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Marked  
in  
Montana  
Nevea Lane



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# Marked in Montana

Nevea Lane

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Published by  
Beautiful Trouble Publishing, LLC  
PO Box 61  
Colfax, NC 27235  
[www.beautifultroublepublishing.com](http://www.beautifultroublepublishing.com)

Cover Art: Marteeka Karland  
<http://www.marteekakarland.com/>  
Editor: Stephanie Parent  
Proofreader: Novellette Whyte  
<http://proofreadernovellette.blogspot.com/>  
Formatter: Jim & Zetta, <http://www.jimandzetta.com/>  
E-book Conversion: Jim & Zetta, <http://www.jimandzetta.com/>  
ISBN: 978-1-936271-87-0 (e-book)

To T.L.—You were right in my corner when I  
needed you, and hanging out in the distance  
when I thought I didn't need help. Thanks for  
the training wheels—N.L.

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# CAVEAT

This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.

# Chapter One

“Uh-uh, I’m not wearing that.” I looked at my so-called best friend with *the* stare. You know, the stare that asks, *have you lost your rabbit-freakin’ mind?* Yeah, that one.

“But you said you would help!” Brittany cried in that high-pitched whine of hers. There she goes, I thought. Her blue eyes got big, her pupils became dilated, and her fair skin turned bright pink as if she was holding back a Hoover Dam of tears.

“I said I would help, as in decorations, getting champagne, behind-the-scenes help, not dressing up in that...thing you call an outfit,” I said, pointing at the ensemble she presented to me. I hadn’t even had my required five cups of coffee for the morning yet, and she’d already made the vein in my forehead tick.

“Come on, Samara. Please? I swear I won’t ask you to do anything else, but I’m one woman short for this to work.”

It was then I knew this whole trip had been a bad idea. When Brittany begged me to come with her to her brother’s working ranch in Montana, I went

because I really thought I could use the vacation. The brokerage firm that I worked for had folded like a stack of dominoes, and I still hadn't found a replacement job. Of course, I wasn't the overzealous, ambitious, too-full-of-herself type that I'd been when I first got out of business school. Chicago was already a mean-ass city, but throw in the fact that I was a twenty-nine-year-old black woman with an MBA and it was downright nasty. On every interview I had gone on, the manager assumed that I had been fired, I was too opinionated (also known as being a bitch) or that I didn't have enough testosterone to make it in the shark pool of stock trading. I hadn't found a job in six months, and I was starting to feel a little desperate.

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Brittany had already been at the Stone Ridge Ranch for a week, planning the grand reopening of the guest hotel at the base of the mountain. Here I was, nestled in her brother's huge eight-bedroom home, and I was supposed to be relaxing, not thinking about job offers or the lack thereof. I'd confided to Brittany that I was becoming restless, and I didn't know what it meant not to be doing something. I had taken self-defense classes, taken up Sudoku, and yes, of all things, I'd begun working at a coffeehouse, eavesdropping on conversations and listening for a job



opening. If I didn't get a steady job soon, I was going to start handing out stock advice on the street corner for a dollar a tip. I'd just finished rearranging the living-room furniture in our shared townhome yesterday for the tenth time when she called me saying she desperately needed my organizational skills to help finish the reopening gala.

Yeah, I know, she used the word "gala." Brittany has always been melodramatic. Still, this was supposed to be a vacation. I looked at it as an opportunity to get out and see something else besides the hustle and bustle of the city. Now, as I eyed the deep jade cowgirl outfit that Brittany had brought for me to wear to the event, I regretted even getting on the plane.

"Brittany, let me tell you again. I'm not a cowgirl. I'm a city girl. I can barely ride a bike, let alone a horse."

"I'm not asking you to ride anything. I'm not asking you to lift a finger. If you wanted to ride a horse, you could learn—there are plenty of guys here who would show you how. But you at least have to look like you know what a horse is!" she said.

There was that damned squeal again. I didn't know if this woman had ever been told "no." I rolled my eyes at her and popped a hand on my hip.

“First, Brittany, you want to auction me off to one of these ranch men, whom I have yet to lay eyes on. But on top of that, you want me to parade around in that ‘outfit,’ which for the record looks like it’s missing some major pieces of fabric in the torso area.” I fumed and plopped myself onto the oversized plush lounge chair in my room. Decorated in deep garnet reds and gold, the opulence of the room made it hard to remember this was a working ranch. It could have been a swank hotel, except the room screamed male—in fact, the whole place did.

The fact that this place was overrun with males was the reason the whole grand reopening of the hotel was geared toward men—men who needed female companions as lunch dates, riding companions, and hunting companions, as long no sex was involved. Brittany thought holding an auction of the eligible bachelorettes would get the buzz going around town that this working ranch wasn’t for men only. Women could have fun out here too. In my honest opinion, it was an ass-backward feminist approach, but Brittany had sunk her teeth into it and she wasn’t letting go. Throw in the fact that all the money the event raised was going to benefit Brittany’s favorite charity—the Children’s Hospital recovery wing—and there was no way this event wasn’t going to happen.

“You don’t have to be a cowgirl, just wear the outfit. These ranch hands and my brother just need someone to look the part, plus it’s only for three days. We have to show them that they can settle down here, live here, have the job they love *and* a comfy home.”

“Okay, but I don’t live here, and I’m sure as hell not settling down here. Don’t you think that kinda makes me not the right woman for the part?”

“Look, Sam, it’s for three days. No one’s asking you to devote your entire life here. Think of it as a vacation from the Donna Karan suit you wear, or a break from making cappuccinos. You know, you might have some fun,” Brittany said.

Though she said it in an even tone, her blue eyes had a steel edge to them. I knew *that* look. It said she wasn’t going to take “no” for an answer.

I looked at the cowgirl outfit again. It was a halter top, and the pattern looked like a bandana. I think it *was* a bandana. It was a cute outfit, and green was my favorite color. The color looked good on my almond-toned skin.

I arched an eyebrow at the gun holster that came along with the tight-fitting chaps and jeans and looked back at Brittany.

“I figured you’d take the opportunity to show off your pretty gun—unloaded, of course.”

A proud carrier of a concealed weapons permit, I smiled at that. Brittany was officially my best friend again. In my time off work, I'd dragged Brittany to a gun range in the city. I was determined we both get conceal and carry permits. I thought I might as well learn to use one if I was going to be working late-night coffeehouse shifts until a better job came along. The tips were better working at the downtown Chicago location, which meant I had to hop on the L-train. I hated getting on the train alone and I wanted to feel protected, and a can of mace to a crackhead was like Binaca to a pit bull. Though I had to leave my prized Glock at home because I took a plane, I'd sent Brittany with my .9 mm because she chose to drive from Chicago to the Sapphire Mountain Range. It was at least a day's drive, and I didn't want Brittany to feel unprotected.

I realized how laughable that was when Brittany drove into the small town after picking me up from the airport. There might have been thirty people on the street total, and it was ten in the morning. The town was small and quaint, but definitely not a place for a woman like me.

I took the moment to study the room that was to be mine for a week. It was so grand. The bed alone made my queen-sized pillow top at home look like a

child's bed. Maybe participating in this auction would be a small price to pay for a grand room where I'd be staying. Despite the carved wooden lamp, this place was luxury. I sighed and knew I had let my "fair is fair" attitude talk me into this auction.

"Okay, I'm going to do this for you...just this once. What time do I have to be ready?"

"Eight. Come on, I want you to meet my brother. He was wondering about you, and I told him I'd bring you out to meet him as soon as you got here."

I let the overexcited woman lead me by the hand through the huge house. Yep, this was definitely a man's house, I thought as I eyed the many stuffed animals including a pheasant on the wall, the moose head and the many, many antlers. I took a mental note not to go looking for a glass of water in the middle of the night.

Once we were out on the porch, I removed my sunglasses from where they were stashed in my tank top and put them on. The sun was bright, and there wasn't a cloud in sight to dim the brightness.

"Come on, I think Grant's in the barn," Brittany said, and she took off like a schoolgirl down the steps.

I smirked. It was funny how returning to a childhood home seemed to bring out the kid in anyone.

I took a leisurely pace around the property, admiring the scene before me. I was surrounded by mountains, evergreens and fresh air. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Turning on my heel, I ran smack into what I thought was a mountain. How could I have missed a wall behind me?

“Son of a bitch.” Walls shouldn’t be swearing either. I shook my head to clear it from the collision, and I notice the wall had arms and they were gripping my shoulders. I was about to scream when I heard Brittany’s voice from behind the mountain.

“Sorry, Grant, Sam was getting high off the mountain air.”

I took a step back and looked up, and up, and up some more. Holy Mary, this man was tall.

I was thankful I was wearing my shades so he couldn’t see me eyeing him up and down. Grant was all hard muscle, and the way those jeans were fitting him should be illegal. I turned my head to the arms that still gripped my shoulders and gulped. His forearm had to be as thick as my calf, and it was corded like a cobra ready to strike.

I took another step back because his large hands felt like they were burning a hole in my flesh. Then I took another look at the man’s face, and damn did he look angry.

I held out my hand and used my other to take off my sunglasses and meet his steely stare with my own. Big mistake. Without the tinted glasses on, I was having a stare down with the greenest eyes I had ever seen in my life. They were a shade that had no name in any language I knew, and they seemed to have some type of hatred in them.

“Hello, Grant. I’m Sam, Brittany’s roommate in the Chi.” I still held out my hand, but I had turned on my professional, I-am-talking-to-my-boss voice.

He abruptly let go of my shoulders, but he didn’t take my hand. He just stared down at me with his jaw set and his full bottom lip looking like it was trying to see how straight it could go. I wondered what his lips would feel like on mine. I was sure they’d be a perfect complement to my own full lips.

“You’re Sam?” His voice was gruff, and he sounded like he was still pissed off.

“Yes.” What the hell was his problem? I retracted my hand and put it in on my hip.

I looked at him and he stared at me. He tipped the top of his Stetson higher and really stared down at me. If it was a battle of stares, I was the staring queen in my neighborhood.

“Grant, you’re being rude.” Brittany was now right beside me with her arms folded in front of her like a drill sergeant.

The mountain man’s eyes finally left mine, and I smirked—I had won another stare down. He looked squarely at his sister and put his hands on his hips and widened his stance.

“Brits, I have always been rude. All the time, twenty-four seven, I am just mean.” I would have completely believed him if there hadn’t been a twinkle in his eye when he said it.

She giggled and punched him in the arm. At least he was friendly to her. As for me, I think he would have liked to spike me with his spurs.

Since Grant was otherwise occupied with his sister, I took a moment to check him out. He was fine, I will give him that. He had this rough, hardened look about him that yelled “I take no shit from anyone.” His jaw was set in a square shape, but it was the remnant of the scar on his cheek that captured my attention. I wondered how he came by that scar. His broad shoulders looked like he would have to turn sideways to walk through a door. I let my eyes roam lower, and all I could think was *hot damn* and *Sugar Honey Iced Tea*. Those jeans should be outlawed, or him wearing jeans should be outlawed, because the way the denim



was hugging those muscled thighs was assaulting my equilibrium.

I was drooling over that image so bad, I hadn't realized that I'd whistled, out loud, for the world to hear. I hoped the ground would open up and swallow me whole, especially after Grant fixated that emerald green stare at me again. I swallowed and just stared right back.

I didn't know what else to say, but his eyes squinted as if he was trying to figure me out. I felt like my quota of staring for the day had been met. I shrugged my shoulders and shifted my gaze out toward the back of the house.

The barn was huge. It was the customary barn red, but that was where the similarities ended. It was tall, and it appeared to have a top level lined with windows.

"Ahhh, I see you have spied where the auction is going to be tonight," Brittany practically shrieked. In some ways, she was like a five-year-old. Anything fun made her squeal. "Come on. Let me show you where the runway is going to be." I didn't have time to protest as the excited girl grabbed my arm, and her blonde ponytail swung as she pulled me toward the monstrosity of a barn.

I cast one last look over my shoulder at Grant, but he had already turned into the house. Damn.

## Chapter Two

I took one last look in the mirror. I had to admit, Brittany knew what I could pull off, and this cowgirl outfit was definitely it. I'd been a little skeptical before, but the way these jeans fit low on my hips and hugged the curves of my assets, well, the girl knew a thing or two. The top was indeed a green bandana, but it wasn't so distasteful, as long as I didn't turn around. I had never showed anyone the scorpion tattoo that slithered across my back. On my dark skin, the creature looked even more menacing than I'd intended because the eyes appeared to glow green.

I slung the belt and gun holster over my hips and locked it in place. Brittany had given me my gun back, and I placed the unloaded .9 into the holster. The holster was broken in, and the belt had been molded to fit my body. I could tell Brittany hadn't even tried the thing on—none of the other belt notches had been used. The leather was smooth like a second skin.

I was ready for the evening's events. I applied a deep garnet lipstick to my lips and tucked my ear-length hair into the jade green cowboy hat. This was

one of the few occasions that I loved having a bob haircut. It looked good in any hat, and if I had a fetish, it was shoes and hats. The cowboy boots were stylish and went well with the outfit. I was ready to go.

When I heard a gasp, I whirled around. Brittany was standing there in a jean skirt and a plaid shirt tied in the front, looking like Daisy Duke.

Tipping my hat up, I struck a pose.

“So, what do you think?” I spun around in a circle to let Brittany get the full view.

“I think Grant is gonna flip out. I didn’t know you had a tattoo!” Brittany rushed to me and started to feel the small raised areas of my ink job.

I stepped back and raised an eyebrow at her.

“What does the oh-so-rude Grant have to do with anything?”

“Nothing, he just never thinks a woman should have ink.” Brittany had the gall to blush. What the hell was going on? I could see there was something up by the way her blue eyes couldn’t hold my gaze. With those two pigtails in her hair, she looked like a child caught with her hand in the cookie jar.

“I don’t give a damn what your brother thinks. In case you didn’t notice earlier, he doesn’t like me.”

“Yeah, okay. Didn’t this hurt?” Brittany was again fascinated by the inked scorpion on my back.

The tail of the predator was on my right shoulder blade, which I shrugged to make it appear as though it were going to strike.

“Yeah, but sometimes a little pain never hurt anyone. Come on, let’s go.” I was getting uncomfortable, and I was not ready to divulge my other interests to my roommate, or anyone else for that matter.

“Yeah, let’s get moving—I want you to see how it came together.”

I tipped my hat down and followed Brittany out to the barn. When I reached the inside of the barn, I realized the girl had outdone herself. There were still hay bales, but she had them covered with various bandanas, and the tables were all positioned around the runway in the middle of the massive barn. White Christmas lights decorated and provided lighting. It was a cozy little scene. If I didn’t know the story behind the scenes, it would be easy for a girl to get all romantic. That wasn’t my style. I hadn’t had a steady man for three years because I was too “empowered,” as the last piece of meat otherwise known as a man had called me. Actually, I wasn’t “empowered,” just a control freak. I knew it, but I wasn’t about to change it.

As I was taking in my surroundings, some of the other women started to gather. Boy, Brittany had gone to great lengths to make this evening work. It didn't look as though any of these women were from around here. There was a nice-looking East Asian woman dressed in a turquoise outfit just like mine. She was shorter than me, but that wasn't unusual, because I have been called a six-foot Amazon since high school—though it still wasn't true, I was an inch shy of six feet.

There were a few more women, including this pouty-looking blonde done up in a red outfit that spelled trouble. When you socialize in the stockbroker world, you can tell one of these divas from a mile away. She was trying to look coy or innocent, but the truth of the matter is, she was hunting. I could tell by the way her gray eyes were darting from table to table that this woman was scouting. She could probably give the Chicago Bulls scouting crew a lesson or two on identifying good men.

As I sized up all the women, about ten of them not including myself, the men started to trickle into the barn. Apparently they didn't have to dress up for the event. They were still wearing jeans that hugged them all like a second skin. Some of the rugged men had on flannel shirts, but as for those who had on

plain t-shirts—woooo, hot damn. Apparently the other girls were thinking the same way, as most of them started to fidget and some of them started to preen like cats starved for attention.

I looked around for Brittany, but she was already behind the podium, caught in her own little world. I backed away slowly and made for the refreshment table. All of that man meat circulating had made my mouth go suddenly dry. I turned around and kept my back to the crowd. There were almost twenty pieces of flesh in there that I could all too well see shirtless—well, and pants-less for that matter.

I took a sip of my juice and closed my eyes for a brief moment when I felt a shadow behind me. I didn't want to appear jumpy, so I relaxed my stance and purposefully swayed my right hip, brandishing my shiny friend in the direction of the shadow.

“Honey, that BB gun ain't gonna scare a fly from shit.” The low timbre of the voice made my skin grow hot. The slow, sexy drawl almost made me cream in the thong I was wearing.

I slowly put my hand on the butt of the gun and let my thumb stroke the latch of the holster. I twitched my shoulder to make the scorpion tail move and turned around slowly, with a lopsided, albeit sinister grin on my face.

The devil has blue eyes. What I was staring at was indeed the devil incarnate. His perfect white smile and his mess of jet-black hair told me he was trouble. He was of the t-shirt crew. Nothing covered his taut forearms or left much to the imagination concerning the span of his chest. This prime male was built like an ox, and was fine as a summer day. His skin was only a shade or two lighter than mine—he must have been one of the outside workers. Who knew that heaving hay would give you such a physique?

He held out his hand and I held out mine, giving him a firm shake. That only made him smile harder.

“Chase. Chase Daniels. Nice to meet you...”

“Samara Cole, but most call me Sam.” His hand dropped mine immediately. His blue eyes turned wide, and then he squinted. What is wrong with my name out here in BFE Montana? “Let me guess, you thought I was a guy?”

He shook his head and looked around. Then he looked at me and leaned in close as if he had a huge secret to share.

“No darling, I didn’t think you were a guy, no way in hell are you a guy with the way your ass is riding those pants.”



I threw my head back and laughed. Finally! Some conversation that was as feisty as I was. I sure did hope Chase bid on me, because I wouldn't mind letting him show me the ranch.

"And I thought we were supposed to be riding horses? Perhaps a stallion?" I said, quick to pick up on his innuendo. I grinned, and then Chase laughed. His laugh was rich and true. I liked this guy.

Just as soon as he'd begun laughing, he stopped. His eyes grew serious, and his smile waned into a thin line. He straightened, and then he looked beyond me. It didn't take a geologist to figure out that a glacier had just moved into the area.

Slowly I turned around and faced that damn mountain of a man again. Grant. This dude was just a bucket of cold water everywhere I went.

"Hey, boss-man," Grant said, the hint of his previous laughter lingering in his voice.

Grant stopped staring at me and smiled at Chase. He had nice teeth, I couldn't stop myself from noticing. They were bright white and straight. And he had a wonderful smile against that tanned skin of his. You don't see guys like these walking the streets of Chicago—or if you do, they're cops or pro athletes, and I don't date either.

“Hiya, Chase. I see my sister roped you into entertaining this thing tonight?” Grant’s voice would have made Barry White jealous. But I couldn’t help but wonder if the “thing” he was talking about was the auction or me.

“Anything for a good cause, Stone. Plus, the women came here to have a retreat, a getaway on a real ranch, so I’m told.” Chase grinned and stuck his hands in his pocket. Why I was I getting the impression there was something being said in what wasn’t being said?

Grant Stone still didn’t give me the time of day, so instead of trying to intrude, I attempted to slide out of the conversation and from between the two men. I was beginning to feel like a sandwich. Not that I wouldn’t mind being in between those two slices of bread right there.

I put down the punch cup just as Brittany was coming up to me all in a flurry.

“There you are! We’re all set to start up the auction.” I allowed my overexcited girlfriend to lead me away and behind the hay bales, where I met the other ladies Brittany had lassoed into the auction.

“Okay, ladies, this is all of you. Thank you for doing this for me. Here are the rules: you are to give these men a taste of the domestic life. None of them

are married, they all work for my brother, but they don't get away from Montana much. Each one of you has been everywhere but Montana. So, here you are. You are here just as female company, no funny stuff. Some of the boys are rowdy, but they are good guys and gentlemen. When the hotel opens at the base of the lodge, we need tourists to see that this is a family vacation, and if they see a bunch of bachelors running around, they aren't going to get that impression. So, how about it? Are you ladies ready to get domestic?"

I could have laughed—it sounded like a coach trying to pump up a team. But I was going to let Brittany bask in her moment.

"Let's roll," the snarky blonde with gray eyes said. She could be trouble, that one. Why did I even care? I came out here on vacation; if I didn't get bid on, I would be all too pleased.

Brittany clapped and went out to the podium. And just when I thought it couldn't get any cheesier, the woman rang a cowbell.

"Okay, fellas, the time has come to put your money toward a good cause and make this hotel look good for some tourists. All bids start at two hundred bucks. The first lady we have is..." Brittany was in rare form, and she sounded like an auctioneer.

As Brittany went down the line of eligible women, I scanned the crowd. There were some guys who didn't look interested, and some who were just going along with the fun. The hospital would definitely get some good proceeds out of this crew. The women were going for eight hundred or more. It made me wonder, where did these ranch hands get all of this cash?

I was hoping Chase would bid on me, but he shelled out two grand on the Asian cowgirl. She tried to hide it, but I think his size made her nervous. If I was in her shoes I would be thinking the same thing. Finally it was my turn, and I stood up on the runway.

"Next we have the exotic Samara Cole. She is a feisty one from Chicago. Her talents are many, believe me, I know—she's my roommate. Quick wit, great smile, killer legs. She works out her mind and her body, not to mention her little accessory there, boys. She's a crack shot, and you're lucky I told her not to load her friend there. The bidding starts at two hundred..."

Sashaying down the runway, I tried not to notice that there wasn't an answer. I kept my hat down low, and from under the brim I could see a couple of nervous glances to the back of the barn. I wasn't conceited or nothing, but it did hurt not to get bid on.

Perhaps Montana men didn't like dark chocolate. Whatever the case, I was about to sashay off the stage while I still had some dignity intact, when I heard that damn growl again.

"Three thousand for Ms. Cole." I turned and looked over my shoulder. Why would Grant Stone bid that much on me? He didn't even like me!

"Okay, that is three thousand for the lovely Chicago import, going once, going...ah to hell with it, sold!" Brittany chimed. Why wasn't she shocked like I was? Hell, did I see the woman actually smiling? Oh hell naw. I wasn't about to be saddled with someone who hadn't even said "hello" to me yet.

Before I could jump off the stage and strangle my ex-roommate, or would-be ex as soon as we got back to Chicago, I felt a hand on my leg. Grant stood there with his other arm extended up. I was never one who liked being embarrassed, so I saved both of our prides by taking his hand and placing the other on his shoulder. He lifted me down off the wooden runway as if I were a sack of potatoes.

Damn, he was strong. I felt his muscles shift and bunch as he lowered me to the floor. His eyes were unreadable as I looked into them with the question in mine. *Why?*

I watched his jaw work back and forth as the noise around us came to a full roar. The music began to play, and some of the ranchers with their newly acquired “dates” started to dance.

I noticed he still hadn’t let me go as the mellow music played in the background.

“Care to dance?” I almost dropped dead on the floor at the sound of his voice. It was a low rumble that came from deep in his chest. Between that and his stimulating scent of pine and leather, I was speechless.

All I could do was nod and let him lead me out to the floor. He began leading and swaying to the music, his thighs flush with mine. I felt like he was burning me through my clothes. It was a slow song, and he was just the perfect height so I could lay my head on his shoulder. That was comforting.

Then, damn my analytical mind, I wondered why he bid on me. His hand on my bare back was driving me nuts, and that made me feel even thornier.

“So what, you felt sorry for me?” I couldn’t keep the venom out of my voice, and he must have sensed it. His grip tightened on my hand, and he pressed me closer into him. That was not helping me at all.

“No.” That was it. No more to it, just no?

“You don’t speak much, do you?” I said, laying my head back on his shoulder. When Grant didn’t respond, I raised my head to look at him. He looked down at me, and I couldn’t tell what he was thinking. “Is it just me you don’t speak to, then? I mean, you talk to all the guys around here. You can think of me as one of the guys if that helps.” I think I almost saw him smile; it was more of a lopsided smirk, but it was something.

“Believe me, sugar, the last thing I’m thinking about is you being one of the guys.”

“Why not? I like sports, cars and a good steak every once in a while. Plus I can aim a gun. I can be your buddy, kind of like Chase there.” I was trying to coax this man into something, friendly terms maybe, a ceasefire—of course, I didn’t know what I’d done to piss him off so bad in the first place.

“You’re nothing like Chase, because I don’t get this way around Chase.” Then Grant pulled me closer to him. All this time I thought my gun had been caught between us. I gasped as I realized just what the hard line was that was pressed hard into my midsection. It was Grant, and an anaconda was apparently trapped in his jeans. The hard line was so taut, no wonder I thought it was metal.

“Okay.” Damn, I was an MBA, and the only thing I could think of to say was “okay”? This man had my tongue in knots.

At the thought of knots my mind went deep into the gutter. Him tying me up and having his way with me flashed through my mind. I felt my nipples pebble at the thought. Damn me for not being able to wear a bra with this outfit.

“You don’t seem to mind, Samara,” Grant said, and he chuckled.

Instead of letting him see how aroused I really was, I got defensive.

“So what was the not speaking to me crap?” I looked up at him, and he looked down at me. There was something knowing in his eyes. Something that he knew and I didn’t, and that meant trouble. Before I knew it, he was leaning down close to my ear.

“You really want to know?” he whispered in my ear.

I swallowed, his breath tickling at the fine hairs on my earlobe. “Uh-huh.”

“Meet me here, tonight, at midnight. I’ll show you.”

His words of whispered promise almost made me faint. Lucky I was made of tough stuff. I wanted my answers.



## Chapter Three

I don't even remember the rest of the evening. All I could hear was Grant telling me to meet him back at the barn. Here I was, back in the barn, with only minutes to spare. I wanted to make sure that no one else was still lingering after the auction, so I had been waiting around outside for a while. Most people had gone away all cozy together, and Brittany had gone right to bed, she was so exhausted.

"You can stop creeping around and get over here." Grant's voice came from beyond the stack of hay bales. I let out a pent-up breath and walked around them.

I didn't even have time to focus on his face before he pulled me into a mind-shattering kiss. His lips were soft and firm, warm and inviting. My eyes fluttered closed, and I dug my fingers into his hair.

I moaned, and he pulled his lips away from mine.

"Now that that's finally out of the way... Turn around." Grant was a bossy sort of man, but I suppose that was what made him the owner of this ranch.

I cocked my eyebrow at him. I didn't like to be bossed around, but I'd be damned if the sound of his voice alone didn't make me want to do more than turn around.

"Do you trust me?" That was an awkward question for him to ask at a time like this. I was in a barn at midnight, and my gun was still unloaded. Trust was not the first thing that popped into my mind. Now lust, on the other hand—now we were talking.

I put my hand on my hip and looked him up and down. I didn't feel in danger, so I nodded my head yes.

"Good." His voice dipped dangerously low. "Now turn around, and don't make me tell you again."

I turned around slowly, making sure my body language showed that I didn't like being bossed around. His hand circled my wrist, and I felt a cool piece of fabric against my skin. Before I could snatch my arm away, my other wrist was bound to the first. Then I felt Grant come up behind me and press his now bare chest into my back. I didn't scare easy, and I wasn't scared, just confused.

"Now, Samara, do you want to know all the wicked things I've thought about doing to you since my sister has been your roommate?" he whispered in

my ear. His large hand was flowing up and down my back, tracing, I knew, the length of the scorpion's tail. "She would write how brave you were, how tall you were, how smart you were. I was beginning to think she was in love with you."

I snorted—that was all I could do, as his hands were running up and down every inch of my exposed skin and driving me insane. He grabbed the knot of the bandana top and pulled. It slid away from my skin as if I was meant to be this exposed to the man in back of me.

I felt him run his hands softly over my chest, bringing the nipples to attention with the light butterfly touches from his callused fingers.

"Brittany thought you were great, and after a while, so did I. I was falling in love with someone I'd never met. So I tried to convince myself that she was only rambling on about you because you were gay or something else, a guy. When I laid eyes on you, I felt like I had been kicked in the guy parts by my horse. That's why I couldn't say anything to you. I was struck dumb."

I laughed a little and then gasped when I felt his teeth nip my shoulder.

"Now now, don't laugh at me, because it was when Brittany wrote to me about an odd device you

had in your room, thinking I would know what it was, that I was sent over the edge.”

I swallowed. I didn’t think I’d left any of my sex toys out in plain view like that. Everything I owned fit in a nice secure box, except for...shit. I gasped at my realization.

“Yes, my dear Samara, your riding crop. I don’t think there are that many stables or horses out in Chicago.” He pretty much purred these words in my ear.

I was in such a daze, I didn’t realize he’d led me to my knees. Grant’s tone was a spell for sure, but the way his hands danced on my skin, I was hypnotized.

My eyes were closed, and I didn’t have time to be embarrassed about my sexual fetishes as Grant took another lick of my ear. I inhaled a breath, and he took that opportunity to use his hand to undo my belt. His hands were making me a pile of Jell-o as his softly whispered words turned my mind into his playground.

His fingers quickly found the button to my pants and unbuttoned them in one motion. With his chest still pressed against my back, Grant pushed my jeans off my hips and down to my knees.

His presence left my back for a moment, and that gave me an opportunity to catch my breath. Then

I felt it. The unmistakable head of a riding crop on the small of my back.

I tensed. I know I'd said I trusted him, but did I really trust him?

"Now now. Relax." Grant's words were tense too. The fact that he was a little nervous put me at ease. "I haven't played in a long time, but I was thinking perhaps you would be the one to help me."

I finally found my voice.

"This is a hell of a time to be asking for help, Grant." Then I realized my mistake. The whistle of the crop slicing through air should have warned me before I even felt the first sting of leather against my skin. My nipples pebbled, and I felt my girl downstairs whimper and cry. Damn, that felt good.

Yet, I knew two things. I had called him by his first name, and I didn't have permission to speak at that moment. I had always been looking for someone to teach me to be a little submissive, but I sure hadn't thought my roommate's brother was going to be the one to do so.

"I think you know what that was for," Grant said gruffly. A part of me knew he was on the edge too, and I knew what I needed to do, for the both of us.

"Yeah, I do know, but that doesn't mean I know you well enough," I said in the sassiest voice I could

muster up. I knew him well enough that I'd showed up in this barn at midnight, and he knew that as well.

I heard the whistle again and this time the sting came on the opposite cheek, just below the head of the scorpion. I wiggled my bare ass in an effort to relieve the tingling sensation between my legs.

"You know, I think you did that on purpose." Grant's voice was a tight rope from behind me.

"Maybe," I said, looking over my shoulder at him. He had the crop at his side and was staring at my back. His pupils were dilated, and I could see the raw hunger in his eyes. "So, you still think women shouldn't have ink?"

He shook his head and stared at me. Then he got a sly grin on his face.

"Brittany talks too much," he said and turned around so I could get a full view of his back. Then I saw it—it was a scorpion tattoo similar to mine, except the eyes were red. Well, I'll be damned.

"Looks like you've already been branded as mine, sugar." Grant threw the words over his shoulder. I swallowed and knew right then that I wanted this man, now.

"Untie me, Grant." My voice low, I couldn't control the lust I felt at that moment.

"No."

“Untie me now, Grant,” I said again, wiggling a little, but it was impossible to have the upper hand when your pants were around your knees.

“And I said no.”

I turned away from him, my neck tired of straining. His hands were on me again. This time laying me on my stomach on a chenille blanket. I hadn’t even noticed there was a blanket there.

I patiently waited as Grant divested of my jeans. I wiggled my ass again, and this time the smack I felt on my bottom was his hand, not the crop.

I purred loudly.

“Darling, if you don’t knock that moaning off, this is going to end quicker than it started,” Grant whispered, his mouth only a breath away from my ear. His tongue snaked out and licked my earlobe, nipping it with his teeth.

I was helpless. All I could do was squirm underneath him as his tongue rained kisses from my ear to my neck, down my back to the apex of my thighs. Then he stopped. His wide hands circled my waist and raised me a little, and I felt his nose nuzzle my already drenched labia. Then he blew.

My hips bucked, but he had me in a firm hold, and I couldn’t do much of anything with my wrists still bound. His tongue darted over my labia in short, soft

licks until he found my pearl. I heard him growl before I felt his lips clamp down on my clit. I couldn't tell if he said anything after that, because I was on my way to the moon. Bright lights flashed behind my closed eyelids as I felt his warm tongue bathe my clit.

"Grant, please. I'm going to..." I couldn't even finish the sentence as another wave came over me.

"Go over the edge, Sam—I want you to." He licked me hard again, this time from my juice-soaked opening back up to my clit. "I need you to," he muttered as his lip sucked my cherry into his mouth once again and swiped it with his tongue.

That was all I needed. My insides exploded, and I felt my back arch into the air. My toes curled down as the tsunami of an orgasm took over all of my nerve endings. I couldn't even scream as it washed over me; all I could do was ride the wave.

I was still coming down off the peak as Grant untied my hands and flipped me over. This man could handle me like a ragdoll, and I loved every minute of it.

"Now it's time for the real fun." This cowboy had me all goo-goo, and there wasn't anything I could do about it—not that I wanted to. As he leaned over me, I noticed he was out of his jeans. And boy was he out. His lovely tool was thick and pulsating with veins.



I watched with eyes half-mast as he rolled the condom over his rod.

Grant slid his body up mine, his hard pecs rolling across my breasts. The skin-on-skin contact was searing. My legs opened wide to accommodate his broad frame. I felt the head of his cock rubbing against my folds.

He looked me in the eyes, a look so endearing I almost melted. It was at that moment that our encounter went from a lust-filled ride in a barn to something deeper. I couldn't put my finger on it, but that look asked me much more than I could answer. Grant blinked, and that look, that moment of vulnerability, was gone. But both of us felt it, I was sure.

He took his time pushing his thick shaft into me, giving me time to get accustomed to his girth. I swallowed because that was all I could do. I couldn't do anything, but I was beginning to burn with an ache like I'd never felt. He needed to move, he needed to do something to soothe this away.

I positioned my legs and put my heels on his lower back. I began to arch myself upward, as if the skin-to-skin contact wasn't good enough. I felt this urgency to be one with him, to be as close to him as possible. Grant must have sensed my urgency,

because he grabbed my hips and began to pull my body into his.

The tempo was slow, but the pace was building. There were no more arrogant words, no more flippant replies. It was me and him, both striving to send each other off the edge and into the beautiful abyss. I wasn't sure if I'd ever experienced hard "lovemaking" before, but that was what this was. It was the act of love, but no one had declared love yet.

I felt myself going over the edge again, and I didn't feel as though I could catch my breath. I was gasping, clawing at Grant's broad back, trying to find purchase, straining for something to ease the falling feeling.

Grant grabbed my face and captured my eyes in his gaze. His eyes were hard, and I know whatever he was going to say, I was going to say yes.

"Come with me," he growled and crushed his lips on top of mine. That was a command I had no problem with obeying. I know it sounds corny, but when I say the earth shattered, it shattered. It felt like there were a million electric bolts nipping at my skin. Grant gave one final push before his body went tense and he pulled me so close to his body, we shared a heartbeat.

The world was black for a while. I don't remember how I ended up tucked into Grant on that blanket. But he had me snuggled next to him, his body keeping me warm in the cool Montana night. As my eyes fluttered open, I noticed there was a huge skylight in the barn. I could see the stars dance against the inky sky. I sighed. A girl could really get used to this. The fresh air, the contentment...what was I saying? I don't do the country. Plus, I still didn't know what Grant's real deal was, and here I was thinking long term. Grant must have known my brain was working overtime, as his arm tightened into a death grip around my abdomen.

"Stop it," he whispered in my ear.

"Stop what?" I sighed. I didn't know why I even asked; for some reason, Grant Stone knew me better than anyone.

"Overanalyzing things. Sometimes things just work."

"Not for me they don't. I still don't know why you bid that much. Heck, I don't know a lot of things."

Grant sat up on his elbow and looked me in the eye. Whatever he was about to say, I could see in his glare that he meant it.

"One, the hospital needed the money. Two, it made damn sure that no one got the idea you were

available, not now, not ever. Not even after these damn three days. I wanted you from the moment I read how you pulled your gun on some perv trying to take my sister home.”

I gasped at that revelation. Just how much did Grant know about me?

“I wanted you more when you tried to cheer my sister up last Thanksgiving when she couldn’t make it home.”

“I would have done it...” Grant put his finger to my lip to silence whatever lame protest I would have come up with.

“And I fell in love with you when Brittany dropped your gun and holster in my lap and stormed out. She said something to the effect that she can take care of herself. I slept with it next to me.”

“Grant—” I started.

“I’m not finished, Sam. Whose bedroom do you think Brittany put you in?”

“One of the spares,” I said. Then it dawned on me: no spare bedroom had that much of a personal touch. No spare bedroom had a bed that big—a bed that big needed a big man to sleep in it. “Wait, that’s *your* bedroom? How did you know I would even like you?”

At least the ox of a man had the grace to blush. His head dipped a little.

“Well, you know, Brittany always thought of you as a big sister. She thought if she pried a little, you would become interested.” And he smiled.

Every conversation me and my roommate had ever had came rushing to memory. She’d asked me if I liked horses. Did I only date black men? She’d asked me so many questions that I didn’t even realize what she was doing.

Grant’s face became serious the next time he spoke.

“Stay. Screw the three days, and just stay because you want to. Just let me show you a good time, let me show you who I am.”

I laughed. Of course I was going to stay, but he didn’t have to know that yet.

“Well, I don’t know, I mean you have been rude to me, spied on me...” Grant was on top of me in a heartbeat.

“Don’t forget I have spanked you, tied you, and made love to you until you couldn’t see straight...” He growled, taking nips of my lips between his teeth.

“Mmmmm, you got a point there, cowboy. Plus you haven’t even given me the grand tour yet.”

I could feel him getting very aroused very quickly. I looked at his chest again and realized that I had met my match, an equal.

“I will give you a tour,” Grant mumbled, kissing down the base of my throat to the valley of my breasts, “later.”

I sighed and knew I was in for another wild ride under the dark Montana sky.

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# Nevea Lane

Nevea Lane currently resides in the Midwest, where she lives the life of a hermit. Her life has taken her on many travels and adventures, including: the tops of the Swiss Alps, *le Metro* of Paris, the busy street of Adams Morgan in Washington, D.C., and the quiet mystery of the Silver Lake mountain ranges of the Treasure State (Montana). She has called herself a geographic mutt, and believes that your home is where your heart takes you for the moment. Right now, her heart has led her to the rolling plains of Minnesota, where she'll remain until her characters have decided to stop chatting, or the muse leaves to pester someone else. She has received many marriage proposals, but has not yet decided to make that leap. She is looking for more than just a spark, she is looking for a forest fire...until she finds it, let her entertain you.

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