with her friends, hanging out on the weekend, laughing and drinking and dancing. Hoping against hope that Chance would send one look her way. Now here he was, and she was as tongue-tied as a teenager.

“I don’t mean to intrude, Molly,” he went on. “It’s just...you haven’t left the ranch house since you came back. I saw you come in, and even in the dark, I could see you had the saddest look in the world on your face. I was hoping I could help you lighten up.”

She forced a smile. “I guess I haven’t had much to smile about lately.”

“That’s what friends are for, isn’t it?” Chance reached across the table and rested his fingertips on one of her hands. “We *are* friends, right?”

Friends! What a joke that he thought about them that way when she’d always wanted so much more. Chance could still light her fire with just a

glance. Friendship wasn't exactly what she had in mind.

She dug up a weak smile. "Okay. Sure. Friends."

"Great, then." His slow smile made her toes curl. He touched his beer mug to hers. "Here's to friends."

They sat in silence for a long moment, letting the sounds of the bar eddy around them.

"How are *you* doing?" she asked after another sip of her beer, thinking it only polite to ask.

But Chance's face closed up tighter than a gate on a bull pen. "I'm fine, Molly. Like I said, working for your Dad is great."

Okay. So *his* personal life was off limits. Well, hers would be, too.

They sat there across from each other, neither one of them saying a word. *Just a Dream* by Carrie Underwood drifted out of the jukebox, and Chance stood up, reaching a hand down to her.

"Dance with me, Molly."

Danger! Danger!

She opened her mouth to refuse him, but somehow instead, found herself rising from the booth and following him to the dance floor. Only two other couples were making use of the music. Chance tactfully led her to a corner where the lights didn't hit them. She was stiff within the circle of his arms, moving like a windup doll, until one hand slid up her back to hold the nape of her neck.

"Relax, Molly." His mouth was at her ear, his breath a warm breeze against her skin. "It's just a dance. Sometimes it helps to shut out everything else and just fall into the music."

She was trying, but his body was so warm against hers and there was no mistaking the hard thickness of his cock pushing against her through the denim of his jeans. His scent teased at her nostrils, a heady blend of something woodsy and the smell of leather and horses. She was sure he'd

showered but somehow, for men who worked at ranching rather than playing, the aroma burned its way into their skin. She loved it. Always had. If she wanted to be truthful, it was almost an aphrodisiac. She shifted so she was just a millimeter closer.

What she would have given all those years ago to be where she was right this minute. But a lot of water had washed over the dam since then, and the last thing she wanted was to have Chance McDaniel feeling sorry for her.

"I...haven't danced in a while," she said lamely as she tried to relax in his grip.

God. Could I sound any more idiotic?

He chuckled, a low rumbling sound. "I think it's like riding a horse. You never really forget. I think you could probably say that about everything."

His lean fingers massaged the knot at the nape of her neck, his arm holding her against him as they shifted their bodies minimally in place. The stroking of those fingers sent shivers down her spine, but they also coaxed her to relax and move in rhythm with him. She actually found herself leaning her head against his shoulder.

"That's it," he whispered. "I learned music can make you forget just about any damn thing."

She wanted desperately to ask him what he was working so hard to forget, but he'd made it very clear that was off limits. Maybe she'd give her friend Jacie a call and see what the dirt was. She hadn't called any of her friends since she'd been back, but now curiosity was breaching her self-imposed exile.

The song ended and again another one clicked into place. Chance made no move to lead her from the dance floor. Instead, he simply kept moving in place, the two of them swaying to the music. Molly found herself lulled by the melody and soothed by Chance's touch. Her breasts were flattened against his chest, the nipples tender and pebbled from

rubbing against his shirt. Her pussy quivered with a long buried need ignited by the touch of his fingers and the feel of his body against hers.

And that thick, hard cock pressed against her like an oversized branding iron.

His fingers continued their erotic massage at her neck, and his arm held her against him as if they'd done this forever. When the music stopped this time, so did Chance's movement. Molly looked up at him with half-closed eyes. A dark flush stained his cheeks, and the look in his eyes was anything but that of a friend. Heat blazed like celebratory bonfire.

"We'd better get back to that beer before it loses its cold," he murmured, his voice even deeper. "Nothing worse than warm beer."

"Right, right."

She let him lead her back to the booth, holding her hand until she was seated again. Neither of them said a word for a long few minutes, just watched each other across their mugs as they sipped at the golden liquid.

"So," she said at last, setting her mug down. "Did my father tell you I might show up here tonight and you should keep an eye out for the poor, pitiful wreck?"

Something snapped in Chance's eyes. "The only orders I take from Reuben Hayes have to do with the ranch. Be damn sure of that, okay? I like to hang out here because no one bothers me. And Molly? You're far from a pitiful wreck."

Embarrassment heated her cheeks. "Sorry. That was a dumb thing to say."

He reached across the table and closed a hand over her free one. Heat sizzled up her arm.

"I know what it's like to feel that way." There was neither pity nor humor in his voice. "But I see a beautiful, desirable woman sitting across from me who had the misfortune to make one bad choice."

Something a lot of us have done. And that's all I'm going to say about that."

Beautiful? Desirable?

Chance fetched two more mugs of beer from the bar and coaxed her into more conversation. Molly had no idea why he was doing it, but she treasured every moment. And wished he'd ask her to dance again.

But when the beer was gone, he slid out of the booth. "I've had my limit for tonight. Morning comes early at the ranch."

Disappointment stabbed at her until he reached out a hand.

"How about letting me walk you to your truck? I don't much care for leaving you sitting here alone. And there's no pity in that," he assured her hastily. "Just doing what my mother taught me. Come on, Molly. We'll follow each other home."

Chance opened the door of the bar and stood back to let her precede him. The night had turned cool, a sharp breeze ruffling her thick brown hair, and she shivered against the sudden chill.

"You need a jacket," Chance told her. "You probably forgot it gets colder at night here in the Hill Country than in that fancy city where you lived. Here. Come closer."

He wrapped one arm around her and pulled her against him, his body heat flooding her.

Just a friend, just a friend, just a friend, she kept repeating to herself as they walked to where she'd parked. But when they reached her truck and she turned to thank him, tell him goodnight, he cupped her face with his big, warm hands and leaned toward her.

"Molly?" His eyes burned into her like twin torches.

"Y-Yes?"

"I lied before. I don't really want to be friends

with you.”

She started to shake. Was this his way of brushing her off? Humiliating her so she wouldn't bother him again?

“Oh, actually I do, but what I want's a lot more than that. I've waited a damn long time to do this, Molly Hayes. I hope you don't decide to shoot me for it.”

And then his lips were on hers, soft and a little rough, brushing against her mouth, and she was totally and completely lost.

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