



KERI FORD

ON THE FENCE



Uninhibited in Apple Trail, Arkansas

ON THE FENCE

By

Keri Ford

On The Fence
by
Keri Ford

Copyright © 2011, Keri Ford

Editor, Jacquie Daher
Cover art design by Kim Jacobs

Digital ISBN: 9781935817536

Turquoise Morning Press
Turquoise Morning, LLC
www.turquoisemorningpress.com

Turquoise Morning, LLC
P.O. Box 43958
Louisville, KY 40253-0958

Warning: All rights reserved. The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work, in whole or part, in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, is illegal and forbidden, without the written permission of the publisher, Turquoise Morning Press.

This is a work of fiction. Characters, settings, names, and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination and bear no resemblance to any actual person, living or dead, places or settings, and/or occurrences. Any incidences of resemblance are purely coincidental.

This edition is published by agreement with Turquoise Morning Press, a division of Turquoise Morning, LLC.

Acknowledgments

KJ Reed—thanks for all you do. Apple Trail, Arkansas wouldn't be the same without your input and suggestions. Yes, even the times you call me a dummy...and those other words probably best not said in public (you know which ones)...I appreciate it all. *smile*

My Rats—thanks ladies! Y'all are the BEST critique group ever. Whether it's books, writing, men, or kids, I know y'all have my back. Yo Ho, Maties!

Jacquie Daher—my editor. My wonderful, wonderful editor who doesn't edit out all my made up words, extreme Southernisms, and incorrect grammar to keep my writing as naturally me as possible. I thank you.

Kim Jacobs—my publisher. You're awesome. Thanks for the chance you took on me.

On The Fence

If Shellie Chambers has to hear one more condescending comment from her mother about life or men, she might scream. So, she packs up and takes a trip to see her long-missed high school friend, Riley. He'll know exactly what she needs to loosen up. But instead of the girl-chasing jock she remembers from their youth, Riley's gone country, keeping up a farm of his own.

Riley Hamilton has settled down on a farm his uncle left to him. Not the life he ever envisioned, but after getting a girl pregnant in college and then watching helplessly as the baby was aborted, he learned the hard way it was time to settle down. Shellie's reentry into his life reminds of his wild past and it's a fight to ignore the tempting woman she has become.

Chapter One

There was no way around it. Catching Mr. Right was damn hard work. Shellie had worn all different styles of clothes, fluttered her eyes, sipped sophisticated looking drinks, and still, nada.

No, that wasn't entirely true. Not nada-nada, there had been plenty of Mr. Wrongs. Lord have mercy, but there had been *plenty* of Mr. Wrongs. She shuddered. Sorry to the boyfriends and one night stands of her past, but dull and arrogant dropped her pulse to dang near dead levels.

Her mother and her ridiculous ideas about flirting to catch the right kind of man—AKA, wealthy—was putting Shellie on a fast track to becoming the next weird cat lady on her block. That was a serious problem for Shellie. She didn't like cats. Honestly, she wasn't a fan of anything that pissed and shit on her carpet. There'd been only one thing she could do. Get out of town to catch a breather. She turned to the one person she knew in all the world who could revive her. Riley Hamilton.

Riley handed her a glass of iced tea and sank into the rocking chair next to her. "What are you thinking so hard about?"

She smiled. "My carpet."

"Your what?"

"Never mind."

Ah, Riley Hamilton. In elementary school he'd put grasshoppers in her Hello Kitty backpack. In Jr. High he'd constantly untied her hair ribbons. In Sr. High, he'd kissed her. Just once. She sighed as memories washed over. She'd been shocked at the moment and froze. He'd pulled away immediately, muttering an apology. Later she glowed, then she was weirded out by it. They did what any good friends would do—they ignored the moment and fell back into their routine. Looking back, she still found that kiss a bit...weird.

It'd been Riley. They had no business kissing, but still, of the handful of men who had ever kissed her, Riley's was the only one who could make her toes curl by the memory. And it had just barely been a kiss. Not even a kiss, really. A peck. A whisper of lips over one another.

She swirled the ice around in her glass and sighed. "I was thinking about my mom."

He pulled in a slow breath, unsure likely, on how to comment. It was a common side-effect when speaking of her mom. He rocked in his chair and tapped his glass against the wooden arm rest. "Dangerous territory."

She smiled, appreciative of his honesty. "No kidding."

"Are you getting homesick?"

She shook her head. "No. I was thinking about dating and how I follow her advice." A laugh, hollow to her own ears, slipped over her tongue. "I guess I don't know what to do with myself now."

Riley shrugged. "Do what you want. You're better than what your mom lets you believe."

"Thank you." She warmed over at that. When the idea of a breather struck her, she knew Riley was the man to find. He'd been the one who'd showed her how to sneak out at night and how to spend the day on the river bank instead of the mall where her mom believed she was. Taught her how to "borrow" the car and top it back off with gas after she was finished.

Shellie was in desperate need of some of that bad-Riley-behavior. She couldn't push her mom off forever, not if Shellie wanted to keep her sanity. And honestly, married to some stuff shirt banging his secretary would be a hell of a lot easier than sticking it out with Mom and her never-ending list of Shellie Faults.

Sit up, dear.

What are you wearing? Comfortable? No, wear the dark wash jeans and low cut red silk shirt I bought last week.

Why in God's name did you tell him there was sauce on his cheek? You're not his mother! You should have situated yourself closer and nonchalantly removed it yourself.

Knots wound through her stomach. If she didn't stop, she'd have to get her antacids.

Shellie rested her head against the worn wooden back of her rocker, soaked in the cool autumn breeze, and stared off across Riley's property. The weathered chair squeaked against the old, paint-peeling porch, lulling her into a dazed zone.

It was so different from Dallas here. Seemed to be miles of open fields and swaying grasses enclosed within a circle of pines. Brown cows speckled the grounds and a small pond rippled next to a grouping of trees with leaves varying in fall colors from brilliant yellow to fiery red. It was nice and peaceful, but so unlike where she'd pictured Riley, the boy with the quickest hands to ever graduate Jones High School, to have settled down.

God, she'd missed him over the years. They'd graduated high school and been tugged in different directions with only the internet keeping them tied together. This was the first time seeing him in some six years.

He reached across the tree trunk serving as a small table and covered her hand with his for a moment. "I'm not just saying that. You *are* better than what your momma tells you. Go to college or do whatever you wanted."

If only *I don't know what to do with myself* resembled a career path. No, she knew what she wanted. Something with flowers. Growing them, arranging them, she wasn't sure. It was risky business since she tended to kill any plant she dared to breathe on. Still, the idea of being surrounded by that quiet beauty appealed. She'd never voiced that thought, as her mother would likely croak at the idea of her doing anything with her hands which didn't involve flirting. Anytime she'd mentioned doing something other than following in her mother's footsteps of marrying a rich man, the woman broke out into hives and cold sweats.

But no, what Shellie had meant was her love life. She frowned. No, not a love life. She wasn't there. Just figuring out a dating life. Since her mom was about to fling her in front of every eligible, wealthy man across the U.S. as part of some supposed vacation, she had better start puzzling out some dating dos and don'ts. Nothing was worse than being flung in front of a man—boring or not—and being painfully aware she had no idea how to flirt and be herself. Her mother's words were always in her head, making her analyze every little line before she spoke, throwing off the whole conversation.

Smile. For God's sake, at least make your smile look real.

Relax your shoulders. Straighten your back. Shellie, can't you even stand normal without me correcting you?

Would it be too hard to look like you're having fun?

Is that your second piece of cake?

Shellie inhaled a deep breath, one not tainted with her mother's advice. That right there was what she was talking about. Her mother had directed her on behavior for as long as she could remember. She didn't even know what was natural and what had been rubbed in. She glanced around, wishing an easy answer was written somewhere. Instead she caught sight of Riley.

His breath slipped out in slow, but heavy exhales. A white knuckle grip held his tea. The flannel sleeves of his shirt were rolled up a bit, showing the flexing tendons of his arms. A thick swallow moved down his corded throat. With her heart beating unexplainably fast, she lifted her gaze to his dark eyes and found him staring at her.

Their stare lasted for only seconds before he looked away. Something was a bit different about him than the man Shellie had known. Where he used to be light and fun, she now often caught an intense look etched on his squared jawed face. A look capable of tossing her breath for a loop. Dashing and charismatic features had become honed into dark and careful.

Dark and careful was far more intriguing. Exciting.

She tugged the skirt of her gray sweater dress down, not recalling him ever looking at her quite like that before. "Thanks for letting me crash here for a while."

He took an intense interest in knocking dried mud off the side of his boot. "If you keep feeding me like you have been, I may never let you leave."

She chuckled, thankful for his attempt at a light-hearted remark, even if it came out strained. "If that's all it takes, you're the one being dangerous now, Riley Hamilton."

He saluted her with his Mason jar of tea. "You do get my underwear soft when you wash them, too."

"Mmm...I'll keep my laundry secret and you'll have to keep me around then." She'd arrived that morning, saw his laundry room while he'd been out and tossed a few things in the wash. He'd been shocked and then pleased.

"Or I could just quit wearing underwear." He winked.

She laughed and then stopped as the idea of Riley stripping out of his jeans, his lean hard body, that would no doubt be sweating, filled her head. She cleared her throat and tugged at the thick turtleneck suddenly choking her. Where did that thought even come from? Riley was Riley. He used to put peanut butter in her hair and prickly things in her shoes. The kind of guy her momma would say to stay away from.

Oh, Shellie, no, her mother had said. He'll never make something of himself. Just look at him. Look at his parents. White trash. No, stay away from him before you find yourself knocked up and then nobody will want you. Not even him.

A little brown and white speckled cow trotted around the side of Riley's house. Shellie blinked. Holy shit, there was a cow in Riley's front yard. Riley still stared at his boots and didn't seem to notice. She flicked her hand out, trying for his attention, but failing for words. Mother never schooled her on this situation. "Cow."

Riley looked up and set his tea aside with a heavy sigh. "Now where did he get out?"

The animal moved around and munched on grass by the porch steps, like it wasn't a problem. Like this was just a regular routine for the animal.

Dear God, there was a *cow* in Riley's front yard, steps away from the porch. Should she be scared? Was the thing going to climb the porch and stampede? Stampede? Eep! She turned back to the animal to keep her eye on it just in case she needed to make a run for it. But instead of one, there were now two.

"Riley! There's another cow."

"Where there's one, there's usually another." Riley stomped down the steps and walked right past the pair of cows chewing on grass along the side of the house. He even patted one on the ass on his way by. Lord, but it was a wonder the thing didn't kick him.

Growing up, Riley hadn't hunted, fished, or any of those other things. He was into sports, girls, and fast cars. When she'd arrived, the last thing she'd ever expected to find was him surrounded by open fields with cows in a little town called Apple Trail, Arkansas.

"What are you going to do?"

Riley glanced over his shoulder, his brows rose. "Put them back up. They'll get hurt and ruin stuff if they run free." He stared at the horizon and she followed his gaze to dark clouds hunkering and sweeping over the tree tops. "Looks like the rain will be here faster than they called for. It's rained every afternoon this week. My hay fields are mush."

She swallowed as he walked on, completely sure of his actions and his plans. Confidence. He may have changed in some ways, but he still had that. And she was still jealous how he just always seemed to know what to do and how things would work out in the end.

He marched onward and her gaze dropped to his jeans fitting around his ass. No longer was she concerned about the cows because, Lordy, how had she never noticed the way his jeans

cupped his very nice ass? She blinked and stared again. She'd never noticed because he'd worn baggier jeans in high school. Except for those football pants...she cleared her throat, suddenly hot on the cool day.

Cows. On the loose. Right. "How?"

He spun, taking a few steps backward. "You could come with me and find out."

She glanced down at her black suede boots and frowned.

"What's the matter?" He laughed and spun again so that he was walking forward and around the corner he went.

She grabbed the handles of her chair, fully intending to shoot from her seat and march after, but she stopped. The cows didn't follow, but seemed content with lazily munching on the weeds around the house. She had to admit, that would be a handy animal to have around to help with the lawn. Which also made her admit something else, it wasn't fear of the wild cows standing right there stopping her from following.

She walked the long porch to the edge and peered around the corner, but didn't see Riley. The side door of the wooden barn was open. It was too dark and far away to tell what he might have inside there.

Would the cows go to him like dogs? Though if they did, he probably would have called them already, wouldn't he? This was all so rustic and fascinating. Her only encounter with cows before this week included a table and a side dish.

The breeze moved a bit cooler and stronger off this side of the house. It lifted hair from her ears and seeped through the thick, turtleneck sweater dress to prick goose bumps on her skin. No sign of Riley. Was he getting rope things like horses used? Not that she knew anything about horses, but she had watched a western movie or two in her day. She could follow and see as he suggested, but what if she got mud on her wool dress or boots?

A groaned vibrated up her throat and she marched toward the steps. She was so tired of living with her mother's words constantly nagging. Here she was, in the middle of freaking nowhere and she wasn't following her curiosity because she might ruin her boots. Didn't she come out here to get away from all that? To find the fun Riley had shown her in high school. Why was she hiding on this porch?

She stepped out on the narrow walk in front of the house and just like that, lighting streaked overhead. Thunder rumbled through her body all the way down to her toes in her four hundred dollar boots. She hurried toward the barn, wanting to beat the rain.

Why are you drenched, Shellie? My God, you look like a drowned rat. I don't want you touching me looking like that, why would you think anybody else would?

Shellie froze and fought against her mother's words. She stood still in the middle of the yard and waited for the drops to pour down. And then those damn cows ran past, bumped her side, and sent her flying into an icy cold puddle.

Chapter Two

Riley flung open the door to the feed and went after a bucket. He scooped grain and vowed to stop thinking about Shellie in any way but as a friend. Like he had in high school. That's all she was then. A friend. It shouldn't be any different now.

Why he had to start noticing her curves, the heavy ring of her laugh, or her floral perfume, he didn't know. He groaned and rested his hands against the feedbox for a moment. He was like a damn buck in rut. She'd stepped out of her car in his driveway early this morning and he was blown away by miles of legs, hair kicking out in the wind, and the sway of her walk. Oh, and then there was her smile, bright eyes, and breathy voice as she'd called his name before pulling him into a hug.

It was Shellie, but at the same time...it wasn't. Shellie Chambers had grown up. No longer was she an awkward, boney girl in desperate need of teasing. The woman who would be sleeping two doors down from him was all curves and sex appeal. And she did the teasing. He'd like to think she really wasn't as attractive as he was finding her. Not getting laid in the past few months was clearly what affected him, but he knew that wasn't it. His main problem was, Shellie was from his past.

Simply seeing her made him want to behave in ways he hadn't in years. Watching her back off in thought, knowing she was thinking of her mother made him want to grab her hand and go toss her in a pile of hay just to make her laugh. Too often he'd done that sort of thing just for Shellie, but he didn't behave that way anymore.

And he most certainly did not think of Shellie and have ideas of putting her on the nearest wall or bending her over the porch handrails. It had never been sexual with her. She'd been a source of fascination to him growing up. He'd always known she'd itched to be bad, but knew she'd never do it alone because of her harebrained mother.

So, just because he could, he'd pulled Shellie after him, got her into trouble and usually always managed to get her out without her mom finding out. It started out with him tempting fate

to see how close he could find himself in trouble, but it quickly turned to doing it for Shellie. She thrived on it.

He knew she came here looking for some of those good old days from high school, but he wasn't going to give in. There was no one, not even Shellie, who he would risk falling into his past for.

No matter how much he knew she'd like jumping off the loft to land in a pile of hay or risk a fever for a cold-ass swim in the pond. Picturing her swimming filled his head and coated his body in heat. Suddenly taking her swimming seemed like a damn fine idea. He cursed and dropped his head.

He would not be that boy again No matter how nice she smelled and how much he watched her, and knew she didn't realize her appeal, he wouldn't touch her, wouldn't lead her astray.

Thunder pounded and shook the thin plywood walls of the feed stall. He grabbed the bucket. Best to get the calves put up before the rain started. He scooped enough feed to shake to draw the calves in and started back toward the house. He made it as far as the barn door and froze.

Shellie stood in the middle of the yard. Her arms were stretched out to the side and head tilted back like she was waiting to be beamed up. She didn't see the calves running right at her.

He yelled, but his call was smothered by another boom of thunder. He ran, unable to do anything as the two reached her. One ran wide, but the other didn't veer quite enough. The calf caught her against her side and flicked her away like she was nothing. She screamed, her legs kicked and body twisted, as she looked for the ground. His pounding heart clogged in his throat. Legs filled with sand as he tried to reach her, but couldn't run fast enough to get there before she fell in a huge mud puddle. Water exploded up around her, her scream silenced, and she lay still.

He yelled after her, but she didn't move. Didn't sit up. Oh, God, she'd broken something. Had she landed on her head? He couldn't remember. He crossed through the puddle, dropping to his knees and sliding over the slick bottom. Icy cold water soaked up his jeans and he stopped at her side. She blinked. Mud and grass was on her face. She stared up at the sky.

He cupped her cheek. "Shellie?"

She looked at him, bewildered. And then she laughed. And rolled. And hee-hawed until she was clutching her belly. With a blink, he sat back on his heels watched as she basically rolled in the mud.

Her dress was soaked and hiked to her hips. Her thighs, her long, long creamy thighs, were exposed. As she chuckled, her knees parted just enough, giving him a full view of the center of her. The thin black strip of her thong slipped between her opening. Shame, that. It looked painful and he just bet a kiss would make it better.

He swallowed and jerked his gaze back to her face, only to veer back down. Without trying, his head filled in images and thoughts of him lying there. He would start out saying, “let me warm you” and then his kisses on her lips and neck would move down her body, to her breasts, waist, hips...and down he’d move. Already, he knew how damn good the heat of her thighs would be against his cold ears.

He reached out and jerked her skirt down, taking away the temptation. Or so he’d hoped. Covering her didn’t take the image out of his mind.

“Shellie.” God what was so wrong with him that he was distracted by the idea of sex that he couldn’t at least make sure she was all right first?

She sobered for only a moment and met his gaze. Her eyes were watery. Wet hair clung to her flushed cheeks. She lifted her hand. He saw it coming, but not enough time to stop it. She threw a handful of mud at his chest and then broke out in chuckles all over again.

She was simply amazing. And she had no idea. “If your momma could see you now.”

“I know!” She rolled to her side and propped her head up on her palm as if she lounged across a fluffy bed in a five-star hotel. “That’s what I’m laughing about. I was waiting to get rained on. I know she would hate that and then the cow pushed me in the mud instead. It’s better!”

He shook his head and stuck his hand out to help her up. She grasped his hand, her lips kicked up and she tugged.

“Shellie!” He fought for traction, but in the slick mud, he fell and landed across her chest. His hips were between her thighs, right against what he desired most. She laughed all over again. Her body shook against his. As if he wasn’t aware of her enough.

“Come on, Riley!” She grabbed his shoulders and gave him a little shake. “You used to live for this kind of stuff. *You* used to be the one to pull me in the mud.”

He froze as she squirmed under him. Her breasts pressed against his chest, her thighs squeezed his hips, her pelvis raked his quickly hardening cock. He'd pulled her in the mud a time or two, but never like this. He focused on her blue eyes. The only thing that had not changed on Shellie. "I'm not a kid anymore."

She stopped her laughing and stared up at him. Her hand lifted and cupped his face. Her brows dipped over her eyes. "What happened to you, Riley?" Her thumb rubbed his cheek in a sweet soft caress he didn't deserve. Not if she knew his thoughts when she was just having fun. "You've changed so much from what I remember."

He shrugged. He didn't miss he wasn't making any move to push off her. Because moving would make him feel more, he told himself. Yeah. That was why he wasn't peeling his hips out of the cradle of hers. It wasn't because her body fit against his better than he remembered any woman's before. Or that her thighs seemed to be squeezing him or her breasts were pressing to his chest.

It wasn't just her body that was calling to him, it was her. He was the one who had changed? He nearly snorted aloud. She didn't have clue just how much *she'd* changed. Her former shy self had morphed into confidence that was hard to resist.

He swallowed. "You're not how I remember either. I can't believe you're rolling in the mud without changing your clothes first."

She smiled. "While I was standing on the porch I decided I'd had enough of doing what my mom would want. While I'm here, I'm just going to have fun and do whatever I want, like I used to do when we hung out."

"You used to be concerned about your mother even when you were with me before."

She shrugged a shoulder, causing her breasts to lift and press firmer against him. "She's not here to catch me at all. I can do whatever I want without having to hear about it later. It's part of the reason I came here, I think. I just didn't realize it until now."

Now that was a change he liked to see. She'd chained herself to her mom's direction for far too long with the excuse of it was easier. And it was, but it always made Shellie sound weak and she was not weak. He forced a smile. At least she'd have her time here to just have fun and maybe she could take that back with her and not stand to live under her mom's thumb anymore. He could even help her, encourage her to have a little wild time.

He shook his head. No. Because he wasn't that trouble-making guy anymore. He was responsible now.

Shellie was staring at him and he realized he'd been silent for a long moment. He forced a smile and recalled she'd said she was getting away from her mom to misbehave. "Like standing in the rain."

"Yes! I played in the rain once and she filleted me over it."

He remembered. It'd be the first time he'd noticed her. He'd been across the street walking home. She'd been a little girl then, standing in her front yard with her tire swing and huge three-story home. She'd been spinning circles. He'd been jealous that she was so spoiled she had nothing to do but stand there and get wet, whereas he was going to help old Mr. Gregor down the street for money. Then her mother had come outside, grabbed Shellie by the arm and yelled in her face. He'd been across the street but had clearly heard Shellie's sobbing. He'd hurried along to Mr. Gregor's, thankful that while his parents were shitty and poor, they never once told him what to do like that.

He picked a piece of grass off her forehead. "So what's next?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm thinking of something crazy right now I've only done once before."

"Sounds like a good idea." And it was an excellent one. Shellie could dream up all sorts of things she wanted to do on her own. He could even help since he officially wouldn't be the one sniffing out the trouble. Only making it happen for her. That was something he could definitely live with.

She grinned, her hands slid up his arms. "Oh, I think it is the best idea ever."

"What then?"

The corner of her lips kicked up. Her blue eyes he could have sworn had not changed over the years, seemed to do just that and darken. She wound her hands around his neck and pulled him down. Her lips touched his and he didn't move. Oh, God. Yes, they had done this one painfully awkward time before. To this day he still couldn't explain what had come over him that had him lean over and kiss her. When she'd stiffened, he quickly realized his error and pulled back.

She smiled against him now. "I've never forgotten that one quick kiss you gave me in high school. I think I acted then like you are now. Stunned."

“I shouldn’t have kissed you.” His lips brushed hers as he spoke. Because she still had him pulled down, of course, not because he wasn’t pulling his own body off hers.

“And now?” Her heart beat against his chest. Her hands that had been tangling in his hair were still.

He cupped the back of her head. To get her out of the mud and cold water. Wouldn’t want her getting sick. “I’m pretty sure I shouldn’t be kissing you now.”

She blinked. Her eyelids slowly lowered and lifted again as a complete temptress. “Then why don’t you get off me?”

She didn’t say it in anger or irritation. It was more matter of fact that she stated the obvious and he knew he couldn’t keep making lame shit up to tell himself.

“Because you feel too damn good underneath me.”

He crushed his mouth over hers and kissed her exactly as he’d wanted since he saw her this morning. She groaned and her legs parted, allowing him to settle deeper, to bring his hard cock firmer against her. She tightened her arms around his neck, angled her head and opened her mouth for him.

He should get off her.

He shouldn’t be kissing her with this devouring need. Just a quick peck was all he should have given, but he couldn’t stop. The warmth flowing from her lips into him was too good. The sweet taste of her mouth from her sugary tea reached in him and he became drunk on the flavor and lost in the sensations.

Thunder cracked overhead and the downpour started. Sheeting rain slanted across them and laughter spilled out from her all over again.

He pushed off her and stood. This time, he grabbed her under the arms and hauled her to her feet. It was too cold for this and that worked as a perfectly good excuse. The boy he used to be would have lain in that puddle until his body was too numb to feel. So he had a small lapse with Shellie, but he was still responsible and an adult, not some out of control boy because he had stopped things before they had taken off.

She took his hand and pulled him toward the house. Against his better judgment, he followed after, chasing her if for no other reason than she was laughing again. She wound around the corner, toward the front steps. A pile of cow shit lay in the yard in front of the house and he stopped.

“Ah, fuck.” He stroked down his face. How could he have forgotten his cows? His responsibilities? He ground his teeth. He wouldn’t make that mistake again.

She turned back and looked at him. Her brows rose in question and he knew what she wanted, what she waited for. He wasn’t going to give it to her. No matter how much she wanted it or how much he wanted it.

He pulled his hand free from hers. “I have to go put the calves up. Go on in, I’ll be inside in a minute.”

She smiled. “I’ll be in the shower.”

He stared after her as she climbed the stairs. Her dress clung to her ass, hitching high in the back and showing off her creamy thighs. He imagined her bent over the steps right there as he took her. How her breasts would feel swinging in his hands in rhythm with his thrusts. Or her naked in the shower with hot water dripping from her nipples. He could ask her to wait so that he could peel her thong off and soap her long body. His jaw hardened and he pushed away from the steps. No. That was the old Riley.

He looked away and started off. “Okay. When you get out, I’ll grab mine.”

And he didn’t look back. He didn’t want to know if she was disappointed. It might be too much to resist.

Chapter Three

It was stupid to have even kissed Riley. Shellie knew that.

Knew he wasn't into her that way. He never had been. She never really had been into him either, but she had *felt* him. Yes it was still a little weird to have kissed Riley, but it was more good than not. For whatever reason, she wanted him to be attracted back to the point he would have tossed any other thought to the wind and taken her. Like she had done. She'd been ready to loosen the zipper of his tight jeans right there in that puddle and rip-off her panties.

Apparently he hadn't felt the same. He'd picked a cow over her. A cow.

Shellie shook her head. He was supposed to be fun and joking, and just Riley. The Old Riley would have taken her up on her blatant invitation. Even over the fact that they'd never done anything like this, the Old Riley would have been in this bathroom with her.

But he wasn't. They somehow reversed roles from what they were all those years ago. Or was it just her? She shook her head. It wasn't just Riley's missing sexual prowl that was different. It was everything. He was completely understated, in a word, from what she'd known growing up. The man who lived for muscle cars with bench seats was driving an old beat up pick-up truck, for God's sake.

With bucket seats and a stick shift shooting up from the console.

Not much was climbing over that. Gone was hair gel and in its place a worn ball cap. His refrigerator and freezer held actual food stuff instead of frozen dinners and the leftover take out he'd always eaten.

People changed, she knew. She'd changed over the years too, but at the heart, she would say she was still the same person. She didn't think Riley could say the same.

The screen door creaked downstairs and then shut with a pop. Maybe he kissed her outside because it was the polite thing to do. And well, maybe his cock took interest because that was the man thing to do. After all, she had jerked him down on top of her, gripped him with her thighs, and kissed him. He'd probably only kissed her just because.

She didn't want just-because-kisses. She wanted the flush of skin and pounding chests and loss of breath like she heard girls say in the bathroom in high school. Even with the sex she'd had in the past, it had never been thrilling as she'd heard others talk about, and she wanted the exciting ride before she began this husband hunt with her mom. She deserved at least that. A little something to hold on to.

She chunked a rag in the sink. It was time to throw everything she knew to the wind and just have fun, but not with Riley. A sad smile filled her. She wouldn't push him toward what he wasn't interested in. She was here for a few days before she had to return to real life and she wanted to taste a fling and learn to flirt like a proper tramp.

The biggest thing that would horrify her mother the most and she wanted it.

She flicked wet hair off her neck and headed downstairs. The clang of the washing machine lid closing sounded so she headed toward the laundry. She rounded the time-worn corners with faded floral paper. Sheesh.

Riley, confirmed bachelor with a black leather jacket to wear while cruising on his motorcycle, had faded blue flowers on his wallpaper. She looked up from the dingy edge and nearly swallowed her tongue.

God Good, Riley Hamilton was butt-assed-naked.

"Shellie!"

She only vaguely heard her name. Riley was...not what she imagined. Sure, she'd seen his naked chest and his legs in shorts, but that had been years ago. He'd filled out. His thighs were thick. His stomach a hard plane of cuts and lines. His...she dropped her gaze his cock and stared. His...oh, wow. Nice. Long and thick. That explained a lot of talk in the girl's bathroom about sore jaws.

"Shellie!"

She glanced up as he reached for a towel off the dryer and wrapped it around his waist. Pity. She blinked, trying to remember why she'd been looking for him.

"Did you need something?"

She stared after him and resisted answering with, *you bet your fine ass I do*. She cleared her throat. "Do you find me attractive, Riley?"

His eyes widened.

“I mean, sexually.” She pulled in a deep breath and vowed she wouldn’t stand there staring in the direction of his cock for this conversation. “Or do you see me as a...” It was impossible. She simply couldn’t talk to him with him practically naked. She shook her head and turned around. “I can’t do this with you when you’re not wearing clothes.”

“You were supposed to have been in the shower.”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “I didn’t know I had reason to linger in there.”

“You didn’t.”

She tried not to wince under his cutting tone, but wanted to glance back and see him. See if there might be some little smidge of regret. She didn’t look. His short answer to her question was all she needed to know.

Riley Hamilton did not want her, even if his cock pressing against her lady bits fifteen minutes ago said otherwise. Why did that have to sting so hard? But him not wanting her cleared the air. She wouldn’t waste the valuable time she had on a man not interested. “Is there anything to do in Apple Tree?”

“Apple Trail.”

“Whatever.”

“Not much. What are you looking for?”

This was so much easier when she wasn’t looking at him. “I want to have a fling. I’ve never had one of those before. And learn how to flirt.”

He was silent for a long moment. She nearly looked at him to see if he even stood there anymore or if he’d left the room, but finally he spoke. “So, you need to know what’s in town because...?”

“Because I need to find a man who’s interested.”

“You are not going to have some fling while you’re here.”

Her jaw dropped and she spun on her heel. “Excuse me?”

His hands were in fists at his side. His temple ticked. “You’re worth more than to be throwing yourself on someone you just met.”

She shook her head. “You’re not at all the Riley I remembered.”

“You’ve said as much and I’ve agreed. I’ve grown up.”

Disappointment filled through her. How had he changed so much over such a small amount of time? She'd just wanted to come here and find normalcy. "Why? This place"—she swept her arm around—"it doesn't fit you."

"Sweetheart, other than on the Internet, you haven't been in contact with me for over six years. I love it here. I will never leave. And I could say the same about you. The Shellie Chambers I knew would never do something like a quick fling."

A growl rumbled up her throat, but she swallowed it down. "That's because I'm tired of living like that girl. I want to have fun like you used to do. You never heard me criticizing you about the way you bed-hopped."

"You didn't have to." He was standing over her now. The scent of the mud and outdoors from their kiss only moments ago washed over her. "I could see it on your face."

She tried to ignore his heat and forget the way his body had covered hers. "But you did it anyway and I never told you not to."

"Yeah, well I learned the dangers that are down that road and I don't want you there."

"What dangers?" Oh god. She dropped her gaze down only to see the fuzzy towel knotted in place below his bellybutton. But if he had something...that would explain him saying no when his body was saying yes. She looked back to his face. "Did you get an STD?"

His mouth fell open and he backed away from her until he leaned on the wall. "Jesus. No." He was quiet for a long moment. She was about to ask and push for more information, but he sighed. "I did get a girl pregnant one time."

It was her turn for her mouth to dangle. "I didn't know." She found herself looking around like she expected to see a kid jumping out of a closet somewhere. "Where is...a boy or girl?"

He shrugged and pushed off the wall. "I don't know. The baby was aborted against my wishes. It would have been four in February."

She couldn't move. Riley had gotten a girl pregnant. Riley was mourning the loss of a baby that never came.

He remained against the wall. He wasn't looking at her, but words continued to come out. "I begged her not to. Told her I would take the baby and she'd never hear from us again. I never thought I'd want that, you know? A kid." He shrugged one shoulder and stared at the floor. "Me. But the day she told me she was pregnant, something clicked into place." He shook his head. His

lips were tight. “She refused. So, yeah. I’ve changed. I don’t live that life anymore and I’ll be damned if I’m going to let you start. Not here under my watch.”

She tried getting angry over that, but just couldn’t. Too much shock was still rolling around for anger to fit in. “I should hope you’d know me enough to know I wouldn’t do that.”

He shook his head. “That’s not the point. If I hadn’t been living that way, it wouldn’t have happened. That’s not me anymore, Shellie. Don’t ask me to be that guy again and please, don’t turn me into him. I’ll help you do whatever you want to out here. Hell, I’ll let you ride one of my bulls if you want, but please don’t ask me to help you do something like a careless fling.”

There was so much she wanted to say, half of it she wasn’t even sure how to say, but she let him walk past because the one thing that bothered her the most was, why had he not told her this all those years ago?

Chapter Four

Riley lay on his bed, fully dressed, and watched as the darkness outside changed. It had been a restless night. By the nonstop rattling of springs from Shellie's bed down the hall, he doubted hers had been any better.

This house with her sweet, sugary scent filling it, was suffocating him. A single smell could make him think of her naked. And sweating. And gasping. And grabbing. And crying out. He rubbed his palms against his eyes, trying to smother the images out. Thank god those calves got out yesterday, because today he would be tied up looking for the break in the fence and then fixing it. Way too much to do to spend it inside lusting after Shellie.

The sun rose high enough he could see the horizon and he left his bed. He made it as far as the hall when a new scent washed over him.

Coffee.

He continued down the hall, past her bedroom with the door opened and showing the room empty. The closer he came to the stairs, the stronger the scent grew. He hurried down and into the kitchen where he found her.

She stood at the stove flipping something. He didn't pay much attention to what because of the view. She wore completely impractical black boots. They came up to the backs of her knees, the leather hugged and outlined the shape of her trimmed calves. Strings laced up the back and tied a bow at the top of the boot. Her long legs looked to have been painted with black pants curving and hugging her thighs. Then there was her ass. Or at least the part of her ass that wasn't hidden by a red, loose fitting sweater. Her long brown hair was twisted up on the top her head and looked dangerously close to falling out with the slightest touch.

His body responded uncontrollably. After the night of thinking of her curves under him and what he'd really like to do with her, he could no sooner halt a stampede than stop his cock from thickening.

He must have shifted or made some sort of noise, because she started and looked over her shoulder.

She smiled and tilted the pan his way. "Morning. Grilled cheese?"

He swallowed and crossed the room for the coffee pot. "It's awful early to be up."

"You're awake."

He shrugged and sipped from his cup. "I have work to do."

She shook the skillet. "I couldn't sleep. What do you have to do at this hour?"

"Feed the cows for starters. Then I need to find where those calves escaped the pasture and repair it."

"How do you do that?" She flopped a toasted sandwich out on a plate and handed it to him. Wasn't bacon and eggs, but he took it with thanks.

"I scoop their feed into a bucket and pour it into their trough."

She slanted him a look. "The fence thing."

"Oh." He looked at his plate, curious that she had taken an interest. "I ride along the fence line until I find the broken spot and then I repair it. Probably an old rusted nail came loose. My uncle put the fence in. It's wooden and old and needs to be replaced with barbwire."

"Then why don't you do that?"

He stared after her, precisely, at her ass, since he was now sitting and eye level with it. He returned to his sandwich. "Costs money."

"More expensive than consistently making repairs to the old one?"

Here was the largest difference between him and Shellie. It was the only thing about her that ever truly irritated him. Shellie's mother had married old and rich and Shellie had never wanted for anything.

While he, born on the other side of the tracks, was looking for work by the time he was ten. "Not in the long run, obviously, but I don't have the money to replace a fence right now. Last winter we had a lot of ice and it collapsed the right end of the barn. It took everything I had to fix that."

"Oh." She dropped a sandwich in the pan and faced him. "If you need money, Riley—"

"No." He kept looking at his half-eaten sandwich. He suddenly wasn't hungry for the rest.

"We could call it a loan. I know you're true to your word."

He stood and finished his coffee, wanting out. "If I wanted a loan, I'd go to the bank."
"Riley."

He stopped and glanced over at her. She walked up, wrapped her arms around him, and hugged him tight. It caught him so off-guard, he stood for a long moment with his arms stiff at his sides, his back ridged. She squeezed him even tighter before he finally returned the hug with a quick pat on her back. When he did, she sighed against him. That one soft noise breathed into his chest and crumbled him.

Before he did something stupid, like, ask her why in the hell she just hugged him, he cleared his throat, unwound his arms, and made a bee-line for the door. He wasn't able to make the quick escape he wanted.

"Riley?"

He stopped, hand on the old metal latch of the screen door and waited.

"Can I come with you today? When you work on the fence?"

He glanced over his shoulder and wished he hadn't. Shellie wore her open and good heart on her sleeve. Genuine curiosity was on her face and something was different in the shape of her eyes. They seemed heavy with sadness, but he didn't know why.

He nodded, because he had told her yesterday he'd be there for whatever she wanted so long as it wasn't a fling. "Let me feed the cows and then I'll be around to pick you up."

"Excellent."

He glanced down her body and wondered how much work he'd get done. Probably none and what he would manage would no doubt require a couple of re-doings. "You might want to change. Wouldn't want to ruin that."

She looked at her clothes. "It's fine."

Shouldn't have looked back, he knew he shouldn't have looked back. All the way to the barn, while feeding the cows and cranking the four-wheeler, he kept thinking how he knew he shouldn't have looked back. He could have thrown out some lame line about dangers or hell, cow shit being everywhere, but he hadn't. He hadn't denied Shellie his pudding cup in seventh grade when her mom was concerned with her weight, he sure as hell wasn't going to start denying her now.

He let off the gas and was still slowing as Shellie bounced down the steps, her boobs rising and falling and rising and....shit, it was like following a couple of bouncing balls. He blinked and stared at the four-wheeler gas tank. Where he'd like her to sit. And face him.

He groaned. That cold mud puddle yesterday had clearly done some serious damage to his head.

"This is so exciting! I've never been on a four-wheeler before!" She put her hand on his shoulder, stepped on the foot pad and swung her leg over the seat like a pro.

Her legs straddled his ass and thighs clenched his hips. Arms wound around his waist, flattening her tits to his back. Fingers hooked in the waistband of his jeans on either side of the button. It all happened in less than a second flat, but each and every touch seared him. Heat spiraled through his veins. Every cell was aware of her every movement.

He swallowed and shifted into gear, all the while thinking how she'd just said she'd never been on a four-wheeler before and knowing the kind of ride he could give her. There was another time, long ago when he'd gotten his first motorcycle. She exclaimed then how she'd never ridden one and he'd given her a hell of a ride that afternoon while she'd clung to him.

Because it would keep him from dealing with her and sex with a stranger, he gripped his handlebars. "Hold on tight then."

Somehow, she managed to squeeze closer. He didn't wait, didn't think about it because he knew he might change his mind and he didn't want to. He hadn't cut loose like this since college and with Shellie, for this, he could. Because it was strictly happening just for her and no other reason.

He shifted into gear and floored the gas. Vibrations strummed through his body and the old Honda shot off, ramping over a little hill in the yard and Shellie screamed.

But not in fear.

She laughed. Her fingers dug deeper in his jeans and he knew she was dangerously close to brushing over the head of his cock. He wanted to ramp something again just to see if it would happen. This freedom, being broken loose from his self-imposed restrictions was intoxicating and he knew he dared not breathe too much. He couldn't afford to fall back into old habits of woman after woman and party after party. But he was safe with Shellie, because she was....Shellie.

Yes, she was sexy as all get out, but she was still Shellie. His safe-spot in school. A girl he'd maintained just enough good behavior and good grades to not disappoint. She was still his safe-spot today. Just like last night, he'd sent her on to her shower alone. Any other woman he would have followed after.

He slowed the four-wheeler at the gate and came to a stop to open it. "Think you can drive it through?"

He glanced back and found her chewing on her lower lip and he was struck hard in the chest and groin. No, he was safe with the *old* Shellie. This new Shellie, with wildfire in her eyes and her heart pounding in her chest who was hungry for more and didn't need to be talked into anything, he was not safe with. There would be no more cutting loose on his part.

Shellie was too much of a risk to himself.

Chapter Six

Shellie slid forward on the black vinyl four-wheeler seat and tapped the little lever hanging from the handlebars. It was no bigger than her thumb, but so much power was in that pad. The machine between her thighs revved and shot forward a foot or so. A laugh burst from her throat, she gripped the wide set bars and hit the pad again. Slowly she mashed it, feeling power gain as she eased forward with each inch she pressed.

Riley leaned against the opened gate and tipped his fingers in hello at her as she slipped past. She grinned in return and released the button after clearing the gate. He shut it behind her, locked it, and then took his seat in front of her again.

She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tight, ready for her breath to be lost in the wind. While driving those few feet through the gate had been slightly thrilling, it was nothing compared to gripping him for life as he raced over the countryside.

Riley cleared his throat. “We won’t be going fast like that again.”

“Oh.” Her arms loosened a tad, but she didn’t fully release him.

“I need to be able to watch the fence line. And there are holes and stuff out here that could flip us.”

“Right.” Ack! She was an idiot. While she was joy-riding, he was still working. And being Serious Riley.

He eased on the gas. “Besides, wouldn’t want one of the tires to throw a cow patty in your mouth.”

“*What?*” But her word was lost under the loud whine of the four-wheeler as he cruised alongside the fence at a leisurely pace. She kept her lips tightly closed just in case he was serious.

While he drove slow, the engine was too loud to try and talk. Instead, she soon found herself leaning back and gripping the metal rack behind her as she took in the scenery.

Mostly it was flat land with a big ditch of water running through the center. A line of pine trees were in the far distance and that was pretty much it on this side of this property. All this was Riley's. So much land and nature. She hadn't gotten it at first, but now she kind of did. Whoever said that fresh air was good for the soul knew what they were talking about. She didn't know if it was being away from her mother that was so freeing or if it was being around Riley out here, secluded, where she could be and do anything she wanted.

A worn fence was on her right. It was pretty, but looked fitted for something surrounding a house rather than keeping in a herd of cows. Why or how the cows hadn't just pushed the thing over to go where they pleased, she didn't know.

It needed repairing and as much as she'd love to help Riley out, she knew he wouldn't let her. She'd known he wouldn't go for her offer that morning when she'd made it, but she'd given it a shot to see if he'd even changed in that aspect. In a way, she was glad to see he hadn't inherited his parents' affection for handouts, but at the same time, she wasn't just any Joe-blow off the street. It hurt a little that he wouldn't allow her help.

The four-wheeler slowed. She peeked around his side ahead and spotted the hole in the wooden fence. There was a vertical post every six or so feet and then three horizontal posts running the length of the fence. The middle piece of wood was dropped on one side in this spot. Those cows must have really squeezed it to make it through that tiny hole, because the animals she remembered seemed way too big to fit through something that size. It was a wonder the little devils hadn't pushed the whole thing down.

Riley turned off the four-wheeler. The machine quieted with only a little squeak. He stood and eased off, careful not to whack her in the face with his foot, same as he stepped off to open the gate. "It's about what I thought it would be."

He loosened some neon orange colored straps off the front of the four-wheeler enough that he was able to free a dingy green bag. "Likely another rusted nail. The cows were probably startled and bumped against the fence to loosen it."

She remained on the four-wheeler, not wanting to be in his way, and watched as he squatted next to the broken piece. "Is it going to be hard to fix?"

He shook his head. "Nah. I'll pop a couple screws in it and that'll hold it for now."

"If the cows know how to knock the fence down so they can get loose, why don't they do it all the time? And how come the others didn't get out either?"

“They’re herd animals. The calves that got out were probably separated from the group and lost. They don’t leave because I keep them fed. The barn is here for shelter. They don’t have a reason to want to leave.”

She thought it over and admitted he had a point. Maybe that was another layer of appeal of this place. She never considered anything specific about remaining in one area or another as she grew up. With her mother’s constant dreaming of marrying wealthy, Shellie truly never knew where she might end up to want to think about it.

France? Italy? California? Who knew?

She glanced around again at the expanse and open fields. Even though fencing ran every which-a-way, there was still freedom and breathing room here unlike anywhere else. The biggest appeal of all, her mother wouldn’t step foot out here in a place so rustic. “I think I get why you like it here so much now.”

He glanced over his shoulder. His brows were raised.

“It’s just...” She waved her hand around at the field. “All this nature wasn’t like you in high school. I didn’t put the two together, but now I get it. You came out here, it gives you everything you want and so you stay.”

He gave her a smile that she thought was a little tight for Riley’s usual devil-may-care, but she didn’t push. For all she knew, that was Riley’s new smile now. She sighed a little sadly over that.

It was time to let the old Riley go and embrace and realize the new one before her. And she found herself proud to know him. To know the new one. He’d accomplished so much after having so little. She’d never earned anything of that kind of measure in her whole life, even if it was a bit sad he’d abandoned his old self. There had been nothing wrong with him before.

He dug in the bag and pulled out a tool. Two screws dangled from between his teeth. While balancing the board on one knee and in one hand, he positioned one of the screws against the board. It seemed he hadn’t lost the talent for having good hands though. She smiled and hopped off the four-wheeler.

She squatted next to him. “Let me help.”

“I’ve got it.”

“I know, but I still want to help.”

Two quick screws later and the board was secured into place. He did a crablike walk to the other end of the board and inserted two more screws there. He grabbed the board and shook it. "That'll hold her for now."

Dear God, Riley Hamilton just fixed a fence in less than five minutes. He stood and she didn't stop. She didn't think. She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him again. Like before, he awkwardly patted her back, which only made her smile.

"I'm really proud of you."

"Is that why you keep hugging me?"

She squeezed him a hair tighter. "No. I keep hugging you because you look like you could use a hug. That's all."

"I'm okay."

She angled her head up and found him staring down at her. She tried giving him another smile, but it was hard to make her lips curve. "No, you're not. What happened with the baby, that wasn't your fault, Riley." He tried pulling away, but she laced her fingers together at his back. "No. I'm going to tell you that over and over until you get it. It wasn't your fault. It was her fault. You tried everything you could, but she made the decision. Not you."

"I was the one who got her pregnant."

She arched an eyebrow. "I must have missed the part about you forcing sex on her." His mouth tightened, but she pressed on. "She agreed to sex, too. Nature did its thing, but she was the one who said no to the baby. Not you. There was nothing more you could have done. It's sad, but it's the truth. You need to stop beating yourself up over it."

"I'm not beat—"

"Yes you are."

"I know what happened, Shellie."

Infuriating. She lifted on her toes, threw her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips to his. He stilled against her, but she wouldn't give up. She knew this wasn't what he wanted on the surface, but she wouldn't ignore the pressure of his cock she'd felt against her just yesterday...was feeling again now.

Yes, she was proud of the new Riley, but also saddened that he'd completely cut himself away from the man he used to be. A little breath of freedom and life from his demons was all she

had to offer. After everything he'd done for her in the past, she owed it to him. More than that, she wanted to give this to him.

Still he resisted. His hands lay unmoving on her back. The length of each finger awkwardly frozen against her spine. Firm lips were unyielding under hers, but she refused to give up. This kiss and touch wasn't for her, it was for him. She stepped into him, her pelvis stroked against the front of his jeans and just the tiniest of moans slipped beyond his immobile exterior.

"Stop denying yourself." She nipped his bottom lip and when his fingers twitched, she smiled against his mouth and licked the spot.

She didn't slow down, didn't want to give him time to think. Thinking always seemed to have been her biggest problem. Now he'd started the awful habit. She licked along the seam of his lips, surprising him enough they parted. Fingers tightened on her back and she dipped her tongue in. The crisp jolt of coffee flavoring him slid inside her mouth and his hands dropping to her ass tingled through her blood.

While she understood what happened to him and where he came from, she wanted to give him some of his self back. She wanted to see the lightness on his face and the casual movements of his body she'd missed so much. The only time she'd seen him loose was yesterday when they had been in that puddle.

She hopped in his arms and wound her legs around his waist. There was no awkwardness in kissing him or feeling him. Not like it had been before or all those years ago.

This all felt suddenly so right. Like colors of a rainbow lining alongside each other in correct order.

His hands came around her hips and he gripped her bottom. His fingers kneaded and squeezed the curves of her cheeks. Little by little, his tense muscles and heavy shoulders loosened and relaxed and came against her.

And then he broke the kiss. Gasping for breath, he lowered his eyelids and shook his head. "No. I'm not this kind of man anymore."

"And what kind is that, Riley? I'm not going to ask you to do anything you don't want, but I'm having a hard time believing you don't desire me right now." She wiggled best she could, catching her crotch against the firm ridge nudging his zipper.

"I don't have casual sex anymore on the spur of the moment."

“Me either. I’ve been thinking about it since yesterday when I saw you again.”

He frowned. “That’s the same thing. I don’t rush into things anymore.”

No, no, no! She was just starting to feel him let go. Just starting to feel him become anxious and excited to breathe again. One way or another, she’d prove him he doesn’t have to hide himself this way. “So let’s take this one step at a time. Okay?”

He breathed for several long seconds and then nodded. “Yeah. I’m okay with that.”

“Okay. No penis into vagina sex.”

He burst out laughing.

She couldn’t help it. She laughed to. “I mean it. It’s off limits. But Riley…” She cupped his cheek to get him to look at her again. “That leaves a big open field of other stuff to do.”

His gaze lowered and he was back in thought. Oh, she didn’t want him thinking. She wanted him doing. If he wanted to remember something, it should be the carefree guy he’d been before that woman cut him to the core and left him raw and bleeding.

She ran her thumb over the seam of his lips. “I see this working out in a couple of ways. One: you can go back to kissing me and we can see where this leads Or two: You can put me down and we can be miserable for the rest of the day and week.” His gaze was back on hers. She leaned forward and nibbled his jaw. “I’m not really interested in being miserable, Riley.”

She kissed his cheek, the corner of his mouth. She licked the spot behind his ear and caught his lobe between her teeth. He hissed. His fingers went back to squeezing her ass again.

“What’s it going to be, Riley?” she whispered.

He turned with her and sat her on the fence at her back. He held her hips, steadying her there. “No,” —he smiled and glanced down with a shake of his head— “penis and vagina sex.”

“That’s not an option for the taking.”

“I know. I don’t even have a condom on me.” His hands slid along her thighs and she tried adjusting to encourage him higher, to grab her on the rear. He only held her still and leaned in closer. “I’m pretty sure you don’t either, not in those pants.”

She shook her head, breathless and anticipating what he had in mind. “Nope.”

And he finally gave her that Riley Hamilton smile. The one she’d heard girls whispering about in the bathrooms during high school. Pushing him to return to his roots a bit was a very, very good idea.

Chapter Seven

The crisp fall air slipped across the back of Riley's burning hot neck, bringing with it the fresh scent of pine and damp earth. He stepped closer into the cradle of Shellie's hips and finally kissed her as he'd been wanting to. Lips and tongues melded together in a ball of heat and passion. Her hands cradled the back of his head and her nails scraped against his scalp. That one rough touch of her nails jolted through his body and revived him.

Not all of him, just a piece. He knew exactly how far today would go and no matter how much he might become tempted, he knew it wouldn't matter. He would not lose control. Couldn't, really. Without a condom, he couldn't take as much as he feared he would really like to. It was why he didn't keep condoms unless he was in a devoted relationship. It kept him honest with himself.

He swallowed and the small charge in him pounded through his veins. Bolts fired through his blood and his body moved into motions he'd long ago tried to forget. Hands curved around her hips and up her backside. Fingers dipped under the fuzzy soft warmth of her sweater, touching hot skin. He gripped, knowing if he didn't, his hands would shake. It'd been years since it'd been like this and it was nearly too much.

Sex since college had been controlled. And in a bedroom. With lights off. With Shellie, out here on his land, his well maintained level-head was giving way to his trembling body. He carried on, knowing he couldn't go too far without protection.

She bent and pressed her mouth back to his. After all these years, after two quick kisses, he was going to find out what set Shellie Chambers off. Would she be easily intrigued or hard to please? Hell, he really didn't give a damn, because either way, he knew it would be great and a perfect fit for him. She always was, with everything else in his life.

He gripped her hips gently and slowly increased pressure until she was on the edge of the fence. Hot breath panted from her lips and turned to fog. Her thighs squeezed against his sides and kept him within her legs. He edged under her sweater and felt up to her waist. His thumbs

smoothed over each one of her delicate ribs and he wished to God they were in the house so he could strip her and see her naked without the cold air freezing her ass off. Later... he could do that later tonight. Because at the house would still be safe since he had no condoms there either.

Now was for fun and quick release. Later he would worship her curves and memorize what made her breathless. He cupped her silky smooth bra in his hands and welcomed the natural fit of her tits against his palms. Later he'd know those more intimately. Their taste and weight. The shade of her nipples and the prick of her tips. He kissed her neck and dropped his hands to her thighs and did his best to ignore his own raging desire to take her how he wanted, just for his own satisfaction. That soul sucking need for sating his cravings would not return, no matter what. Not that his partners had ever been left wanting to his knowledge, but never had he set out with their needs coming first in his mind.

Going at this just for the purpose for Shellie was different. More thrilling. A challenge against himself to not become so overly interested that he lost his purpose of pleasing only her. He dipped his fingers between her thighs and dragged his thumbs along her warm center, covered by the thin layer of her pants. She shuddered in his arms. Again he stroked her and rested his palm against her until her breath was hitching. This wasn't enough. It was only making him crazier. He grabbed her and tugged her off the fence. She startled but held tight to him as he turned for his four-wheeler and laid her across the length of the seat with her head carefully placed against the back rack.

Stretched out before him, his for the taking to do as he pleased. Not *all* he pleased, but a lot of possibilities raced around. Shellie had been right about that. There was still a whole hell of a lot they could do.

He lifted her legs and straddled his four-wheeler backwards so he faced her. Her long, beautiful trim thighs extended over the top of his and her heels hooked over the handlebars. He dipped his hands under her bottom and lifted ever so slightly as he tugged at the light pants she wore.

Of all his options, tasting her was the one thing he wanted the most. He pulled on the black stocking looking things, freeing her ass from them and he was met with panties as red as her shirt. His cock ached in a way it never had before. Stomach tightened, desiring nothing more than to free himself and stroke her until she cried out his name. He jerked the red thong down to her knees, as far as her pants had been shucked, and shuddered at the need to bury inside and

thrust until he came. To feel her tight wet heat sucking and jerking on him. He swallowed and closed his eyes to get a handle on himself.

He was hit with the strong scent of her sex and he waited no longer. He bent and lifted her to his mouth. She groaned, her back arched as she reached above her head and gripped the handlebars of the rack.

Her sweet and honeyed taste coated his tongue while her gasping pants of air filled his head and zipped down to his balls, gripping them tight in desperate need. He licked and sucked at the very center of her. Somehow she seemed to grow wetter and the urge to take her how he wanted grew stronger. But he wouldn't and surprisingly, he found himself okay with it. Not that he was thrilled, by any means, but he was okay doing this just for her and not giving up himself and the new Riley. He licked her and nibbled and finally gave her what she wanted as she cried out. Her hips twisted in his hands as her body was thrown into rapture from his attention. He drank from her until she melted and relaxed with a purr. Her eyes still glazed over, he tugged her thongs and pants back up and into place, putting a safe barrier between him and her.

She sat forward and wrapped her arms around his neck. He grabbed her by the hips and brought her flush against his aching cock. Her ankles hooked at his back. Arms wound his neck.

"I want to take you home and undress you. I want to feel your naked skin against mine."

She nodded, still trying to catch her breath, but not slowing down to take the time.

"Next."

Her hips rolled upward, stroking her pelvis along the length of him. He groaned and brought her against him again. Her head tilted back and she kept the pace. Her skin flushed in the cool air. He could see it coming over her again, building in her eyes. He ground against her, felt his own need rising. He pressed on. Just a little longer and he'd have her clawing at him again.

She kissed his neck, licked the lobe of his ear. "I want to taste you, Riley."

The image electrified through his mind. Of entering her mouth. Watching her lick him. Her tongue rasping over him. The tip of his cock delving to the back of her throat. His balls tightened and he froze, knowing it was too late.

Release shuddered through him quicker than he could catch his next thought. He was left holding her, grasping for something else, praying he had not just spilled in his jeans like a thirteen year old.

But he had.

Shellie stilled and he knew she'd discovered exactly what happened. Her gaze dropped between them. She breathed heavy and leaned forward and pressed an open mouthed kiss to his neck. "That's the hottest thing I've ever seen."

Chapter Five

Shellie smoothed the edges of her skirt down. Not so much because it was wrinkled or trying to fold up, but to keep her hands on her lap. Otherwise, she knew where they'd end up. In Riley's lap, pressing her palm against his zipper. She'd managed to peel herself off him that morning and he'd taken her back to the house. He stayed long enough to change his clothes before he was out the door without much more than a, 'we need to go to a party this evening'. She knew he was having a difficult time grasping what had taken place outside—she certainly was—but then when he returned, he seemed set on dodging her step and not talking about it. And she'd let him because she was grasping herself for some answers.

Being with him had not been quite like what she expected. She expected it to be good and not leave with any complaints. What came as a surprise was the way her skin seemed to electrify at his touch. How she was still tingly and craving more after all these hours.

Warmth threaded through her blood and she flicked the heater vents off. "Who are these people again?"

"Parker and Stephanie. He's my mechanic."

"Your mechanic invited you to his open house party?"

"Actually his girlfriend did."

"How do you know her?"

"I don't really." His knee bounced. "I mean, I know of her, but I don't really know her. She was married to Parker's best friend, but they divorced."

"And now she's with the best friend, Parker. We're they having an affair and that's why they got a divorce?" Talking about other people should be distracting her thoughts off his lap and the warming action taking place between her thighs. It wasn't.

Riley shrugged as if he wasn't having arousal issues. And who knows, maybe he wasn't. He was so laid back at the moment. Except, his hands looked awful tense holding the steering

wheel. “I don’t know. I think her ex-husband was having the affair, 'cause right after they split, he moved with Stephanie’s friend to New Mexico, I heard.”

“I thought you said you didn’t really know these people?”

“I don’t. Parker is just my mechanic, but it’s a small town. Everything gets around and everyone is friends with everyone.”

He pulled along the curb and parked amongst the other half dozen or so people there. She hopped out and met him at the front. He walked next to her. His hand was on her back, innocently resting there. But his fingers spread wider. The tips teased at the waist band of her gray skirt.

Memories of that morning filled her head. Not that they had ever left...but still. She had made Riley Hamilton lose control. He was rumored to have insane amounts of stamina, but he’d lost it with her.

A rush of school girl giggles raced through her, but she managed to keep from spilling them out her mouth. She’d finally managed to see the Riley she remembered that morning. He’d been lighter and seemed happier. He still was... to a degree.

The closer he moved to the house though, he seemed to be curling into himself, returning into a shadow of a man. His mouth was straightening into a hard line, his shoulders were rolling back into place.

He walked her up the short concrete drive and didn’t even pause at the glass screen door. He just reached down and opened it like he lived here.

She glanced up. “I thought you barely knew these people.”

“I don’t know them as well I know you, if that’s what you’re wondering.”

Heat raced through her that had nothing to do with embarrassment and everything to do with the wetness forming between her legs. “Of course not.”

“Stephanie said they’d be in the back, to just come on in.”

He held the door opened and she walked past. It was a nice home, held that just cleaned and fresh scent to it. The walls were white and bare of pictures or any other things. The tile floor in the hall opening was a pretty tan and her heels clicked over it, ticking off the time until she would be in his arms again. Or it seemed that way to her, at least, because being with him again was something she couldn’t wait to get after.

Laughter and voices echoed through the entryway and she followed them toward the back of the house, through a cute little country looking kitchen that had yellow walls and a dark wood table. Out the glass sliding doors were a dozen or so people laughing and having a good time.

Riley reached around her and slid the glass aside. “The man at the grill in the jeans and white shirt is Parker. The brown headed girl next to him with her fingers hooked in his belt-loops is Stephanie.”

“Pretty.”

Riley only shrugged. And it made her heart flutter, which was a really stupid and ridiculous thing to happen, but there it was anyway. For the next half-hour, she stood next to Riley as he made introductions. The more he talked tractor races, cows, and gardening, the more his shoulders relaxed, the more often his hand found the small of her back.

When she was scooping potato salad on his and then her plate, she got a startling wash of déjà vu. Dear God, this was high school all over again with Riley leading a conversation here and there and she smiling and laughing along. There was the difference in Riley being reserved and conversation centering around livestock and the weather instead of cars and football, but still basically the same.

Don’t get her wrong, she was having a good time. Riley included her in the conversation same as he used to, but she was over this and ready for more. She sat next to him at a table that had been set up in the yard. He handed her a glass of tea and she his plate.

“Having fun?”

She smiled. “Yeah. I am.”

At that moment, a lovely blonde sat next to her. Shellie faced the woman as she sat. “Hi, I’m Shellie Chambers. I’m a friend of Riley’s.”

“Oh hey!” The woman’s face brightened, her brilliant eyes held a smile and warmth. “Jessie McBride.” Another blonde sat on the other side of Jessie. “And this is my cousin, Tiffany. Are you here visiting?”

And at that moment, Riley’s hand dropped to Shellie’s thigh. His large palm covered the top of her leg, his long fingers rested between her thighs, and she completely lost her train of thought. He wasn’t doing anything suggestive or dirty under the table, but it was just that his hand was on her, warming her and zapping her words before they could even reach her tongue.

Shellie blinked and stared at Jessie. “I’m so sorry, but what did you say?”

Jessie's head tipped back at that and laughter spilled out. She sat forward again and leaned over to whisper. "Don't worry. I'd be distracted if he'd just put his hand on my leg, too. Oh, hell, if *any* man did, I think I'd lose every word I know."

Shellie felt her jaw go slack and warmth took her cheeks—this time because she was utterly and completely humiliated, but also amused because the woman next to her got it. "Thank you."

And conversation continued on, with only the occasionally hiccup when Riley would squeeze her leg in a most suggestive manner which would make her all but leap off her seat. And then he went and lazily stroked her thigh.

Jessie tipped her head in Riley's direction. "I think he's probably ready to go."

Shellie laughed herself and whispered back. "I know I am."

At that, the two cousins released full out laughter that had every head at the table turning to look at them. The pair didn't seem to care, and Shellie wasn't certain they even realized. Riley glanced down at her.

His brow was scrunch, but she only smiled. "You about ready?"

"Yep."

He nodded and stood and stepped behind her. Balancing their mostly empty plates in one hand, he pulled her chair out as she stood. She turned to say thank you, but her foot hung and she tipped forward.

Riley reached out, the plates in his hands forgotten and he smacked them against her chest in an effort to keep her from falling. Something a bit wet and mushy smashed against her chest. A flicker of something else cold splattered over her cheeks. A hush fell over the people there and all stared. Riley's eyes were huge in his head.

She forced through the slight embarrassment. "Anyone know how to remove a barbeque stain?"

Chuckles broke out around them and everyone resumed their conversation. Riley dropped the overturned plates on the table and reached for her elbows, helping to straighten her up. "I am so sorry."

She shook her head and gripped his arm. "No, thank you for keeping me from falling on my face."

His mouth opened—but a woman's voice interrupted him.

“Oh, you poor thing!”

Shellie looked around Riley and saw Stephanie stepping up. “No big. Just a stain.”

Stephanie smiled and glanced to Riley. “Take her inside to the bathroom. Just down the hall to your left from the front door. Some rags are in the drawer.”

Shellie shook her head. “We were just going anyway.”

Stephanie continued to smile, but lowered her voice. “You’ve got a chunk of potato salad in your cleavage and sauce on your forehead. I won’t have you leaving looking like that. God only knows what some of these neighbors would think. Go on and clean up and I’ll box you up some cake to take home.”

Riley grinned. “You heard the woman.”

He gestured Shellie ahead. Once inside she turned to him. “This really isn’t necessary. I can clean up at the house.”

He picked something out of her hair and showed her a slither of chicken skin. “I think it wouldn’t hurt to clean up just a little.”

She winced. “I think if Mom was here, this would have officially gotten me disowned.”

He shook his head. “Nah. She’d likely have me arrested on some crazy charges of attempted physical harm, but I think she’d be proud with the way you handled it. I know I am.”

Her gaze dropped. She had handled that spot well with humor and a flip of the hand. Her mother probably would have been proud, but Shellie knew she wouldn’t have taken the accident as well with her mother breathing down her neck. Oh, she’d like to think she would have, but instead of her off-handed comment, she would have run. Not so much in embarrassment over the incident, but from what her mother might have said instead.

He put his arm over her shoulders and tugged her down a short hall and into a small bathroom. It was simple with the only items out being a roll of toilet paper and a bottle of dish soap next to the sink. She pulled open the top drawer looking for a rag. Hairspray, a brush, and a strip of condoms slid to the front.

“Well.”

Riley looked over her shoulder. “What?”

And then he saw them. His eyes darkened and she watched as a swallow passed down his throat. Without a word, he put his hand to the front of the drawer and silently slid it closed.

Disappointment touched her. It wasn’t that she wanted to steal a strip of condoms. Or even take

one, for that matter. She didn't even know those people, but it was that he hadn't taken time to really consider it before saying no.

He opened another drawer and withdrew a rag. "Let's get this cleaned off."

She forced a smile and leaned against the counter as he wet the rag. Sure, she could take it from him and do it herself and probably faster, but why? Hell, she'd even left the potato salad in her boobs for him to deal with.

He'd changed during the barbeque. He was still held back and holding in his shadows, but he'd flirted with her. Kept his hand on her thigh. He seemed to be hovering right on the edge of either taking her or turning to a cold shoulder.

The rag now wet, he turned off the silver knobs and rang the excess water off. She put her hands behind her and thrust her chest forward. "Clean me up."

The corner of his lips turned up as he pulled salad from her cleavage and just as quickly tossed it in the trash. She frowned, but released the tension off her face as he turned back to her. With quick, cleaning strokes, he dipped the warm rag between her breasts. The corners stroked into her bra and sent chills over her body.

He adjusted positions, causing his wrist to rub over an achingly sensitive nipple. Breath rushed out of his lungs and he stilled for a long moment. His eyes dropped closed. Even if he refused to acknowledge it, the heat popping between them was impossible to miss. Being in his arms those all too brief moments flared through, wishing she'd had more. Wishing he'd remained at home the rest of the day so she could lay naked against him as he'd wanted to do. She edged a bit closer, brushing her thighs along his. A loud breath sucked in his chest. His eyes opened and met hers.

He only stared.

She touched his hands and guided the rag along her chest to clean up the mess. He didn't object, only allowed her to move him where she desired. She leaned in closer to him and raised his hands to her neck. His knuckles brushed her jaw and the rag plopped to the floor.

His lips were on hers in a rush of immediate need. That morning on the four-wheeler had been amazing, but had left her desiring and needing more. She wanted him like she'd never wanted anything in her life. There'd always been something about Riley that made her want to throw caution to the wind, but now she was really, really wanting to do that and never look back.

She stepped against him. Allowed her hips to align against his and she shifted so that she brushed his already hard length.

His lips tore from hers and ravished down her jaw and to her neck. His breath puffed out as though he couldn't get enough air and he struggled for more. Oh, God. Riley had let himself go. And it was good. His hands cupped her breasts and he growled against her neck. He reached down, grasped the hem of her sweater and ripped it over head.

Unlike this afternoon where he'd been very concentrated on her, his attention was driven solely on his own desires. It was in the way he grabbed her and touched. Even his staring was different. Earlier, he seemed to have looked and taken her in. As he stood back now, staring at her breasts beneath the thin silk of her white bra, he all but licked his lips.

Wetness grew between her legs and dampened her panties. He came at her again. Nimble fingers had her aching breasts free and bra lost on the floor with her shirt. She moaned aloud as his hands took their weight. Thumbs rasped over her tips and palms stroked the sore bottom curve from her underwire.

As he touched her breasts, sensation spiraled down. She didn't want to wait longer. She needed him here and now and not a moment later. If only he would give it to her. Reaching between them, she popped the button loose on his jeans. A heavy relief lifted from her shoulders when he bent and pulled her nipple in his mouth instead of stopping her. She arched against him, feeling his cock grind against her. She lowered the zipper and eased his jeans and boxers off his hips until he sprang free.

She wrapped her fingers around his hard flesh and stroked him tight. Moisture beaded from his slit and she rubbed her thumb across, savoring the hot liquid. Her mouth watered, desiring his taste, wanting him filling her. She pulled in a steadying breath, not wanting to push. By his reaction with the condoms in the drawer, the whole full-out sex she-bang was still off the table.

She took what options she had and pressed a kiss to his chest. Licked over each of his flat nipples. His abs were hard under her lips. Hands stilled on her back as she bent and pulled the head of him in her mouth, licked up his salty essence.

He growled and pulled her up against him. "No."

Before she could respond, his mouth was on hers. The taste of him on her tongue was soon lost on his. He pulled her skirt up. Cool air washed over her exposed ass. Hands reached

between her thighs and spread her legs apart, allowing more air to touch her. Shivers ran down her body. He palmed her, replacing the cold with heat. His fingers slipped inside and stroked. She wrapped her hands back around his length and kept pace on his cock with the speed he set. Release was rolling over her, so close, nearly there, but she was denied.

She didn't ask, didn't wait to see what he'd do next, but delved in that top drawer and felt around for the packets she'd already found. She didn't even have them out of the drawer when he took them from her, ripped the top one off and covered himself.

His eyes met hers, silently asking.

She kissed him in answer and slid her leg up his thigh, opening herself to him. He grabbed her by the hips and spun her around to face the mirror. His hands slid down her back, the weight of his palm bumped over each bone of her spine, bending her over.

She tried pressing back for more, but he stilled her with his hand on her hip.

"You sure you want this?" Even as he asked, he was lifting the back of her skirt, his fingers lazily eased up her thighs.

"Like nothing I've ever wanted before."

He folded the skirt over her lower back. His thumbs brushed under the curves of her ass. He dipped a finger under her thong and ran his hand down, pulling the material free and sending her so close to the edge, just not enough. Keeping her thong aside with one hand, he reached between her legs and inserted his fingers again. She squeezed him and tilted her hips, seeking more. All the while he watched her. Desire coated his eyes and glazed them over until they were hazy.

He stepped forward and held his cock in his hand. It slipped between her thighs and she arched as he took her. Pleasure jolted through her core. She squeezed, but he just wouldn't give her more. He pressed in inches, then pulled back. Pressed in a little further, pulled back. Deep inside she ached for him to fill her, to just grab her by the hips and take her.

But no. He kept that maddening pace of stretching her little by little. She grasped for more, squeezed him tight. Need for release curled and ached and demanded satisfaction, but he bent over her back and kissed her neck, refusing her.

Reaching around her waist, sliding over her ribs, his strong, rough hands cupped her breasts. Fingers pinched her nipples, lightly twisting the sensitive tips. She pushed against him,

turned her head and sought his kiss, only to be denied as his callused fingertips felt down her body. His hands moved to her hips, his mouth nuzzled over her spine.

“Riley, please.” She met his wicked gaze in the mirror. The corners of his lips turned up as his eyes darkened while he slid in, slow. Agonizingly slow. His hard length made a long, continuous stroke against what she wanted him to touch the most until his hips met her ass.

Fully seated, he held her there, his grip tight to prevent her from rocking and took his time kissing her neck, her shoulders.

“Riley!”

He glanced up and met her gaze in the mirror. A devilish smile formed on his lips. He held her stare and finally pulled out and thrust forward. And he took her over and over again. His cock thrust into her in wonderful, maddening pushes.

She clenched around him, feeling the brink coming. She curled her hands around the counter’s ledge and met his thrust. Sweat gathered on her brow.

And she was thrown over the edge. She bit her lip to keep from crying out and alerting the whole house party that Riley had just rocked her socks completely off.

Riley pressed on, continued giving her more through her orgasm until he too finally stiffened and slouched over her, his cheek rested on her shoulder. His breaths were full and heavy and she supported him even as her core was still tingling.

His arms wrapped her in a hug and he kissed her shoulder blade before straightening and pulling free from her body. She looked up in the mirror at her flushed cheeks and mussed hair. All she could do was smile. Riley moved alongside her and cleaned himself. She straightened as well and tugged her skirt down. Using the forgotten rag on the floor, she swiped sauce from her forehead and picked a few bits of chicken from her hair. Best to at least look like they’d been in the bathroom cleaning her as they were supposed to.

She turned for the trash and smacked into Riley. She glanced up, intending to smile, but what she saw on his face stopped her. His jaw was tight. His lips flat and eyes narrowed. She touched his arm and he flinched under her hand. Not much, but she hadn’t missed it.

“Riley?”

He shook his head and stepped around her, leaving the bathroom and leaving her alone. What the hell? She threw on her bra and shirt and hurried after him. She stepped in the living

room and several pairs of eyes met hers, but there was no Riley. She started toward the door, but an arm looped through hers, halting her.

Stephanie leaned in close. "We are going to be very good friends."

Being Shellie only met the girl an hour ago for a brief hello, she doubted that. But she smiled like so anyway, mostly so she could end this conversation and find Riley. "Think so?"

Stephanie smiled herself then. "I know so. Your shirt is on inside out and it wasn't a moment go. Also, Riley came down the hall just now with his shirt un-tucked. It wasn't when he got here. I guess there wasn't any trouble finding the bathroom?"

Chapter Eight

Riley waited by the front door and motioned for Shellie when she would have run past. She stopped and met his gaze. Her eyes were worried and heavy. He thought for a moment she might hug him, but instead she only stared up at him, waiting for answers. He hated that wounded look on her face. He knew it was his fault. He should have done something other than glare at her while she was still obviously glowing and thrilled, but it just hadn't been in him.

He'd left all this behind and in two days, Shellie had dragged him back into a man who slept without a commitment, fucked in a friend's bathroom during a party, and had a helluva time doing it. Even still, he wanted to drag her back to that bathroom and do it all over again until there wasn't a condom left. And that just fucking pissed him off more than anything.

"Riley?"

He answered her with a quick shake of his head, waved at Parker, and forced a smile before ushering her out the door. She should be pissed and giving him the cold shoulder and waiting to get to his house so she could get the hell out of there. Instead she looked ready to wrap him in one of those damn hugs again. He opened the passenger door for her and held her hand as she stepped in the truck. Once her feet were in, he pushed the heavy metal closed. The clang of the door closing felt like it shoved all he'd worked for these past few years into his face.

He walked to the driver's side and stepped in. She didn't say a word and he for damn sure wasn't. He put the truck in drive and headed around the corner. Shellie was now tapping her foot hard enough it bounced her knee and he knew the silence wouldn't last that much longer. There was no way she'd hold off until they got home so he could hop on his four-wheeler for a drive and hide.

She sighed and rested her elbow on her door. The silence was at an end. "You're going to have to talk to me eventually."

He was somewhat deflated because he knew she deserved so much better. "I don't do this shit anymore, Shellie."

“Have sex with someone you care about is shit to you? It sure as hell wasn’t to me.”

He winced. “No. I don’t have sex with temporary people anymore. You’re leaving in a few days. How long before I see you again this time?”

“Well, I don’t know, Riley, but don’t you dare accuse me of losing touch with you. You’re the one who went through a life change and didn’t bother to even pick up the phone and let me know about it. Nothing changed for me over the years. I was always in the same place, living the same life.”

“I don’t know, Shellie, but nothing changes the fact that you’re still leaving in a few days.”

She stomped her foot. “Says you!”

He bit down until he thought his teeth might shatter and he forced them apart again. “No. Says you. Last I heard you were staying through the weekend and going back home. You just wanted a little breather before going back to your mom. That makes you temporary.”

“Yeah, I said I was planning to leave on Sunday. Days ago before I ever got here and saw you again.” Her hand touched his arm and she squeezed. “You’re the only one that keeps saying temporary, Riley.”

He froze as her words sank in. It was true, he couldn’t deny that. He was the only one saying temporary, hell, ‘cause that’s all he knew. Temporary was the arrangement she made when she came to visit him.

A sigh escaped him and he leaned on his door. Trees flew past his window in sickening, streaking smears and Riley eased off the gas pedal. A grocery store was just ahead and he slowed, pulling into the parking lot and stopped in a deserted corner at the back. He was shaking. Jesus.

He raked his hands through his hair and tugged. “Where do we go from here?”

“Will you let us go from here?”

He glanced over. “Of course.”

“Will you though?” She unbuckled her belt. Before he knew what she was about, she’d eased over the console and straddled his lap. She cupped his face and turned him up to her. “You’ve been different through some of today. You’ve been the Riley I know. Fun and loving. Carefree.”

He glanced away. “That got me into trouble in the past.”

She leaned forward and wrapped her arms around him and hugged him in one of her damn tight hugs. He was starting to like those. “I don’t care how many times I have to do it, I am going to hug that thought out of you. You can still be responsible and still be yourself.”

He swallowed and searched for something to get this off him. He knew what happened in his past, she didn’t. Hell, she was still living in the past. “And you?”

“And me what?”

“When are you going to stop telling lies about yourself? When are you going to admit to your mom that her life’s ambitions are not yours? You’ve been living that lie for as long as I’ve known you and still are.”

She sat back on his lap. Her hands dropped to her thighs, head was down and she was once again silent for a moment. He wanted to say something, anything, but at the same time, he didn’t. He’d never been quite that forward and direct when it came to her mom. But it was damn time she heard it.

Shellie raised her head and looked at him. “Make a deal?”

He arched a brow.

“I’ll tell my mom to kiss off, that I don’t want a rich man, that I want a flower shop—”

“Flower shop?” His brow furrowed.

She flicked her wrist. “I’ll explain that later, but anyway, I’ll call mom right now and tell her that. If...you have sex with me in this truck right here, right now, and you have fun doing it. No pissy moods afterward. And then when we get home, you’re going to carry me upstairs. We’ll go to sleep and tomorrow you’ll go tend to your cows or whatever it is that you do. And then when you want me again, you’ll come get me. Even if it’s seven in the morning and then again at ten. And you’ll see that you can still be responsible and be Riley Hamilton, the boy with the quickest hands to have ever come out of Jones High School.”

He leaned his head back and thought over her words.

“You know, Riley, you don’t give yourself much credit.” Her arms were crossed under her chest now. Completely serious. “You were just as responsible in high school as you are now.”

He met her gaze and waited for more ‘cause he’d never heard a bigger lie in his life.

“Every time I went with you somewhere, I knew I’d be okay because you’d take care of me. I still believe that. Back then, you managed to have fun and be yourself, but also be in

control of every situation. I'm not that girl you met in college. You can do and say whatever you want, but you've got to realize you weren't the only one responsible for making that baby. Hell, it could have happened to a thirty-year old virgin."

He breathed in and let her words soak through. He would always blame himself for what happened. Nothing would change that, but she was right. She was not the girl from college. This was Shellie. Shellie, who was wanting more than temporary, even if they were off to a fast start. He leaned forward and kissed her, sealing the deal. Her nails combed through his hair and he could feel her smile in her whole body.

Shit.

He pushed her back. "Condoms. I still don't have condoms. We'll have to swing by a drug store and then seal this deal."

She was smiling. She reached in her waistband and pulled the remaining strip from the bathroom drawer.

His mouth dropped. "I cannot believe you stole their condoms. What if they needed those?"

Her head fell back and she laughed. "Let's just say I had an interesting conversation with Stephanie when I went looking for you. I like her. She's going to come with Parker later this week so we can talk while he looks at something or other of yours." She dangled the packages.

He shook his head and lifted his phone from a cup holder. "You promised something first."

She snatched the phone from his hands and dialed the numbers without hesitation. He could hear her mom's voice on the other end of the line and figured why not get this started? He cupped her hips and slipped his hands under her shirt, going for second base while she was on the phone.

She slanted her eyes at him, but he smiled and didn't stop. She spoke to her mom. Keeping her words quick, explaining that she was staying with him and she was going to open a nursery to sell flowers and trees. He didn't know what that was about and unless something had changed, Shellie couldn't grow a weed. But if that's what she wanted, he'd see that she could do it, one way or another.

“This is about what I want, Mom.” Shellie shook her head. Her lips parted more than once to interject, but he didn’t think her mom ever bothered with a breath. Shellie rolled her eyes, clicked the phone shut, and tossed it aside. “Where were we?”

He pulled her forward. “I was about to make love to you in this too small truck for the hell of it even though home is only fifteen minutes away.”

“Fifteen minutes?”

He shrugged and slipped his fingers under her skirt. “Seems too damn far to me.”

She leaned forward. Her lips met his. Her hands dropped between them and opened the fly of his jeans for the second time tonight. He lifted up, pressing her up, and slipped his pants down enough to free himself. Her skirt had worked up to her hips again. She sat forward and rubbed against him.

“This isn’t going to last if you don’t stop that.”

She shook her head and dropped the condoms in his lap. “I don’t want it to last. I want it now.”

He couldn’t say he disagreed with her. And hey...a second quick blow now and he’d be ready for her again when he got home. The image of Shellie spread out before him on his navy sheets sprang to mind. Of her legs parted and his face between her, tasting her again. Hell yeah.

He covered his cock, lifted her and dropped her down on him. She was so tight again. Gripping him. Sucking. She set a rhythm and he grabbed her hips and helped her keep the quick pace until his balls were drawing in tight and he exploded in release.

She rocked her hips one last time and screamed out like he knew she’d been dying to do in the bathroom. She breathed heavy, but she didn’t relax against him. She pressed her hands on his shoulders, trying to catch her breath. “Well?”

“I’m ready to get you home so I can see you naked on my sheets.”

He kissed her one last time, holding her tight to him before she settled back in her seat. She clipped on her belt and tucked a foot under her ass. “Let’s go, cowboy.”

He shook his head, a smile on his face, and left the parking lot. “I’m not a cowboy.”

“What are you then?”

“Just a farmer.”

She lifted his old, torn and ripped ball cap from the floorboard. There used to be a tractor ad on the front, but it was faded off. She dusted the bill and bent the corners down as he’d shown

her years ago and tugged it on her head. “Can I call you a redneck? Then when I call Mom later I can tell her I’m moving in with my long-term redneck lover?”

He chuckled, trying to recall the last time he’d felt this happy. This light. It was probably the last time he’d seen Shellie. He tapped on the steering wheel. Sometime over the summer after graduation. He’d taken her to the river, given her a first sip of beer that she had spit out within seconds, and returned to volleyball. A smile tugged deep until he recalled later that day.

When he returned her home. And she left. And he left for college. His stomach did that uncomfortable pinch it’d done those years ago, only it was magnified into a tugging, turning, twisting ulcer thing. He swallowed. “Is that really what you want to tell her?”

Shellie finished adjusting her hair under the cap, flipped the mirror up, and sat back. “I don’t want to talk to her at all, but I’m going to have to call her back and explain more.”

He reached across the console and grabbed Shellie’s hand. “No, I meant, is that what you want to tell her that we are. That we’re long term lovers.”

Her lips flattened. “I don’t want to push you faster than what you’re ready for, Riley. You said you’re ready to try, and I’m open for what you’re willing to give. I just—”

He lifted her hand and kissed it. “Will you be my girlfriend, Shellie?”

She stared at him. He waited for laughter, but it didn’t come. A smile curved up the corner of her lips. “Yes.”

“Yes?” He parked in front of his house and shut off the truck.

“Yes. Most definitely yes.” She nodded and looked toward his home, but frowned.

“It’s probably not what you always imagined. Hell, this little farm house wasn’t what I imagined either.”

She squinted and leaned over the dash. “Cows. Back in your yard.”

He looked up to see the same two calves there who always managed to escape. “Little devils.”

“Riley.” Shellie turned in the seat, a hand wrapped around on her hip. “I want to stay here. I like this house. I like what you’re doing here. I like everything about this place, so don’t start making excuses, to ‘give me an out’ if you think that’s what you’re doing. But we are going to have to do something about these cows in the yard because the first time I step in a pile of shit, you’re going to be missing one from the herd.”

He put a hand up. “We’ll work something out. Tomorrow.”

She nodded. "Tomorrow."

He tugged open his door. "Let me get these two put up."

"I think I'll go take a shower to get the rest of this food off. Meet you in bed in ten minutes?"

He stopped and tapped on the door. A shower. With Shellie. "How about in the shower in five?"

She winked. "Only if you'll scrub my back."

"Honey, I'm planning to scrub a hell of a lot more than that."

THE END

From the Author—

Thanks so much for reading *On The Fence*. I hope you enjoyed the story and the small town charm of Apple Trail, Arkansas. This is the second novella in the *Uninhibited In Apple Trail, Arkansas* series.

If you enjoyed *On the Fence*, check out the first in the series, *Through The Wall*. In that story you'll discover the truth behind Parker and Stephanie's relationship instead of those vague rumors Riley can barely remember. Some people. I tell ya, they just can't remember the good details!

Next up in Apple Trail is *In The Hay*. Drew and Nicolette are only visiting Apple Trail...but they might stick some roots in the ground after the small town charm pulls them in and holds them tight for one long sexy week.

In The Hay – Excerpt

This wasn't the first time Drew had been caught staring after her. He doubted it would be the last. It couldn't be helped. Her god-awful dancing had first drawn his eye, but it was the realization she wasn't drunk, or even drinking, that held his gaze. Moves like those should really only come after shots.

Eight or nine of them.

He wasn't certain what she was attempting. Looked like a combination of the robot, chicken dance, and hokey-pokey. Bad enough, but made so much worse by the others rhythmically dancing on the floor beside her.

Drew could give her props. What she lacked in talent, she was more than making up for with enthusiasm and seemed to be having the best time. It was a refreshing since he was having his worst.

A cop leaned on the bar next to him and gestured at the girl with his fingertips. "She with you?"

Drew glanced at the red headed beauty. "Ah, no."

The officer shrugged. “You’re both new around here. I didn’t know if you were together.”

“Nope. Riley Hamilton is my uncle. I’m in town helping him put up his new fence.”

“Good man.” The cop held out his hand and they shook. “Mike Gable.”

“Drew Hamilton.”

“All right.” Mike nodded, his brows pulled into a V as he searched the small bar. “Let me see if I can find who she belongs with. Want to make sure she doesn’t drive out of here drunk.”

“She’s not drinking.” Drew searched the crowd, his chest tightened when he couldn’t find her short, but very nice legs or her just barely long enough yellow skirt. He looked higher and caught a bit of red hair swinging around as she looked to be head-banging to the classic country tune.

Mike winced. “She looks pretty wasted to me.”

“Haven’t seen a drink in her hand all night, but I’ll keep an eye on her for you.” Because he was going to be watching her anyway, and continue looking to see if she was with anyone here.

Only a few had attempted to dance with her. One guy thought to get behind her and hump her, but in both cases, she laughed, scouted away and carried on with flinging her body about. She’d only stopped her attempts long enough to sip from a bottle of water before returning to the middle of the dance floor.

The cop flicked his fingers up. “Don’t want to trouble you, but was just checking.”

Drew smiled at Mike. “Really no trouble at all.”

The door to the packed out bar opened and two tall blondes walked in. They were pretty, but they didn’t draw his eye near like the redhead. She was just...bless her heart, she just didn’t have a dancing bone in her body no matter how hard she tried or attempted to mirror the girls next to her.

Mike straightened and cursed under his breath. “Thanks. I’ve got my hands full now.”

“No, problem.”

This was not only Drew’s worst night ever, but the start of a worst couple weeks and he didn’t want to lose sight of the little bit of entertainment he had for the evening. Or maybe had. Either way, come morning, it was time to straighten up his act, and help Uncle Riley install a

new fence for his cows. Drew's dad had the mistaken belief that once he proved he knew hard work, then he was ready to take over the company.

Drew wasn't sure how in the hell being able to drive hundreds of fence posts in the ground and string barbwire meant he could manage their successful construction company. He'd do it though, to prove he was ready. Just one more step up his dad's ladder.

Drew turned back to the bulk of the crowd for the dancer. Their gazes caught again. This time she stilled and stared back. He glanced down her body. Her heaving chest. Flat stomach. Shaped legs and little slipper looking shoes.

She took a step. He lifted his gaze back up her body, past her fisted hands, straightened shoulders and raised head as she crossed the small bar. Her stare never wavered from his face. As she drew closer, he could see the sweat that had formed on her brow and soaked into her barely covering white tube shirt thing. Her cheeks were flushed. Breath rushed out of her. She stopped before him, dark red hair clung to the sweat on her neck.

She stared up at him. Hmm. Not just simple brown eyes, so much more than that. Golden and bright and flecked with bits of green. "You've been watching me."

He shrugged a shoulder. "I have."

She pressed her lips together and glanced away for only a second before looking back at him again. "What's your name?"

"Drew. Yours?"

"Nicolette."

She didn't look like a Nicolette. She looked like honey fresh from a hive. "Having fun dancing?"

Her lips split to a wide grin. "I've never danced the night away before."

"Ah. That makes sense." Not really, but she liked the answer, so that was good enough.

She glanced around and bit her lower lip, kicked at the old concrete floor with her toe, and twiddled with her fingers. He started to ask if she wanted to get out there, but he wasn't given the chance.

She grabbed the front of his shirt, tugged him forward, and planted her lips to his. No sooner did their lips touch and the tangy sweetness of what he thought was peach bubble-gum fill his mouth, she pulled away, red-face.

“I’ve never done that before.” Air gushed from her. “So sorry.” She spun on her heel and started away. Her heat and fire was slipping through his fingers.

“Not so fast.” He curled his arm around her waist and spun her around and brought her against him. “For your first time, it ought to be done right.”

Keri Ford was raised in South Arkansas on a farm surrounded by family, horses, cows, donkeys, ostriches, emus, chickens, ducks, Canadian Geese, and enough dogs one would think they were a pound...and then she bought a *Cosmopolitan* when she was twenty-two. She doesn’t recall the fantastic sex tip that drew her to the magazine, but she vividly remembers reading an excerpt of Christina’s Skye’s *Code Name: Princess*. One elevator scene and quick thought of, *I didn’t know people wrote stuff like this...* and her life would never be the same.

Visit Keri at her website for the latest information about her, her books, extras (a free read or two!), videos and more! www.KeriFord.com

Thank you!

For purchasing this book from
Turquoise Morning Press.

We invite you to visit our Web site to learn more about our
quality Trade Paperback and eBook selections.

www.turquoisemorningpress.com

You can also find our books at many digital and print retailers, including:

Amazon
Barnes and Noble
All Romance eBooks
OmniLit
Bookstrand
Diesel eBooks
Kobo
Sony Reader Store
Apple iBooks Store
Smashwords
Coffee Time Romance eBookstore