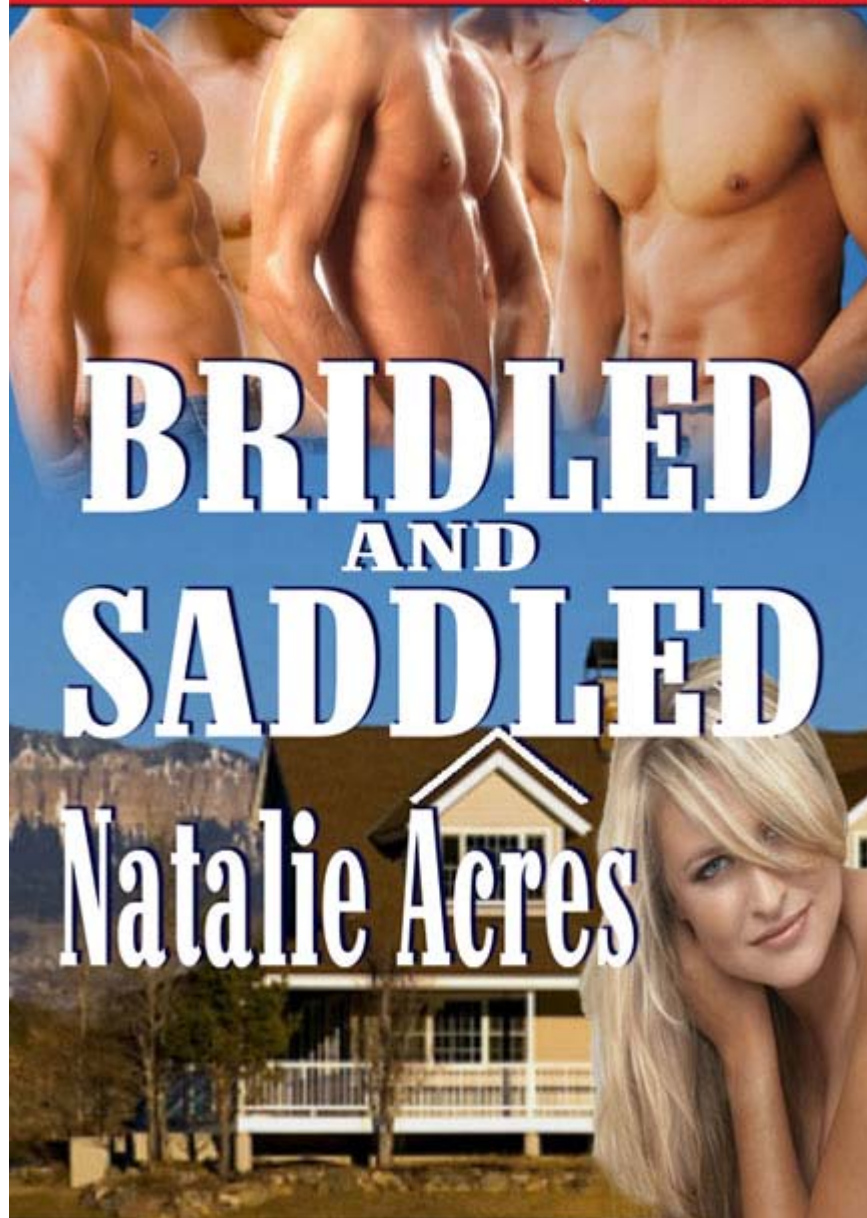


Siren Publishing

LoveXtreme



Sequel to *Bridled and Branded*

Bridled and Saddled

Lynlee Lewis McCain is a woman in love, only she's a little confused about who she's permitted to love. She married a man she adored, embraced a lifestyle he introduced, and ultimately understood what it meant to become a wanted woman—in more ways than one.

Hoping to keep Lynlee safe from a madman, Blaine McCain realizes he can't move Lynlee completely out of harm's way. After Lynlee is abducted by a serial killer, she becomes targeted by a lunatic, a madman reasonably distraught because Lynlee is the one who got away, the only victim who can identify him.

After a short stay in the hospital, Lynlee returns to the mountains of North Carolina where the McCain brothers vow to keep her safe. Lynlee soon discovers there are several men willing to die for her, but there's also more than one lunatic interested in seeing her dead.

Genre: Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Western/Cowboys

Length: 35,522 words

BRIDLED AND SADDLED

Sequel to Bridled and Branded

Natalie Acres

LOVEXTREME



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DEDICATION

For Blaine

BRIDLED AND SADDLED

Sequel to Bridled and Branded

NATALIE ACRES

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Chapter One

“Hot damn, this calls for one hell of a celebration!” Carlisle McCain exclaimed as he popped the cork on a Cristal champagne bottle.

Rhett pointed toward the bay window. “You’d better wait on the party. Looks like the posse arrived just in time.”

Carlisle grinned. “That’s what I like to see. All the McCain brothers coming together to help us christen this place properly.”

“Minus one,” Rhett said, thinking he sure missed the good old days when Blaine McCain was around for gatherings like this. He also missed Blaine’s beautiful sidekick, but if Carlisle could survive life without Lynlee, Rhett was ready to make a stab at getting on with his, too.

Carlisle’s broad smile dimmed. “I’ll give ya a second to reminisce. With that crew there, I’d better get the beer on ice.”

Carlisle disappeared behind two swinging doors, and Rhett was left to sort through recent memories, events that ultimately drove Casey McCain—Carlisle’s father—to an expensive purchase. They’d been bought off in Casey McCain style. After Casey realized Rhett and Carlisle were messing around with Lynlee, they’d been told, not asked, to leave.

Rhett couldn't feel too sorry for himself. Casey had been more than generous. He purchased a nice piece of ground right outside of Asheville, North Carolina, not too far from Casey's place in Anderson, South Carolina. Then, he paid for the best bred horses and cattle his money could buy. He even transferred some of the Anderson house staff and farm employees. After he signed over the deed to his two sons, Carlisle and Royce, Casey threw Rhett's name in the mix, too, and sent them on their merry way.

"Howdy! Howdy!" Royce McCain shouted, entering the massive family room with bags of groceries dangling from his fingertips. "Fellow told me some rancher down in Anderson bought this nice horse farm right outside of Asheville. Thought I'd stop by and make myself at home."

Carlisle reappeared and grabbed three plastic sacks, but only those with bags of chips topping them. "Did you pick up more beer? I've just got a case. Dallas can drink that in an hour."

"Nice to see you, too, little brother," Royce said, rubbing the top of Carlisle's head with a closed fist. "I got more than even Dallas can drink out in the truck."

"That's what I like to hear—a McCain who's always thinking ahead," Rhett said.

"Well look at you, Rhett. You've put on some weight since I last saw you."

Rhett patted his gut. "Been drinking all I can."

"It shows, friend," Royce told him, grinning.

"He's had a lot on his mind and plenty to sip about," Carlisle teased. "He lost the love of his life and didn't realize it until she said 'I do' to our baby brother."

"Shut up, Carlisle. We don't want to get started on that topic. Do we?"

"That's the word back in Anderson," Royce said, slapping Rhett's back while staring at Carlisle's. "There's a lot of gossip going 'round back home."

"I know what the rumors are, but those tales don't carry a bit of truth. Trust me,"

"*Trust me*, he says," Royce teased. "Listen, Rhett, you tell a woman to trust you right before you take her to bed and fuck her all night long, promising her your lovin' is gonna change her life. You tell me and Carlisle the straight of it. Just lay it out on the table. You look right troubled. Say what's on your mind."

Carlisle set the bags down. "Domestic chores can wait. I gotta hear this."

Rhett stared at Carlisle and Royce. "You really wanna discuss this right now?"

"Absolutely," Royce replied. "I meant to talk to you at the wedding, but I couldn't drag you off to myself for longer than a few seconds. You were hell-bent on following the bride and groom around until they pushed off on their honeymoon."

"My services were required," Rhett informed him.

"I'll bet," Royce said.

Rhett stared out the window again, studying Dallas, Austin, and Houston. He wished the triplets would quit admiring that damn herd in the pen and come on inside. Maybe they'd save him from the bull backing him in the corner.

When they started for the barn instead of the house, Rhett realized he didn't stand a chance. Royce was persistent as hell, like most of the McCain men, and apparently he set his sights on ribbing him. Rhett would have to set him straight.

"I'm happy for Blaine, man. End of story."

Carlisle arched a brow and crossed his arms.

"Don't give me that look, Carlisle."

"Think of it this way," Royce began. "Blaine's happy ending bought you a new beginning."

"Man's got a point," Carlisle said, twirling around with his arms wide. "All this wouldn't have been possible if Mom and Dad didn't think it was necessary to get rid of us."

“What? You mean you were in Lynlee’s bed, too?” Royce faced Carlisle. “And here I thought Dad’s generosity was because we were the two favored sons.”

“Shit,” Carlisle drawled. “If I’d hopped in bed with that, you can bet your sweet ass, I’d still be there. My name isn’t Rhett Mitchell.”

Rhett shook his head in disbelief. Carlisle continued to deny what he felt for Lynlee. Rhett had to give Carlisle credit, though. He sounded believable enough. If Rhett hadn’t watched Carlisle fuck Lynlee with his own eyes, he might just buy his six-pack of nonsense.

Royce pointed at the big family portrait hanging from the far wall leading to the foyer. The McCain men formed a semicircle around Lynlee and their mother, Victoria. With Lynlee’s snow-white hair glistening in the sun, she looked like an angel. “By damn, I’ll say this. Our brother is one lucky man, huh, Carlisle?” A beat later, Royce added, “Course, ole Rhett here knows all about the man’s good fortune.”

“All right, boys. I’ve heard all the Rhett and Lynlee jabs I can stand. Let’s get this party started before I pop open a beer and shed a few tears.”

Royce snorted at that. “The day you cry over a woman, is the day I see you married with a couple of kids.”

“No worries there,” Rhett grumbled. “I had everything snipped and tucked just to make sure.”

“I hear ya, buddy. We ain’t the marrying type, are we? Poor Lynlee is gonna find that out the hard way with Blaine, huh?”

Rhett took a deep breath. “Time’ll tell.”

“I’m gonna give Blaine two years, max. Unless she’s got the golden pussy, my brother will get that seven-year itch five years shy of claiming it for real.”

“She does,” Rhett said, regrettably.

“Blaine’s not going anywhere,” Carlisle promised.

Royce narrowed his gaze on Carlisle. He stalked him then and Rhett smirked. Carlisle was pretty sharp. He’d somehow avoided

answering questions his brothers had asked in the past. Still, Rhett had wondered when the day would come when somebody would get suspicious, when someone other than Casey McCain would probe for the information Carlisle carefully guarded.

“So, little brother,” Royce drawled. “How many times?”

“What are you talkin’ about?” Carlisle asked, hurrying toward the kitchen.

“How often did Blaine let you tap that?” Royce called out.

Yep, sure enough, it was only a matter of time before an outright interrogation began. The moment had finally arrived.

Chapter Two

“Shit, Carlisle!” Royce bellowed. “I’m your brother for God’s sake. The McCain men don’t keep secrets.”

Like hell. If Carlisle had learned anything from his parents and their swinging lifestyle, he’d gained an education in keeping confidences, particularly when certain truths had the potential to hurt the innocent parties involved.

Dallas, Austin, and Houston entered the kitchen. Carlisle barely acknowledged them with a tilt of his head. Two days had passed since he’d last seen his brothers, and they’d enjoyed plenty of bonding time while they were home for the wedding.

“We could hear you two bickering all the way outside,” Dallas said, opening the fridge and pulling out a beer. “What’s up?”

“Rhett isn’t the only one who slept with Lynlee,” Royce announced.

Carlisle caught Rhett’s wide gaze and silently hoped he wouldn’t provide confirmation. “I can’t help him. Royce thinks he knows it all. I’m not confirming or denying anything he says because it serves him right to sit and wonder.”

Dallas chuckled. “You’re pretty bright for an unemployed lawyer, aren’t ’cha?”

Austin straddled a stool. “Answer something, Royce. Why on God’s earth do you think it’s any of your business who our sister-in-law spread her legs for prior to marrying our brother?”

Royce’s eyes twinkled. “Ah, now, come on, Austin. Don’t tell me you’re not curious, too.”

“Curiosity is one thing. Asking questions that are none of my business is another beast altogether.” He shot Carlisle a sideways glance and then gave Rhett a quick look, too. “I’ll tell you one thing, if I’d been sharing the same roof with them, I would have tried. I might have begged.”

Houston laughed. “That’s what’s eatin’ at ya, isn’t it, Carlisle?”

“What’s that?”

“You tried, and you weren’t successful. Man, that must have been a real stinger, too. Big successful attorney like you trying to put the moves on Lynlee just to discover she only had eyes for Blaine.”

“Let’s not forget Rhett here,” Royce teased. “He’s not denying he was in her bed. Hell, he couldn’t if he wanted to. He gets all doe-eyed when he sees her, and then there’s that incident.”

“Which one?” Dallas asked, opening a bag of chips and stuffing a handful of spicy tortilla rounds in his mouth.

“Oh, you mean there were several?” Royce sang, lighting up like a jukebox.

Carlisle pushed by the others, quietly placing the canned goods and snacks in the pantry. Which event was the question, sure enough. Carlisle and Rhett had enjoyed Lynlee plenty while Blaine was away—with Blaine’s permission and his blessings—and there were too many close calls to recall. In fact, one more time with Lynlee and Carlisle was certain he might have always looked at Lynlee Lewis McCain as the one gal who got away with his heart.

Instead, she ran off with Blaine’s.

With his back to his brothers, Carlisle closed his eyes, listening to the continual banter. Thoughts of Lynlee filled his mind, and he fought his inner urges to sneak outside and text her.

Who was he fooling? Lynlee stole his heart, wounded his soul, and dampened his spirits. He’d been trying to hide behind laughter and a smile prior to Royce’s arrival. If he could keep a good celebration going, party until dawn, maybe then he’d forget the forbidden love he’d been dying to share completely with Lynlee.

Lynlee was his brother's wife. That's the way it should've been. "Or at least that's the way it is."

"What'd you say over there, Carlisle?" Royce asked.

Carlisle took a deep breath and faced them. He pressed his palms to the counter and leaned over the long bar, eyeing the men on the other side. Rhett quickly shook his head in warning, something Carlisle was certain Austin saw given the fact he was staring right at Rhett.

"Don't you have anything better to do outside of lusting after our youngest brother's bride?" Carlisle asked in an edgy voice.

"At the moment? No," Royce replied.

"I've got an idea," Carlisle said. "What do you say we all get cleaned up and go out on the town? My treat."

Rhett waggled his brows. "Depends on what kind of treats you're paying for."

"The best damn attorney in South Carolina didn't walk away from Anderson without heavy pockets," Dallas pointed out. "He's talking girls and drinks."

"I'm not interested in hookers," Carlisle quickly told him.

"Me, either," Rhett said.

"Well there you have it, men," Royce said grimly. "It appears that another McCain has bitten the dust. Not only did Carlisle fuck the lovely Miss Lynlee, but he apparently fell in love while she was doing him dirty and driving him wild."

Chapter Three

Rhett entered Carlisle's bedroom about an hour later. "You got a minute to answer a question you don't want anyone else to ask?"

"Make it fast," Carlisle said, lacing his boots. "I'm hungry, and after the badgering downstairs, I'm pretty thirsty, too. I may tie one on and forget everything worth remembering."

"Is it true?"

Carlisle swallowed the dry lump lodged in his throat. Straightening his shoulders, he stood. "I thought we agreed before we moved here. We're not talking about Lynlee now. If we discuss her at all, we decided conversations would be limited."

"To Sundays," Rhett blurted out.

"Huh?"

"We agreed we'd only talk about her on Sundays."

"I don't remember anything about Sundays."

"I do," Rhett said. "Blaine left every weekend while he was working with those guys from Wheeler. By Sunday evening, he was talking feedlots, and we were speaking Lynlee-language."

Carlisle should've been shot right there for remembering the delicious ways they passed the time away with Lynlee. Fuck! He was as hard as cannon just by harvesting those memories.

"Got instant recall, do ya?" Rhett asked, taking a seat on the end of a Walnut dresser.

If Rhett looked down and pointed out the obvious, Carlisle planned to deck him.

"You love her, don't you?"

Carlisle grabbed his keys and stuffed them in his pocket. He picked up his wallet, tucked the leather billfold in his hip, and walked toward the door. "What do you want me to say, Rhett?"

"Maybe you could tell me I'm not the only one with a thing for my best friend's girl."

"I can't help you," Carlisle said, running a comb through his short, dark hair. He leaned closer to the mirror. He had gray circles encasing his eyes, making his pupils appear blacker, truly somber. Carlisle was a haunted man. His appearance highlighted his troubles.

"You can tell me, Carlisle. Hell, talk to me. Maybe we'll both feel better here if we discuss what happened."

Carlisle's fury got the best of him. He slapped his palm against the flat surface of the dresser. "You want to talk? Because I swear it's not talking that I think you want. Oh, no! You want to remember! You need someone else to walk you down memory lane because then you might have one ounce of hope that sometime in the future, you and I can go to Blaine together and ask him to consider sharing a woman we both love!" He ran splayed fingers through his hair. "Fuck my life!"

"Carlisle, I know what you're going through, man."

"You have no idea. You wouldn't stop until I told you what was on my mind. Now there you have it. Do you feel better?"

Rhett stared at him blankly.

"Of course you do. You can handle your demons now, because while you're in love with your best friend's wife, I love the woman who married my brother!"

"And those feelings she stirred inside of you are driving you crazy," Rhett said softly.

"Yeah, I guess so," he ground out, remarkably able to admit more than he was initially prepared for, but feeling a little better afterward.

Rhett frowned. "Do you hate yourself?"

“No,” Carlisle deadpanned, certain he could never despise himself for spending such incredible moments with a beautiful woman his brother once unselfishly shared.

“Well that’s good to know. ’Cause ya see, I understand a little something about being uncomfortable in my own skin now. I guess that’s what’s eatin’ at me. I’m carrying around a lot of guilt.”

“I hope not, buddy,” Carlisle said. “Way I see it, we didn’t do anything wrong. We didn’t sneak behind Blaine’s back. If you’re beating yourself up now, then you’re doing something my brother doesn’t know about. If I’m right and Blaine finds out, it’s gonna get real ugly, real fast.”

* * * *

“What time is Lantry due in?” Carlisle asked as soon as he and Rhett joined the others in the foyer. “I thought he met Dad in Hendersonville to look at some Holsteins. He should’ve been here by now.”

Dallas slowly turned and glared at them. Austin gripped the banister, clutching it with death’s grip while Houston paced, plowing his fingers through a head full of curls.

“Something wrong?” Carlisle asked, reading the triplets’ expressions well enough to realize they were pissed. Royce looked pleased with himself, which should’ve been warning enough. He loved stirring angst.

“Blaine called,” Dallas finally replied.

Carlisle stopped three steps shy of reaching the front door. “Did he now?”

“You betcha,” Austin said, focusing on Rhett.

Rhett walked past the triplets without glancing over his shoulder. “So why in heaven’s name is he calling you when he should be taking care of one spunky little woman?”

“I reckon that’s what he’s doin’,” Dallas drawled, the loyal brother ever-present, and his tone suggestive of the fact.

Carlisle studied Rhett, noting he looked as guilty as homespun sin.

Rhett tucked his hands in his front pockets. “Everything going all right on the honeymoon?”

Dallas grunted. “It would be if Lynlee could stay off her damn phone. All she’s done since they left Anderson is text back and forth. Blaine says she’s received over three hundred.”

“Really?” Rhett asked, shooting Carlisle a cold stare.

Shit, Carlisle was busted. But he’d stake a few hundred messages on one fact—he wasn’t the only one.

“Know anything about that, Rhett?” Dallas asked, picking on the guilty party without McCain blood in his veins.

Rhett looked down at the floor. He shook his head a time or two and then said, “He can’t make her happy, boys. Not by himself. That’s God’s truth. Listen to me. Hear what I’m telling ya. He won’t keep that sparkle in her eyes. There’s no way he can please her for the rest of her life. You’ll see.”

“And how would you know?” Houston asked, contempt lingering in the question.

“I just do,” Rhett replied, tilting his head toward Carlisle. “Damn it to hell, he knows too. Ask him. That marriage was a mistake.”

To think Carlisle had been worried about breaking confidences, defying trust.

Dallas swung his gaze toward Carlisle. “So what the locals had to say about the four of you held some truth?”

“I need a drink,” Carlisle said, strolling toward the large family room and refusing his brother a straightforward reply.

“This ain’t right, Carlisle,” Dallas said in that deep, baritone voice. “You listen to me, boy!”

Carlisle stomped toward the tea service cart where he’d left the expensive bottle of champagne. Hell, he might as well get drunk.

They were in for a long night ahead.

Chapter Four

Lynlee paced the oceanfront penthouse balcony. Nibbling on her thumbnail, she watched as Blaine clicked through one text message after another.

A couple of times, he glanced up, but he was hard to read. She couldn't imagine what he must be feeling—anger. Or what he must've been thinking—betrayal. Or what he might do now that he knew the truth—divorce.

She gasped at the sudden intrusive thoughts. He immediately looked up and shot her a tight smile. Undoubtedly, the effort was forced.

"Blaine, let me explain."

"There's no need," he said calmly. "Besides, Rhett and Carlisle have taken care of that for us, haven't they?"

The restraint was in his voice. And that cool demeanor of his was disturbing enough to rattle her.

"Blaine, I'm sorry!"

"Sorry?" he asked, tossing her phone aside. "Do you know how this makes me look?"

"Blaine—"

"Do you!" he bellowed.

Lynlee slowly nodded and returned inside. There was no need in airing out their dirty laundry on the affluent Hilton Head Island coastline.

She strolled across the ceramic tile flooring, crossed the short stretch of carpeting, and entered the master bedroom. She sat on the bed and buried her face in her hands. What on earth had she done?

Oh, God, why had she contacted Rhett and Carlisle? She'd known it would end badly if Blaine suspected she wanted to talk to them, longed to see them.

A few minutes later, she felt him watching her. She slowly lifted her head. Their eyes met. The mark of confusion stamped Blaine's handsome face, and she lost herself in those wild green eyes, feeling entrapped by them, and at the same time, consoled.

"I did this to us, Lynlee," he said softly. "I knew what kind of possible outcomes we faced if I allowed them in your bed, but I did it anyway. I couldn't help myself."

Lynlee shook her head. "You didn't marry me with the intentions of sharing me."

"No, but I shared you with the intentions of marrying you."

"Blaine, I was wrong," she said, sniffing.

"Yes, you were, and I was too. Ah, hell, Lynlee, I'd love to blame you, but I have to accept partial responsibility here. I'm the one who encouraged you to play well with others."

She dabbed the corners of her eyes and laughed. "Is that how you explain all this?"

"I don't know, baby. If you're looking at me and hoping I can make sense of all this, I'm afraid you may be disappointed. For the first time in my life, I'm at a loss for words."

"Oh, Blaine," she whispered, standing before going to him.

He drew her against his chest and hugged her, burying his face in her long hair. "Just hold me, Lynlee. Hold me and tell me that regardless of who or what you want, you'll never let me go. I swear I don't know what I'd do if I lost you."

"You won't lose me, Blaine. I'm right here. I'll always be right here in your arms."

* * * *

“You sent her over two hundred messages?” Carlisle accused, unable to wait for a more appropriate hour to approach the Blaine and Lynlee subject. “Are you out of your mind? She’s on her honeymoon for crying out loud!”

“And I wonder where the other hundred or so messages came from,” Rhett said tightly.

Royce was all over that one. “Any idea, Carlisle?”

“None,” he fired back.

“I’d say you have some,” Dallas said, still as a bull with his horn caught between a few wooden planks.

“Dallas, this really doesn’t concern you,” Carlisle snapped. “Or any of you for that matter.”

Dallas was enraged. He threw a punch at thin air. “The hell it doesn’t. Daddy Cattlebucks made it possible for you to give up your three-piece suits and stuffy courtrooms for faded jeans and a lot of prime land. Now, it’s easy to understand why he was in such a rush to set you and Rhett up right.”

“Royce is a partner here, also,” Rhett reminded him.

Dallas shook his head. “Well howdy ho, big brother. Are you bangin’ Lynlee, too? Shit, Dad’s net worth must’ve gone up a few million if he had the money to buy three men out of Lynlee’s bed.”

“I could only be so lucky,” Royce grumbled.

Carlisle clenched his fists. What he’d give to knock out Dallas’s lights. Unfortunately, Houston and Dallas were the two brothers he hated going up against. They used to give him weekly ass-whoopings as a kid, and Houston always sided with Dallas, regardless of whether he was right or wrong.

In this case, Carlisle understood Dallas’s concerns, but the way he voiced them was another story. Add in the fact he thought Royce was screwing Lynlee, too, and he wanted to wallop him.

“Dallas, if I’d been in Lynlee’s bed, you would’ve known it. I would’ve sent ya a snapshot,” Royce said. “Then you would’ve had a

nice-lookin' broad's picture in hand when you took your own to what you haven't used in well over a year."

Dallas sneered. "I've been overworked a time or two. Don't you worry about me, Royce. You'd better be concerned about the brother who can't seem to keep his prick in the right warm pouch. You know what I'm talking about—the kind of pocket that isn't already engraved with another McCain's name!"

"Damn you!" Carlisle shouted, cursing Dallas. "I've heard enough."

Before he connected his fist with Dallas's jaw, Austin stepped between them. "Oh, no, you don't, Carlisle. You're gonna have a seat over there on the sofa, and you're gonna tell us what's going on with you and Lynlee. Otherwise, when you throw a punch at Dallas, you'd better be ready for the ass beatin' you deserve."

Carlisle shook himself free of Austin's grip and stormed the tea cart, grabbed the champagne bottle, removed the cork, and chugged a good dose before he said, "This topic isn't open for discussion."

All eyes immediately shifted toward Rhett.

"I don't have anything to say either."

"You don't?" Dallas asked, arching a brow. "Well ain't that a blasted shame? Because we're all gonna sit right here and have a nice chat, or I'm gonna dial Daddy Cattlebucks and explain why his latest investment is getting ready to go belly-up. I suggest one of you start running that jaw. I wanna know what the two of you want with Blaine's wife. And I wanna know right now."

Chapter Five

“What do ya say you come over here and love on me for a little while? Maybe with a little persuasion, I can forget all about this secret of yours.” Blaine sat on the king-sized mattress, watching Lynlee with those tortured eyes.

“Promise?” she asked, pushing the straps of her swimsuit off her shoulders and allowing her breasts complete freedom.

“You know it, baby,” he growled. His eyes were heavier then, hooded and moist.

Unable to look away from the man she’d loved since she was a teenage girl, Lynlee peeled the sheer black suit down her body, stepping away from the material when the garment hit the floor. “See anything you like?”

A wicked smile stamped his lips. “You’re in trouble, doll.”

Dropping to her knees, she spread his muscular legs. Imprisoned by his gaze, she unhooked his belt and let her fingers roam. “I hope so. I like living life on the edge.”

“I’ll say,” Blaine said, shifting his upright position. Once he was perched on his elbows, his mischievous expression turned all rogue. Nothing but raw sex lingered in the air. “Don’t get in any hurry now. Take your time. Do what you can to set a man right.”

This was Blaine McCain. This was the man Lynlee had always loved—playful, naughty, and forever receptive to her touch. She became greedy in her pursuit, unbuttoning his jeans before releasing his zipper. Tugging his cock to her lips, she whipped her tongue around the crest, moaning as she worked the denim and briefs over his hips.

“Ah, Lynlee,” he growled. “That’s it, sugar. Show me you’re my woman.”

“I’m always yours,” she promised, sliding her tongue up and down his cock before consuming the head and whispering muffled sentiments against his thick flesh.

Lynlee’s fingers raked over his hard thighs as she committed herself to bringing him pleasure. She curled her tongue around the engorged crest, dragging her tongue back and forth over the small slit topping the swollen head. “Mmm,” she moaned, caressing his firm balls. “You sure taste like my husband.”

“I am your husband. Me, Lynlee, only me, baby.” He screwed himself inside her mouth, tapping her throat as he slid deeper, thrusting once or twice as he changed positions. “Tell me I’m enough, baby. Show me I’m all you need.”

She tightened her grip around his cock, using her lips to massage the heavily veined skin. Dropping her mouth over his shaft again, she consumed his length. She went down on him, lapping at the heavy wedge of flesh lodged inside her mouth, moaning as he used her oral presentation for his personal satisfaction. Then, he yanked her to the bed, pulling her atop him in one fluid motion. “Fuck me, Lynlee. Damn, baby, you don’t know how much I need you.”

Crawling up the length of his body, she seated herself over his cock. Blaine nudged the tip of his penis inside her, gripping her thighs as he ground against her. “That’s it, Lynlee. Prove to me who you belong to, sugar.”

“You, Blaine. I’ve always belonged to you.” Lynlee bunched her hair in her hands, lightly fingering the strands as she let herself go. Tossing her head back, she fucked her husband, and her body undulated as she freely rode him.

“Feel me, Lynlee. Ah, yes, work that pretty little pussy for me, sweetheart.”

Lynlee succumbed to the pleasure, becoming and acting upon Blaine’s desire. She saw the glassy-eyed look of addiction lingering in

his eyes and knew then more than ever before—she was his one and only drug.

Blaine pumped inside her harder and faster, committing himself to her orgasm. By the time her climax swept over her, he was coming, too. His release approached like a sudden summer rain, and he pounded inside her until the warm sensation washed over her, leaving her to shiver in the aftermath of a storm that passed too soon.

She collapsed against Blaine's chest, breathing in his scent and indulging in the way he stretched her as he pumped inside her. There was strength and power behind his delivery when he wrapped his strong arms around her, grunting as he thrust inside her, filling her with his size and moaning as his hot cum jetted through her channel.

Blaine called out her name. He clutched her hips, dragging her forward and back, pushing still higher and higher until she swore under her breath, exasperated and sated, yet seeking more, wanting more of this Blaine, the man who often told her he couldn't get enough of her loving. The man she couldn't help but love.

When he finally stopped moving under her, she pressed her ear to his chest, listening to the uneven tempo of his heartbeat. His fingers walked up and down her back. "Look at me, Lynlee."

Resting her chin upon her hands, she allowed her gaze to meet his. His lips stole hers then, and he ravaged her mouth completely, taking the opportunity to make the kiss their own. Slowing down after a spell, he kissed her gently, sipping at her lips. His tongue flicked across hers, and he swiped a fallen curl away from her brow. "You're so beautiful, Lynlee."

"You ain't bad lookin' yourself, Mr. McCain."

"I love you, baby. No matter what happens, you'll always belong to me. I loved you first, and I'll love you always."

He was right. In her heart of hearts, Lynlee knew she was Blaine McCain's woman. He loved her first, and through his love and his unselfish ability to share her with his brother and best friend, she'd grown attached to Rhett and Carlisle.

Blaine realized it, too, long before they took their vows and said “I do” because Blaine knew her better than anyone, except maybe Lantry, but Lantry didn’t count.

Best of all, Lynlee understood Blaine better than he understood himself. He shared her once, and he would again, not because Lynlee would ask him or even because she cared for Rhett and Carlisle. Oh, no, Blaine would allow Carlisle and Rhett the opportunity to join them again because he enjoyed watching Lynlee with other trusted men. Like Lynlee, Blaine couldn’t get enough of the forbidden, or the fruits produced by their erotic labors.

* * * *

Carlisle was a practical man. He’d achieved all he’d ever wanted to accomplish in his law firm. As an attorney, he’d been hell on wheels in the courtroom. Soon after he began practicing in Anderson, he was offered countless partnerships from all over the country. Ultimately he chose to give up his career, and for one reason—Lynlee Lewis McCain. And he understood the repercussions long before he made the decision.

His choices put him in the spotlight. Casey McCain, the patriarch of the McCain family, paid close attention. His father had been there himself, he’d said, recounting the years he’d spent loving Lynlee’s mother from a distance. He came up with a brilliant plan to help Carlisle and Rhett come to terms with the things they couldn’t have. What good did his money do him if he couldn’t share it with his sons and those he loved? He bought the farm in Asheville, signed over the deed, and grinned from ear to ear when Carlisle, Rhett, and Royce accepted, and that was that.

Casey McCain rarely lost when he negotiated. He sweetened the pot with cash and real estate and kept adding to the deal until he paid a high enough price to buy his way.

Carlisle ran his hand over his face and studied his brothers, leaving behind that dreadful day when his father bought him out of Lynlee's life. The silence and tension sliced through the room, leaving an unpronounced chill in the air.

The triplets nursed their beer bottles, taking slow drags from the longnecks while he clung to his bottle of Cristal like some folks held fast to the last note played in a favorite country ballad. Carlisle and Rhett were living a few sad song lyrics and Carlisle wasn't sure that out of sight, out of mind, would help either of them change their tune.

Carlisle missed Lynlee. He longed for her.

Royce stirred up a couple of gin and tonics, passing one glass off to Rhett, who looked like he needed that drink. Then, he paced the floor. "We could've hit the bars."

"Yep, that was on my mind," Austin said. "Somebody refused to let the turtle bury its head."

Carlisle finished off the bottle and slammed it against the floor. Standing, he said, "I love her. Okay? I've said it. I love her more than I've ever loved another. That's what you wanted to hear, so there, I've told you what's in my heart. So shoot me."

"Blaine oughta hang ya," Dallas said, seething.

Rhett rubbed his temples. "You know, for a guy who doesn't take a woman to bed without plenty of company, you sure are a judgmental prick."

"Watch it, Scooter," Dallas said, using the nickname the brothers had pinned on Rhett years ago.

Scooter stuck because that's how Rhett lived. He scooted from one bed to the next, looking for one thrill after another. In the weeks leading up to Blaine and Lynlee's wedding, Rhett stopped playing the field altogether. That was Carlisle's first clue. Rhett's heart belonged to Lynlee.

Carlisle had slowed down his pursuits, too, but he hadn't necessarily stopped chasing skirts altogether. He wondered what that said about him. Did he love Lynlee less than Rhett? He was sure he

didn't love her as much as Blaine, because if he did, he wouldn't have been able to take another woman in his arms and fuck her, or at least that's what he told himself. In truth, he'd searched for distractions, silently hoping someone would turn his head and keep it at an angle.

Austin rubbed his bottom lip with his thumb and forefinger. "He's right, Dallas. Who are we to judge either one of them? As many women as we've shared, who's to say we couldn't end up in the same predicament at some point?"

"We won't," Dallas retorted. Then, glaring at Carlisle, he added, "I expected more out of you."

"Maybe I did, too," Carlisle said regrettably, "but you wanted the truth."

"And we only got about half, didn't we?" Dallas asked, taking on that infuriating authoritative air.

"Yes."

"She's the reason you gave up practicing law, isn't she?" Dallas asked.

"Yes," Carlisle replied, watching Rhett for a reaction.

Rhett lifted a brow, but other than that, he didn't respond. Rhett was probably still sore at Carlisle. They'd been close friends, too, practically brothers, but he'd guarded his Lynlee-secrets as much as Rhett had chosen to protect his own.

"You gave up your career for a piece of ass?" Dallas screeched.

"This is your final warning," Rhett said, jumping to his feet and ready to defend Lynlee this time. "Say another off-color remark about Lynlee or how we feel about her, and I swear I'll make you eat those words."

Dallas shut up, and Carlisle made a mental note to remind him of this day at a later time when tensions weren't so high. Dallas wasn't one to back down from anything, but apparently he was starting to grasp a clearer picture. Rhett loved Lynlee. Carlisle loved Lynlee. A good old McCain strong-arm wasn't going to change that.

“And yes, I gave up my career for Lynlee,” Carlisle said. “I represented wealthy criminals for God’s sake. The last thing I needed was for someone to find out I had a weakness and go after an innocent woman whenever the jury didn’t return with a verdict they wanted.”

Houston finished off his beer, retrieved another one from the kitchen, and returned in a great big hurry, acting like he’d just thought of something he couldn’t wait to mention. “Then where is she, Carlisle? You forfeited everything you’ve worked for so Dad could what? Send you away? Make you swear to stay out of Lynlee’s bed?”

“I never swore,” Carlisle corrected him, trying to think if in fact they’d made that verbal agreement. No, he decided, he’d never promised *that*.

“Carlisle, Dad bought this place for you, Rhett, and Royce—which by the way, Royce, I still don’t know why you were thrown in the mix—so you could do the very things you never wanted to do. You’re stuck breeding horses, shipping cattle, and farming. The career you didn’t want is right at your feet, Sir Carlisle. Like always, Dad paved the way for another son. Thing is, you have a dirt road ahead of you because being a rancher is not what you want to do.”

Houston was right. He generally was, which explained why he never said much. He waited for some kind of earth-rattling revelation, and then he just came on with it, knocking everyone over with some food for thought guaranteed to make someone uncomfortable.

Come to think of it, Houston made several good points. Carlisle understood his father’s reasoning. He realized his dad purchased that ranch for the sole purpose of moving Rhett and Carlisle out of Anderson, but why throw Royce in the mix?

Carlisle’s gaze immediately swung toward Rhett, who was totally blood red. “What the fuck, Royce?” Carlisle asked, balling his fists and feeling now what Blaine must’ve felt at some point—like he was left in the dark. “Have you been sleeping with Lynlee?”

Chapter Six

Royce was saved by the entry of another McCain. Lantry McCain strolled in the house as if he'd spent most of his life there. He dumped his luggage in the center of the room and, like the rebel he was, released a big hoop and holler, clapped and rubbed his hands together, and said, "Come on, boys! What the hell are you doing just sittin' here? We've got women to see!"

After backslaps and hugs, Lantry made his way to the kitchen. He returned with a sloppy sandwich in hand—signs he hurriedly piled mounds of ham and cheese under two slices of bread—and a beer bottle dangling from his fingertips. "All right, somebody start. What's going on here? How come y'all look like you're the last bunch standing in line to board a sex train you've already missed?"

"Everything in life doesn't have something to do with sex," Houston grumbled.

"Wanna bet?" Lantry asked, taking a bite out of his sandwich and managing another few words around a mouthful of bread and meat. "I can only imagine what this is about. Anybody wanna take that as a bet?"

The room remained quiet. Carlisle glared daggers through Royce. At thirty-four, Royce had something the rest of them didn't have—Momma and Daddy in his ear twenty-four-seven. Royce must've known why their father booted them out of the house, even though he'd played it safe and acted like he didn't have a clue. But why was he included in that quick scuffle to transfer deeds and purchase property?

“No takers?” Lantry asked, shoving the last bite between his lips. Swiping his crumb-infested fingers against his blue jeans, he said, “All right, I’ll tell you why you’re sittin’ there with your long faces. You let me know if I’m close.

“The sex train in question is one little white-haired darling. She has pale skin, perfectly blushed in all the right spots, and stands about yay-high,” he said, stretching his arm directly in front of his body to indicate Lynlee’s height, and he was right on the money. “How am I doin’ so far?”

Austin threw his hands in the air. “Please God in heaven tell me you haven’t been in bed with her, too.”

“Are you kiddin’ me?” Lantry looked like he was about to lie and say he had, but then he dropped his jaw. “Wait a second. You’ve been bangin’ Lynlee, too?”

“No,” Austin assured him. “Wrong brother.”

Lantry focused on Dallas. “Well I can’t say I’m surprised.”

“You missed again,” Dallas grumbled.

Lantry swung his gaze full force toward Rhett. “Hell, everybody knows he’s already been there and enjoyed that.”

“Not him,” Dallas said, nodding toward Carlisle.

“Carlisle? Psh! That ain’t gonna happen,” Lantry said, focusing on Rhett again. “I heard all about the threesome Blaine, Lynlee, and Rhett had at Carolina Showplace last year. Dallas, I don’t know where you get off pointing fingers, but if you want to accuse the sinner, point that finger Rhett’s way.”

Rhett laughed. “I see you haven’t changed a bit.”

Lantry shrugged. “I do my best to stand out in this crowd. Kind of like you, friend. You get in there and take the spotlight while there’s something left to polish and shine.”

Rhett snarled. “I still got what a woman needs. Don’t you worry about me.”

Lantry chuckled. “That remains to be seen. Rumor has it Dad got rid of you because you had a sudden change in lifestyle. Guess it’s

kind of hard to miss when your eyes cross, and your head spins round and round whenever Lynlee walks in the room.”

“The problem isn’t Rhett. Hell, he’s not blood. We can overlook his flaws. He’s not expected to be loyal.”

“He’s always been like a brother to me,” Lantry fired back. “And as far as I know, Dallas, he’s always had your back, too.”

“Thanks,” Rhett said. “That means a lot, Lantry. Touches my heart and makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside.”

“Speaking of which,” Lantry began, looking around, “where are the ladies tonight, boys?”

Royce returned to the bar. “No wonder you don’t have a woman, Lantry.”

“I don’t have a woman because I don’t want *just one*, Royce.”

Dallas tilted his bottle toward Carlisle. “You and Carlisle used to have that in common.”

“Son of a fuckin’ bitch! You just won’t let this die, will ya?” Carlisle shouted, pacing the floor again.

“I’ll tell Mom you politely gave one of her sons your regards,” Lantry teased. “What the hell is wrong with you, Carlisle? You act like somebody stole your butt plug or something.”

Carlisle sneered.

“Aw shucks,” Lantry teased. “I wasn’t supposed to tell, was I?”

Carlisle resisted an outright grin. Lantry always kept him on his toes, and if nothing else, he was comic relief. “Ah, hell, Lantry, you know what they say about the McCains. We have our fair share of secrets.”

“Well then, if that’s the case, we might as well show all the pieces of the puzzle, boys. That way, everybody can join in and play.”

* * * *

They were drunk and sloppy by two-thirty or three. Thanks to a large family room, they were able to spread out and relax comfortably.

“So you fucked her?” Lantry asked, leaning out of his chair and propping his elbow on the couch located an arm’s length away.

Carlisle glared at his older brother. “I’ve been with her, yes.”

“Was it any good?”

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Dallas said, chugging his beer.

“Just askin’ a question. No harm in gettin’ the details. We’re all friends here.”

Stretching across a wide and sophisticated camel-colored sofa, Carlisle ignored Lantry and reached in his pocket. He looked at his cell. No text messages. No phone calls.

He wondered if he and Rhett had ruined Lynlee’s honeymoon. Was Blaine taking out his frustrations on his young bride? Was he giving her the third degree? Was her heart breaking? Had Blaine made her cry, or were they over their tiff and making love right then? That was something Carlisle couldn’t envision, especially since he wasn’t there to enjoy Lynlee, too.

Stuffing the phone back in his jeans, Carlisle looked at Rhett, a dozen thoughts going through his head. If Lynlee had shed tears, had she cried them for Blaine or their marriage, or had she cried them for him? “Have you heard from her, Rhett?”

The entire room fell quiet.

“A gentleman never talks.”

“He wasn’t asking a gentleman,” Dallas pointed out. “If you were this fine, upstanding man, you wouldn’t be in this predicament right now, Rhett.”

Lantry had just settled in his recliner again when he sat abruptly, kicking down the footrest. “You know if we all stopped pointing fingers here, we might get somewhere. What do ya say I start?”

“You?” Royce asked, sitting up and paying attention.

“Sure, why not? I seem to be the only one here who can come up with a sensible way for Rhett and Carlisle to compromise.”

“I doubt that,” Dallas grumbled, yanking another beer from the cooler that had long since been placed between his and Austin’s rocking chairs.

“Assuming Carlisle and Rhett are the only two who need to ask Blaine to compromise,” Lantry added, shooting Royce a quick jab and sharp stare.

A continual ear-piercing alarm resounded in the room, and Rhett immediately snatched his phone from the coffee table. “I’ll be right back.”

With Rhett out of the room, Lantry continued, “As much as I hate to agree with Dallas, he has a point. Blaine isn’t *Rhett’s* brother.”

Carlisle took a deep breath. Now he understood why he gave up practicing law. He was no match for his brothers, and the day was soon coming when he’d hit a losing streak in a court of law, too. Then again, maybe he’d argued so many cases that he was too tired to defend himself. Either that or he didn’t represent himself effectively. He was guilty, a true accessory to crimes of passion that were never supposed to escalate into a most forbidden love.

“Damn, I must’ve missed out on some kind of woman. Look at you, Carlisle. You’re moping around like you failed to represent the only client you ever wanted acquitted.”

His brother must’ve read his mind. “That’s a good way of wording it, Lantry. I *wanted* Lynlee released from obligation. I didn’t want her to marry Blaine, but the reasons I asked her to cancel her plans weren’t entirely selfish.”

“You asked Lynlee not to marry Blaine?” Royce asked, arching a brow.

“You’re damn right I did,” Carlisle replied. “That marriage was planned long before Lynlee realized she had feelings for me. Hell, Blaine put a ring on her finger way before he gave her a chance to sort out her feelings for Rhett, too.”

Lantry shrugged. “So basically you’re saying Blaine took a virgin to bed, tossed his best friend and brother in there with them, and said, ‘While I’m traveling, honey, play with your new boy toys, but remember, you can only borrow ’em. When you’re done, return them to a shelf—one you’ll see every day—but don’t you ever pick them up and play with them again, ya hear?’ And what woman doesn’t want a sweet treat every now and again after she’s already developed a taste for different flavors?”

Carlisle stared at Lantry and probably matched Royce’s shocked look of disbelief.

“That’s beautiful, Lantry,” Dallas remarked, sarcasm thick on his tongue. “Well stated, really.”

“I thought so,” Lantry said, pulling the brim of his hat over his brow and slumping against his chair.

Carlisle retrieved his cell again and stared at the blank facing on the flat surface. Had Lynlee called Rhett? Why was she up after two in the morning? Was something wrong? And if so, why did she contact Rhett and not him?

The obvious reasons came to light quicker than he could dim an outward show of disappointment. He thought of his last communication with Lynlee. After Carlisle’s father told him to back off, he tried his best to honor his father’s wishes, realizing Blaine must’ve harbored his share of concerns. Carlisle tried to stay away and he failed, but he at least made an honest attempt. Lynlee contacted him first.

They exchanged texts—a hundred of them sounded about right—and Lynlee had told him she loved him. Her confession came after spending two days on her honeymoon with his brother. And Carlisle’s dumb-ass told her to leave him alone.

Chapter Seven

“Blaine and Lynlee will be here tomorrow afternoon,” Rhett announced, returning from the kitchen.

“What?” Carlisle asked.

Rhett shrugged. “According to Blaine, the honeymoon is over.”

“Ah, hell,” Carlisle said, dropping his head while trying to cope with a mix of emotions.

“Are you happy now?” Dallas asked, storming across the room. Houston trailed behind him but then passed him, stumbling upstairs while Dallas continued ranting, “You and Rhett ought to be real pleased. Thanks to the two of you, Blaine’s plans are shot to hell and Lynlee won’t have the honeymoon of her dreams.”

After Dallas disappeared up the front steps, Rhett looked at Carlisle and said, “That was Blaine.”

“He called from Lynlee’s phone?”

“He said Lynlee went for a walk on the beach and must’ve forgotten her cell.”

“So since Lynlee forgot her phone, Blaine’s gonna punish her and cut the honeymoon short?” Lantry asked. “Thata way, little brother, show a woman who’s boss.”

Royce snickered. “You don’t know Blaine. Since Lynlee got a hold of him, he’s been a different man. She wears the pants and the boots in that relationship.”

“Sounds like she’s got a good pair of spurs, too,” Lantry said, shaking his head.

“He wouldn’t just cancel the honeymoon because of a forgotten phone,” Carlisle said, being practical.

“He says she’s not happy,” Rhett informed them, smiling.

“Well far be it for the two of you to take pleasure in that fact, right?” Lantry asked.

Rhett shrugged. “I tried to tell him that he’d never keep her satisfied. I told Lynlee the same thing right after they announced their engagement.”

“And just why would you do something like that?” Royce asked, his fury apparent.

“I love her. Hell, Carlisle loves her! And Royce, if I spared a guess, I’d reckon you’re pretty fond of her, too.”

“I haven’t been in Lynlee’s bed,” Royce informed them.

“Yet,” Lantry pointed out, wagging his finger and catching glares from around the room.

Austin was taking all of it in, sitting there quietly. Finally, he said, “What was Lynlee thinking going out for a walk on the beach in the middle of the night?”

“Maybe she was thinking about me,” Rhett offered.

Carlisle knew better. He and Lynlee had exchanged some emotional texts. If Lynlee left Blaine’s bed, she had one thing on her mind—the last words he’d typed out, the damning lie he’d made her believe. “I told Lynlee I’d found someone else, and that was the real reason Dad bought this ranch.”

“You did what?” Rhett asked.

“It was the right thing to do,” Royce said.

Lantry smirked. “Of course it was, nothing like a good mind game to get a woman back where she belongs. Right, Carlisle?”

“I’m taking the Fifth.”

Lantry chuckled. “Little brother, you’ve already incriminated yourself enough. My advice is, you’d better run. The jury is out, and this upcoming verdict isn’t one you’re gonna want to hear. When Blaine arrives tomorrow afternoon, he’s gonna hang ya. I know I would if I were in his shoes.”

* * * *

Lynlee hadn't bothered to notice how dark the beaches were until she'd been walking for a long time, probably close to an hour. She turned around and started to head back to the room when a man approached her, barely visible in the moonlight.

"Excuse me, Miss?"

"Yes?"

"Are you alone out here?"

Standing about six foot four and a good two hundred and forty pounds or more, the man reeked of alcohol, but his speech wasn't slurred. Lynlee jerked when she noticed the evil smile tilting his lips. As he moved closer, she detected something mysterious and quite dark in his expression. She swallowed hard and said, "I like to walk in the moonlight, and my husband takes late-night swims. He's waiting for me a little ways down the beach."

"A little ways?" he asked. "Where are you from, doll?"

"South Carolina," she stuttered.

"Here?"

Lynlee kept walking, noting how her breathing changed. She was in danger. She'd only felt a similar sensation one other time in her life—a year and a half ago at the Carolina Showcase Horse Show. Keep a level head, she told herself. Keep walking and start talking. "Oh, no, I'm not from Hilton Head. We live in Anderson. I'm originally from Tennessee."

"You don't say? Tennessee?" he asked, keeping the rapid pace she'd started to walk. "What part?"

"Crossville. Are you from around here?" she asked, panicking. Oh, God, she prayed. *Please, please let Blaine get worried and look for me.* Then again, Blaine only had a fifty percent chance of finding her. He'd most likely go left where she'd taken a right. She should've gone left, too. That's where all the condos and hotels were located.

Instead, she'd decided to explore the area of the beach she hadn't seen. The beach she could barely see now!

The stranger leaned toward her. "I've been around. I've traveled so much I'm not quite sure where I'm from, but I've always loved South Carolina. I spend a lot of time here."

"I can see why," Lynlee said, glancing at him. "Especially here in Hilton Head. The beaches aren't that crowded."

"No," he said. "Where'd you say your husband is?"

"Down here a little ways," Lynlee replied, pointing toward the dimly lit, vacant stretch of sand in front of them.

"I see," he said, offering his hand. "I'm Lee Marks, by the way."

"Lee," she said, shaking the hand he gave her. "Hi."

"Hi," he whispered, leaning her way once again. "And you are?"

"Lynlee," she chirped, speeding up.

"Lynlee," he drawled. "What a beautiful name."

"Thank you."

"And you're here with your husband?"

"Yes. Maybe I can introduce the two of you."

"Wouldn't that be real swell?"

"I think so, yes," she said, frantic now and hoping her reply didn't shine a light on her fear.

"Lynlee, what do you like most about the island?"

"Like I said, it's not crowded."

"This time of morning, it's quite deserted."

"Uh-huh," she agreed, staring straight ahead, wondering how far she'd walked and noticing there weren't any buildings to speak of and no one on the beach.

"It's very dark out here, Lynlee."

"Yes."

"A woman shouldn't be out here walking alone."

"You're right," she said, forgetting she'd mentioned her husband was right up ahead.

"You're alone, aren't you, Lynlee?"

“No,” she stated flatly, starting to jog.

He immediately caught her and tugged her against him. “Lynlee, do you know what I like about this beach most?”

She gulped. Her heart slammed against her chest, beating harder and harder with every breath she tried to take.

“Few people are out here after midnight. That means, no one will hear you if you decide to scream.”

Chapter Eight

“Lynlee!” Blaine ran down the dark beach screaming his head off like a crazy man. Given the fact he was dressed in boots, jeans, and a button-down shirt, strangers—if he’d seen any—would likely think he was looking for a horse instead of his wife.

He’d taken a left at the end of the walkway, deciding if Lynlee were in trouble, she had a better chance of gaining help from a stranger staying in one of the resorts. To the left, Blaine could barely see his hand in front of his face and that was cause for alarm. That and the fact Lynlee had been gone for nearly two hours. “Lynlee McCain! Answer me!”

Jogging across the sand, Blaine thought of the many ways he could’ve handled the situation with Lynlee. For starters, he shouldn’t have confided in Dallas. Lynlee already had it in her pretty little head that the triplets didn’t think much of her after she’d decided to marry Blaine. She’d known them since she was a kid, but it had been years since she’d spent any amount of time with them, especially Dallas.

Damn. Blaine had realized Dallas intimidated Lynlee and what had he done? Called big brother and told him about Rhett and Carlisle. That was real fucking mature.

To make matters worse, after he’d fallen asleep, she’d received a text from Rhett. Evidently, his fingers couldn’t type out the facts quick enough. Blaine read the text with his own eyes. *Are you okay? Blaine told Dallas there was something up. Anything I can do?*

Yeah buddy. What a pal. Rhett could’ve minded his own damn business.

“Lynlee!” Blaine screamed, calling out to the wind.

Her phone buzzed in his pocket about the time his cell rang in his shirt. Answering both at the same time, he didn't check the caller ID on either phone. "Who is this?"

"Carlisle."

"Lantry."

"Look it," Blaine began. "Something is wrong here. I don't have time to talk."

"You got that right, little brother. Lose Carlisle and talk to me."

"Carlisle, I'll call you back," Blaine said, stopping at the shoreline and wincing when the salt water completely washed over his expensive snakeskin boots.

"Blaine, I've got some bad news. You gotta listen to me."

"What is it?" Blaine shouted, his heart thumping, his blood running cold.

Lantry was employed by a private firm working unsolved cases all over the country. He knew everyone in law enforcement, and when the McCains were in trouble, Lantry generally received the first call.

"It's Lynlee, Blaine. She's at Hilton Head Regional Medical Center. I've got a car waiting for you. Meet the driver in front of the resort welcome center."

"What the hell happened?"

"Blaine, it's bad. I don't know the details."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"She was attacked. That's all I know."

"Attacked? You mean raped?"

"I don't have that information. You've got to get to the hospital and get there as fast as you can."

"Have you told Rhett and Carlisle?"

"No, not yet. You're her husband. I wanted to talk to you first."

Blaine felt the bile rise in his throat. He turned toward the hotel. Everything was so surreal in that moment. He kept thinking he was trapped in a bad dream and in a minute, Lynlee would wrap her hot little body around his and shake him awake. Only that's not what was

happening. This was real life. It had to be, of course, because Blaine didn't hear Lantry's voice in his dreams.

"What the fuck happened? You gotta know something. Tell me everything, damn you. This is my wife we're talking about!" Blaine was running for the outdoor deck area located in front of their beachfront building. By this time the bright orange sun was pushing its way into the brand-new day, a day Blaine wasn't sure he could even face.

"Blaine, I've told you what I know. I was only on the phone for a minute. Frank Dobson called me from Beaufort PD. A fax came across his desk this morning, something about a serial killer being stopped because of a traffic violation. A girl rolled out of the backseat and begged for help. Turns out the girl is—"

"My girl," Blaine choked out, cursing his existence as he ran through the pool area and spotted the driver standing curbside, next to an unmarked white car.

"Are you here for me?" Blaine called out, waving his arms toward a man dressed in a cheap suit.

"I'll see what I can find out and call you back," Lantry told him.

Blaine barely heard what his brother said. He approached the man who appeared to be waiting for him. "Are you Blaine McCain?"

"Yes, sir. Thanks for coming."

"I'm Detective Mark Stevens. Get in. We need to hurry."

Once Blaine was in the car, Detective Stevens said, "Your wife was attacked by Lee Marks."

"You say that name like it should ring a bell or something. Who is this guy?"

"We think he's the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer. If we're right, your wife may very well be the only woman who has ever escaped one of his brutal deaths."

Blaine stared out the window. The detective kept talking. His words were shallow. The way he spoke, an effortless attempt to keep his voice low and steady, made him sound like he was lost in some

kind of hollow, or maybe Blaine just couldn't focus on anything else outside of the fact that Lynlee had been harmed, hurt in a way he couldn't begin to imagine.

"Mr. McCain, does your wife have a degree in psychology or has she taken any kind of self-defense classes? This guy's MO is typically disfigurement—"

"What?" Blaine screeched, facing the detective. "Are you telling me this crazy bastard..."

"Hang on there a minute, Mr. McCain. What I'm trying to tell you is that your wife isn't marked up like the others he's killed in the past. I believe it's because she either talked him down, or she had some kind of self-defense course that made her a bigger challenge than what he bargained for. Has she taken any classes, Mr. McCain?"

"Lynlee? No." He quickly remembered an incident the year before, how she'd been held by that lunatic Scott Sanders. He and Rhett had overheard her talking to Sanders. Lynlee didn't crack under pressure, even when she believed Sanders was holding a knife to her throat. As it turned out, the knife wasn't real in that particular incident.

Blaine had read enough about the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer to understand that wasn't the case in this situation. *Oh, God, she must've been scared to death.*

"How bad?" Blaine blurted out, understanding whatever he faced was certainly more than he was prepared to handle.

"Sir, I don't know. All I can tell you is that one of our officers pulled them over. Lynlee fought her way out of a large cardboard box in the backseat and—"

"A box?"

"Yes, sir. From what I understand, this guy transfers all the women to remote swampy areas by large freight boxes. He preys on small women, gals that typically wouldn't be able to defend themselves, much less overpower him."

"And Lynlee, she's going to live, right?"

“Yes, sir,” the detective said. “I can give you that much. Anything else and I’m afraid I can’t help you. The doctors are running tests now.”

“Was she raped?”

The detective didn’t reply. Blaine tossed his head against the headrest and shut his eyes. “Oh, God, no!”

Silence was often thicker when weighted down with unspoken answers. “Mr. McCain, I have no way of knowing that. I was asked to pick you up so you wouldn’t drive under duress while searching for the hospital. Your wife is under a physician’s care and two female officers are with her now.”

Blaine shook his head again. “How long before we’re there?”

“Ten minutes.”

Blaine clutched his phone in hand and dialed Lantry. “You gotta give me something here, Lantry.”

“I’m trying, little brother. I’ve got my ears to two phones, e-mailing every officer and detective I can think of that may still be working in that area. As soon as I have something, I’ll let you know.”

“What about this guy?”

“Lee Marks got away, Blaine.”

“He what?”

“The officer was trying to pull Lynlee free of the box, and Marks was fighting to keep her in the car. The officer made the choice to save Lynlee, and Marks was able to make a clean break.”

“Fuck!”

“Rhett and Carlisle are getting suspicious. What do you want me to tell them?”

“Tell them to get some sleep. I may need them later today. If I don’t, Lynlee will.”

* * * *

“What the hell is going on?” Carlisle demanded, walking into the study with Rhett on his heels. The other McCain men had long since turned in for the night. Lantry had a few hours sleep before he got the call and the news that could inevitably change them all.

“Give me a second,” Lantry said, scouring the internet for all the information he could find.

Lantry had started tracking the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer five years ago after he’d killed a few girls in Myrtle Beach. Every lawman in the US was on this guy. Every federal agent had been pinning for him for over a decade, and all the while, the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer was getting busy—leaving dead bodies from coast to coast.

“Answer me, Lantry!” Carlisle yelled, storming to the computer and peering over his shoulder. “You’re working now? Does this have something to do with Lynlee?”

“Yes,” he snapped. “Give me another few minutes, damn you!”

Lantry turned around and snatched a thin piece of paper from the fax machine before Rhett or Carlisle grabbed the chance. The black smudges were enough to alert him to the image on the other side of the white sheet. Lynlee had been photographed by one of the officers, and when he asked what kind of condition she was in, he was told he could judge that for himself. The officer asked for his fax number and apparently didn’t waste time sending over the proof.

“Both of you—sit down.”

“Lynlee is in trouble, isn’t she?” Carlisle asked. “She left Blaine and did something stupid, didn’t she?”

Lantry twirled around in the small office chair and faced the worn expressions of two worried men. “She’s been attacked. She’s alive, and that’s all I can tell you.”

“What do you mean that’s all you can tell us?” Rhett rushed him, grabbing his collar.

Carlisle stood back, processing. He shook his head a few times, probably in an effort to see through his inebriated state of confusion. “What happened?”

Lantry’s phone rang. “Hang on. It’s Blaine.” He fumbled with the options and hit the speaker button. “Go ahead, Blaine. I’ve got Rhett and Carlisle with me.”

Lantry clutched the fax in his hand, realizing he couldn’t flip the image over unless he wanted to encourage widespread panic. “Have you seen, Lynlee?”

Blaine was clearly choked up and unable to speak. Oh, God, he was crying. That was a bad sign.

“Blaine, man, talk to us,” Rhett said. “Is Lynlee okay?”

“I don’t know!” he bellowed. “I only saw her for a minute before they took her for more tests.”

Carlisle paced the floor. “Blaine, has she been—”

“You don’t understand,” Blaine interrupted him. “There’s no way to describe the pain in her eyes. She was hurt, man. I’m telling you, that son of a bitch hurt her.”

Rhett’s eyes widened. Methodically, he yanked his cell from his pocket and punched in a few numbers. Walking away, he lowered his voice and started mumbling something to the person on the other end of the line.

“Blaine, I have some initial reports coming through e-mail right now. Hang on and I’ll read them to you,” Lantry said, thankful in that moment that his name was Lantry McCain. Most everyone always jumped at the chance to help Lantry, even those in law enforcement. Lantry had always suspected the reasons why. A lot of folks thought McCain money funded the operations Lantry led. Thanks to the murders he helped solve, he also gained respect.

Carlisle snatched the photograph out from under Lantry’s wrist while his fingers raced across the keyboard. When he gasped, Lantry stilled.

Carlisle's anger and concern collided. "Blaine, damn it, you answer me—was she...I mean, did he..."

Lantry shook his head. His poor brothers were in a bad place for sure. "Blaine, was she raped?" he asked, helping Carlisle out of a pinch.

"The female officer I talked to doesn't think so."

"Thank God," Carlisle said, slumping to the couch and burying his face in his hands.

"But she's badly beaten," Blaine quickly added. "Her back may be marked up pretty good, too. She needs stitches."

"He cut her?" Carlisle asked, tears pooling in his eyes.

Lantry dropped his head, and with great regret, he said, "That's this guy's trademark. He cuts the girls before he ever puts them in containers and transfers them to the places where he plans to leave them for dead."

"Blaine, tell me something more here. We aren't there. You've seen her. Is she going to be okay?" Carlisle stared outside as if he were looking for someone.

"Like I said, I just don't know. I only saw her for a minute. Her face is pretty swollen and they're stitching up her back. That's all I can tell you."

"Well it ain't much," Rhett said, reentering the study. "We'll be there in about an hour. Carlisle, get your stuff. Your dad is on the way with the chopper."

Chapter Nine

“Did you sleep there all night?” Dallas asked, tapping Lantry on the back of the head.

Lantry jerked and pushed away from the desk.

“What the hell have you been doing?” Dallas asked, snatching the photo Lantry had quickly tried to crumble in his hands.

Dallas held the picture up to the sunlight beaming through the drapes. “What the ever-lovin’ hell is going on?”

Royce, Austin, and Houston rushed toward them, and Houston said, “Mom just called. She said Lynlee was attacked by a serial killer and escaped? There’s an update coming on SCNN.”

Austin grabbed the remote, turned on the large flat-screen television, and sank to the sofa, flipping channels. “Is she all right?”

“She’s fine. Dad picked up Carlisle and Rhett about seven this morning, and I heard from them about an hour ago.”

Vern Donaway, a South Carolina reporter, was telling the horrifying tale. “Turn it up,” Dallas ordered.

Vern’s broadcast was already in progress. His image filled one side of the screen while Liz Davis’s small frame occupied the other. “I’m standing here in front of Hilton Head Regional Medical Center where we’re told the latest victim of the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer is under twenty-four-hour guard. Now, Liz, right before sunrise this morning, a local law enforcement agent pulled over a bright red Mustang for a missing taillight. The man behind the wheel is believed to have been Lee Marks.”

“Marks is thought to be the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer?” Liz asked.

“Yes, based on evidence found this morning and the information he supplied to his latest victim, police now believe the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer is Lee Marks, a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, native. Lee Marks, as you know, was the original suspect in this case,” Vern explained.

“Yes, and I’m sure that’s quite disturbing to those who have been hunting for this serial killer,” Liz added, looking straight at the cameras.

Lantry grunted. “She has no fucking idea.”

“What can you tell us about his latest victim, Vern?”

“We know the victim’s husband is Mr. Blaine McCain. The McCain family is well known in South Carolina. Casey McCain has the reputation for being a generous philanthropist, making much of his fortune in Texas oil wells, cattle, and real estate. Blaine’s brother, Carlisle McCain, is a well-known, high-profile lawyer here in South Carolina. We’re told he and Casey McCain arrived with another individual sometime this morning.”

“Shit! Who cares! Just get on with it!” Dallas yelled at the screen.

“They’re more concerned about Lynlee’s social status than what this Marks character has done to her,” Royce said, sitting on the coffee table directly in front of the television.

“Can you walk us through what happened, Vern? How did Mrs. McCain encounter Lee Marks?”

“We know Mrs. McCain was walking on the beach late last night. We don’t know why she was out or where she met Lee Marks. What we do know is there were signs of a violent struggle.”

“You say signs of a struggle, Vern. Was Mrs. McCain sexually assaulted? Badly beaten? Shot or stabbed? Elaborate for our viewers.”

Vern looked off to the side and lowered his microphone. Someone was coaching him. Lantry didn’t have to guess who, but the camera gave a quick shot of Carlisle standing off to the side.

“Thata boy, baby brother,” Lantry said. “Give ’em hell, Carlisle.”

“Tell him to stick to the facts!” Dallas bellowed.

Vern cleared his throat and continued, “Mrs. McCain is in stable condition. She’s twenty-four years old and said to be otherwise healthy. She’s expected to make a full recovery.”

“That’s our Carlisle!” Dallas cheered.

“He probably fed the teleprompter and let Vern know he planned to sue the network if he didn’t cut his update short,” Lantry said, satisfied Carlisle would take care of things in Hilton Head.

“They didn’t call him the Intimidator in the courtroom for nothing,” Royce reminded them. “Good thing he was there. Now, let’s get in touch with Dad or Rhett and find out what happened.”

Lantry had just started for his phone when his cell lit up, announcing an unknown caller. “Hello? This is Lantry McCain.”

Lantry heard a lot of ragged breathing. After another round of short breaths, the person on the other end said, “She wasn’t supposed to get away.”

“I beg your pardon?” Lantry asked, motioning for the others and utilizing the speaker option. “Who is this?”

A forced chuckle sent chills up and down Lantry’s spine. “You know who this is, don’t you? I found something that belongs to the McCains. Gorgeous little woman, she is. Lovely white-blonde hair, nice plump breasts, tiny waist, a real little thing, she is. Found her walking on the dark beaches of the island this morning, as luck would have it.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Lantry said, pressing his fingertips to his lips and hoping his brothers remained quiet.

“Let me cut to the chase, McCain. Your brother made a mistake. His highly publicized wedding was something, wasn’t it?”

Lantry felt sick to his stomach. Had his pursuits of the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer somehow lured a madman?

“Are you still with me, McCain?”

“I’m here. What do you want?”

“I want you in Hilton Head this afternoon. I want you at Lynlee McCain’s bedside assuring her that I did not give her my name. I have

family in Jersey, McCain, family I love and care about. They are under scrutiny because that bitch your brother married gave my name to the police this morning.”

“I can’t help you,” Lantry said. “You gave your name and—”

“And if things had gone according to my plan, your sister-in-law wouldn’t have had the opportunity to relay anything at all to the police!”

“Maybe if you weren’t a psycho fuck our sister-in-law wouldn’t be lying in a hospital, fighting for her life!” Dallas screamed.

Lantry pursed his lips and sliced his finger across his throat. Glaring at Dallas, he placed his fingertips to his lips once more.

“Excellent! All the McCains are present, aren’t they?”

“Some,” Lantry replied.

“You listen to me, Lantry McCain, and you listen well. I’ve had a bad taste in my mouth for your family since I discovered your father has been funding your Rambo tactics and trying to bring down a killer who will never be caught. Now, if you want your brother’s wife to survive—and I have a feeling you do—then I suggest the lot of you McCain men back the fuck off and do what I tell you!”

“I’m listening,” Lantry said. “Go on.”

A long pause led to instructions. “You’ll go to Hilton Head. You’ll see Lynlee McCain. You’ll instruct her to retract her statement. Then, you’ll make her believe no harm will ever come to her by my hands if she remains quiet. Finally, I want the guards taken away from her hospital room, and if I detect a law enforcement agent anywhere near her, I’ll wait and watch for a more appropriate time to take her once more.”

“I can’t ask the guards to leave Lynlee. You had every intention of killing her. Those placed at her door aren’t on my payroll. You know that.”

“You’ll find a way to do as I say. I’ll be watching the news, and I’ll be waiting for Mrs. McCain to retract her statement.”

“You can watch all you want,” Lantry said, rubbing splayed hands through his hair. “I can’t make that call.”

“You’ll make it or else you’ll bury your sister-in-law. And that is most definitely your call to make.”

Chapter Ten

Casey McCain's bold voice filled the line. "What do you have, Lantry?"

"A maniac that insists your money funded the ongoing investigation to bring down the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer."

The other McCains stared at Lantry as he talked to their father. Casey McCain wasn't a man to agitate, and when it came to Lynlee Lewis McCain, the daughter he never had, nothing would be spared. If Lee Marks wanted a fight, he picked a worthy opponent.

"Marks wanted the guards removed from Lynlee's hospital room. He's demanding that she retract her statement. He wants her to say his name isn't Lee Marks. He doesn't want her to say anything at all about her abduction."

"Well ain't that a damned-ass shame?"

"Same thinking here," Lantry agreed. "He also wants me there in Hilton Head, but I have a better idea. We have friends here in Asheville. How soon can Lynlee travel?"

"I don't know, son. She's banged up pretty good."

"You gotta get her out of there. He's somewhere close. He's watching the hospital, maybe he's even inside. He knew there were guards placed at her door."

"That was an accurate guess. He'd assume we'd have her privately guarded even if the cops didn't put someone on her."

"That's a fair enough assumption. Now, I want to make sure we don't let the man down. Move her out of there, Pops. Fly her here, and we'll take care of her."

"There?"

“Yes, here. You can’t take her back to the ranch, and she can’t stay in Hilton Head now. The local PD isn’t equipped to handle a guy like Marks. Trust me. I know what I’m doing. Carlisle, Rhett, and Blaine will be here. Royce and I will, too.

“I’ll send *the trips*—Dallas, Houston, and Austin—to stay with you and Mom on the chance Marks shows up at the ranch. In the meantime, get Lynlee out of that hospital. See if you can get her released and I’ll have medical personnel on standby.”

“Is this the best option we’ve got?”

“Dad, you know it is. I’ve been tracking this guy for a long time. He’s cunning and more intelligent than anyone realizes, but worse than anything else, he’s diabolical. He kills for sport. Murder is his only pleasure. Just because Lynlee got away doesn’t mean he plans to leave her alive. He’s been responsible for over fifty deaths. Authorities in Florida and California believe that number will rise once all bodies have been recovered. Some detectives believe a large percentage of missing young women may have been Marks’s victims.”

“What are the chances you can protect her?”

“Good. Damn good.”

“I need a hundred percent, Lantry. If anything happens to her...”

“I’ll protect her with my life.”

“I want her safe, Lantry.”

“We all do, Dad. Believe me.”

“Lantry?”

“Yeah?”

“I said I want her safe. I didn’t say I want her fucked by another one of my sons.”

“Dad, really? You want to discuss this right now?”

“Blasted hell!” he yelled. “No! I don’t want to talk about this, but apparently, I should’ve warned Carlisle before he landed in bed with her. That girl is family. We watched her grow up.”

“Dad, I know you loved Lynlee’s mother. You lost her, and I understand what kind of anguish you experienced after Mrs. Lewis passed away, but Dad, you gotta let Lynlee find her own way.”

“Remember what I said. Keep her safe, or you’ll answer to me and your brother.”

The call was disconnected. Lantry was left to wonder which brother his father had referenced.

* * * *

After Austin, Dallas, and Houston headed for Anderson, Royce went to Asheville to meet up with an old friend with a new passion for guns and other weapons. Lantry was left to ponder the woman who’d been just a child when she’d earned his affections. He needed sleep, but with tremendous danger in the air, he wanted to tighten security around the property before they brought Lynlee there.

Going through the bedrooms, he double-checked the locked windows and looked around each private suite, trying to decide which room he should assign Lynlee. He entered Carlisle’s room, where he discovered a photo album, a book that contained faded memories in vivid color.

Most of the photographs were snapshots from various horse shows. Some were old photos from Christmas parties and summer vacations. The McCain and Lewis families spent many hours in campgrounds, enjoying an equestrian’s lifestyle, going from town to town for one event or another.

The only girl between the two families, Lynlee was always at the center of attention. And she won Lantry’s heart as a child.

The adults used to say they bonded from the time she was a baby and Lantry held her in his arms. Her first words were Momma, Papa, and LanLan, a nickname she gave him that she eventually stopped using...after she turned sixteen. Lynlee’s mother used to say they were soul mates, and, well, he might have thought so, too, if Blaine

hadn't fallen for her at such a young age, and there hadn't been so many years separating them. Truth told, until Lynlee turned eighteen, he'd been her confidant, the one she turned to whenever she had a problem. He wouldn't have had it any other way.

Lantry smiled as he studied a photograph of Lynlee perched on his knee. He'd been eighteen or nineteen, which meant Lynlee must've been somewhere around eight. Chocolate encased her puckered lips and they were barely an inch from his ear.

Chuckling, Lantry made a mental note to show Lynlee that picture. He remembered the big secret Lynlee shared with him that day. In a small voice, she'd said, "I'm going to marry your brother when I grow up and get a husband."

He'd tickled her until she'd begged for mercy. "Which one?" he'd asked.

"Blaine," she'd replied with stars in her eyes.

Lantry shuddered. He imagined the twinkle was long since dimmed now.

With moisture in his eyes, he continued browsing. He ran his hand over the laminated pages, eyeing the spunky child staring back from days gone by.

He revisited the past through yesteryear's mementos until he reached the last page. There, in the back of the book, tucked between two separate photographs of Lynlee and Blaine, was a picture of Rhett, Carlisle, Blaine, and Lynlee.

Lynlee was on Carlisle's back. One arm was draped over Rhett's shoulder, the other secured around Carlisle's neck. Blaine had this inexplicable look in his eye as he watched from behind, keenly focused on Lynlee's ass.

Lantry took a deep breath and narrowed his gaze on four happy faces. "What went wrong here?" he asked aloud. "What in God's name have we done to you, Lynlee?"

They were big buddies, he and Lynlee, the best of friends. He'd never looked at her as anything more. Until now.

His hand brushed against his cock and he cursed aloud, tossing aside the source behind his rising frustration. He paced the floor and realized then that he couldn't blame anyone other than himself.

Lynlee's attack wasn't a freak occurrence. Oh, no, Marks went after the McCains, and he'd waited—bided his time—until he found their weakness. Man, did he ever find the one soft spot they all shared.

"Damn it," he muttered, rubbing his temples. What else could the McCain men do to mess up this girl's life?

Releasing a sigh, he jumped to another conclusion, or more precisely, an accurate fact. If blame was placed, then accusations began with him. If fingers were pointed, they should've been crooked in his direction.

Lantry was responsible for what happened to Lynlee. He'd pursued a killer, taunted him as much as he could whenever he had the spotlight. In turn, he'd provoked a cold-blooded animal, an animal searching for intended prey. A beast prepared to pounce, Marks attacked from the blind side, an angle no one thought to secure.

Now, it was up to Lantry to keep Lynlee alive.

Chapter Eleven

“She’s here!” Royce shouted, acting about as giddy as a child who might have been waiting by the chimney for Santa.

Lantry joined him on the front porch. They stood between white handsome columns with their hands stuffed in their pockets. Lantry’s eyes scoured the property, and he wondered aloud, “Think he’s out there somewhere?”

“You know he is,” Royce replied. “He’s just not here yet.”

“He’ll be here,” Lantry assured him, thinking Lynlee was damn lucky to have been able to walk away from Marks with her life.

“Dad said he didn’t notice any unnecessary interest from bystanders when Lynlee was released from the hospital.”

The helicopter descended, aiming for the large, circular landing pad near the driveway. “He suspected we’d move her. Besides, if he had been in that hospital, he would’ve been well disguised. That’s one reason he’s been so difficult to catch.”

“There’s no chance he’ll leave her alone. Is there, Lantry?” Royce asked.

“No.”

“Will we be able to protect her?”

“If you’re questioning that then I kept the wrong brother. Maybe I should’ve sent you home to Anderson and asked Dallas to stay.”

Royce narrowed his gaze. “You got the right brother, and you know it.”

He was right. Royce was an excellent marksman, and if he fired a gun, he didn’t miss. “You’d better notify *the trips* and tell them to expect company. Tell Dallas they may see Marks before we do.”

“I heard from Houston about ten minutes ago. He says they’re ready and waiting.”

A full staff of medical professionals stood next to an ambulance parked about ten feet away from the landing pad. The blades topping the chopper slowed and eventually came to a halt. Lantry lifted his left hand and wiggled his forefinger toward the team. The medical personnel immediately embarked on the helicopter.

“All right,” Lantry said. “Once she’s inside, this house is on lockdown. Security is on at all times, and she is never left alone in a room. Got it?”

“I’m with ya.”

Minutes later, Blaine reluctantly left the helicopter, followed by Rhett and Carlisle. The long faces were warning enough. Lantry frowned. “Damn, I hope so, Royce. By the looks of them, I’d say we’re on our own.”

* * * *

Lynlee hadn’t been conscious for longer than a few minutes the entire time she was at the hospital. She remembered waking up in Blaine’s arms the first time she came to and sobbing as he rocked her. The next time she awoke, Victoria and Casey had been there. Victoria hummed, singing some kind of lullaby, strangely enough.

What seemed like a few seconds later, she awoke to find Rhett’s arms cradling her, and beyond that she only remembered thinking she heard Carlisle’s voice. Now, she was staring at a magnificent white antebellum home situated in the center of the greenest grounds she’d ever seen. In the distance, she saw several of the McCains, but her vision was so foggy, she couldn’t tell who was there, only knew by the way they were clustered together, they were McCains.

She closed her eyes and moaned, agonized by the simple task of moving her head from left to right. “Lynlee?”

Trying to stretch her neck to find out who called out to her, she saw a large man coming for her, trying to make his way toward her while hunched over. She couldn't see him clearly, but he looked intimidating. Had something happened? Where were Blaine and Rhett? Had Carlisle left her when she needed him most?

"Lynlee, hon, we're gonna get you out of here. Are you in any pain?" The voice didn't seem compassionate at all. In fact, she detected a hint of mockery, didn't she? Frantic, she heard herself breathing, taking ragged breaths.

Then, his cold hands touched her and she released an agonizing, ear-piercing scream.

"Lynlee! Honey, it's all right." Blaine was there in a minute, cradling her head, brushing her bangs away from her face. "Honey, I've got you. We're all here now. Carlisle and Rhett are here. Lantry and Royce, too. You've got five McCain men at your beck and call. What do you think about that?"

Lynlee moaned when she was hoisted onto the stretcher and carried inside. Everything remained a blur—the large oak trees and weeping willows, the beautiful assortment of roses following the red brick pathway leading to the house, and even their faces. They all ran together—Carlisle, Rhett, Lantry, Royce, and Blaine. "Sweet, Blaine," she breathed.

The team in charge of transporting her inside carried her past Lantry. He patted her arm and said, "You still hung up on my little brother, Lynlee?"

She wasn't sure if she gave him a reply, but in her head she heard a resounding "yes!" over and over again. She hoped, after everything she'd put him through, he was still crazy about her, too.

Chapter Twelve

Eight Days Later

“You’ve got a spring to your step this morning,” Royce said, glancing up from his breakfast when Rhett entered the dining room.

“Lynlee’s up and at it bright and early today. I’ve got a dozen reasons to smile, even the swelling has gone down in her cheeks. She says she’s feeling no pain and even refused to take her medication.”

“Give it to her anyway,” Lantry muttered, barely looking away from his laptop.

“She doesn’t need it,” Blaine announced, entering the dining room behind Carlisle. “In fact, she wants to go riding. The doctor said as long as she doesn’t overdo it, a little fresh air and exercise might be good for her.”

“Carlisle and I will go with her,” Lantry muttered, closing out one of his applications.

Blaine frowned. “I’ll come along, too.”

“No,” Lantry said firmly. “Royce set up some targets outside. You and Rhett need to get out there and learn how to fire a gun.”

“I know how to use a damn gun,” Rhett grumbled.

“He wasn’t talking about the one you keep tucked away in your pants,” Blaine teased.

“Good thing,” Carlisle said. “From what Rhett says, he only shoots blanks.”

Rhett snarled. “Good one, Carlisle.”

"I thought so," Blaine said, slapping Rhett's back and heading for the kitchen. "I'll get some practice when we finish riding. Lynlee would probably feel better if I stayed with her."

Lantry's gaze met Carlisle's and he immediately looked down. Shit, what was Lantry thinking? Oh, no, he wasn't going there. He hadn't thought things through when he first suggested Carlisle join him for a ride with Lynlee.

"Any news on Marks?" Carlisle asked, forcing Lantry to look away from his computer once more.

"He slipped away again," Lantry replied, narrowing his gaze on Blaine when he walked in and took a seat at the table. "Has Lynlee remembered anything else?"

"How could she?" Blaine snapped, shoving a helping of scrambled eggs in his mouth. "The doctors have kept her so doped up on pills, she's been in dreamland for the past week."

"I'll talk to her," Lantry said, thinking Blaine sure was a lucky man to sleep next to an angel, and then immediately grumbling after he caught himself fantasizing about his brother's wife.

"When?" Blaine asked.

"When what?" Lantry countered, standing and wondering what he'd missed while daydreams of Lynlee filled his head.

"When will you talk to Lynlee?"

"I think Lynlee and I will take that ride alone. I'll see if I can find out what she remembers."

Blaine dropped his fork. "Is that a good idea? What if Marks is out there in the woods waiting for an opportunity?"

"We'll stay close to the house. Besides, I'm not so sure Lynlee is up for riding the grounds. I'll take her to the lower fields. We'll ride there."

Lynlee appeared about that time. She looked like a million bucks, and in that moment, Lantry didn't see the child Lynlee once was. Instead he saw one fine-as-hell woman.

She wore whitewashed jeans and a bright red shirt, too low-cut for Blaine's preferences apparently, given the fact he groaned when he first saw her.

Lantry silently hoped his gaze didn't take a field trip, but he couldn't be sure. He stared at her tits like they were nibbles and bits, recently placed in front of him as a man's favorite treat.

"Are you talking about me?" she asked, planting her hands on her hips.

Lantry jerked. Since he couldn't seem to say good morning, he took a gulp of cold coffee, and the taste was as cold and bitter as he deserved.

"Always," Blaine promised, swatting away her hand when she reached for his last piece of bacon. "I love you, but I don't share my meat."

"You're telling me," she grumbled, tousling his hair. "For the last eight days, I've felt like a virgin."

She sashayed into the kitchen and left Blaine to some necessary ribbing from Rhett and the others.

"Listen to that, why don't 'cha?" Rhett muttered. "Damn if I'd let my woman feel like she still had her cherry intact."

Lantry considered the easy way Blaine and Lynlee bantered back and forth. Lynlee was comfortable with the teasing, regardless of how provocative. Lantry admired that trait. She was herself around them, just like she'd always been.

"Sounded like an invitation to me, little brother," Royce pointed out.

"Me, too," Carlisle agreed, a tortured sound in his voice.

Blaine leaned back and patted his belly. "What can I say, boys? I'm a lucky man."

And an idiot for saying *that* in front of two men who looked like they couldn't wait to catch Lynlee alone. Lantry didn't point out the obvious.

Lynlee returned and sat on Blaine's lap, taking a hearty bite of an apple. "So you don't think you can keep up with me, Lantry?"

Lantry winked. "I've been *keeping you up* since you were a kid, Lynlee."

"What?" she screeched.

"I've been running a tab for ice cream since you were seven," he told her. "By the way, there's a photo album around here somewhere to prove it. I found a cute snapshot of a little girl sitting on my lap with chocolate all over her mouth. That particular day is the first day I realized we were destined to be family."

"Why's that?" Lynlee asked, apparently forgetting the great revelation she shared.

"You told me back then that one day you'd marry Blaine."

"You know how she was back then. She always walked around making threats," Blaine said, nuzzling her hair and securing his bottom lip under his top teeth.

After Lynlee shifted on his lap, things became pretty obvious. If Lantry didn't get Lynlee out of there, he might have to wait until Blaine took her upstairs and made up for the time he lost over the last week and a half.

Lantry rolled up a few papers and slapped them against his palm. "Come on, sunshine. We've got some riding to do."

"Aren't you going?" Lynlee asked Blaine.

"No. Top gun over there wants to ask you some questions. The interrogator in him wants a few minutes alone with you," Blaine said. "Are you scared?"

"Of Lantry?" she asked, her voice cracking. "Yeah, right. He's the one cowboy here I'll never fear."

Chapter Thirteen

If Lynlee knew what Lantry was thinking, she might have changed her mind. Lantry had been unable to tear his gaze away from her ass since they'd walked from the house to the barn. He should've been shot for gawking.

When they reached the horse stables, Lantry greeted Jose, the farm manager they transferred from Anderson. He had been a loyal McCain employee for the last twenty years and Lantry trusted him. Right now, they couldn't risk Lynlee's safety by hiring new employees. "Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. McCain."

There was something about the way Jose said his hellos that made Lantry uneasy. The way Jose put their names together implied he and Lynlee were a couple. For a minute, Lantry was taken aback, uncertain of the distorted emotions Lynlee stirred inside him.

"I saddled up two plugs," Jose told him, shaking his head and apparently anticipating opposition.

"Lantry?" Lynlee faced him. "I've been riding since I was barely out of diapers. A broke-to-death horse isn't the kind of mount I want to ride."

Lantry shot her a tight grin and then addressed Jose, taking the reins from his hands. "That's what I asked for, Jose. Thank you. That'll be all for now."

When Jose disappeared, Lynlee took a deep breath and let it out in a huff. "You're serious?"

"Lynlee, we're taking a leisurely ride. We won't be in any hurry. This way, you won't be tempted to trot off on your own while I'm trying to talk to you."

“Ah, the memories,” she said, smiling. “You’re still sore because you never beat me in a race across the McCain fields, aren’t you?”

“For the record, I always let you win,” he replied, shooting her a wink and cupping his hands low so he could offer her a leg up.

Pursing her lips, Lynlee stared down at his entwined fingers. “I’m capable of riding a high-strung, well-bred stud, and you know it.”

Lantry chuckled. “Yeah, well, you’ve proven that in more ways than one, my dear sister-in-law. Not any woman could put up with Blaine.”

She cackled, acting as if she thought that was the funniest thing she’d ever heard. Then, suddenly, she tossed her hair over her slender shoulders, stepped in his hand, and swung her leg over the saddle. “That’s why Blaine and I make a good couple, Lantry. See, not just any man can keep up with me.”

Ah, Lord. Here we go.

This was a defining moment, a day when Lantry would discover why Rhett, Carlisle, and Blaine found Lynlee McCain so irresistible.

* * * *

After target practice, the men grabbed a sandwich and sat on the back porch. Considerable tension hung in the air, and no one said much as cold lunches were consumed and beer can tabs were popped.

Finally, after a long silence, Blaine said, “I guess now is as good a time as any to talk about those text messages.”

Royce stood. “I’ll wait inside.”

“Sit down, Royce,” Blaine snapped. “You’re not off the hook just because you’re the only one here who hasn’t been in Lynlee’s bed...yet.”

With the last word spoken, heads snapped to attention. Rhett gulped down his beer and hurried for the cooler at the far end of the porch.

“Carlisle, is it true? Do you have someone else?”

Carlisle locked gazes with Blaine. "It's easier for Lynlee—and for you—if she thinks that's the way things are."

"Like hell it is," Blaine said. "I blame you for this, you know. She never would've left my bed and headed down that dark beach if she didn't have a lot on her mind, if she hadn't been worried about you and what you were doing behind her back."

"Excuse me?" Carlisle asked. "Hell, Blaine, last I heard, when a woman gets married to another man, the fellows left behind are free to buck around in another corral."

Blaine narrowed his eyes on Carlisle. "So have ya?" He immediately turned to Rhett, too. "Have *you*?"

"I've been kinda busy," Rhett answered him, looking into the small opening of his beer can. "None of us have seen a lot of free time with trying to get the stock moved here and attending bachelor parties and such."

"The wedding festivities are behind us. What we have in front of us is a long road if we're all gonna tiptoe around the subject of bedding my wife."

Royce massaged the back of his neck and stared down at his boots. "This may not be the best time for this conversation, and whether it is or not, I probably shouldn't be here."

"I don't see why not. You always have your nose in everything else. From what Mom said, you were the one at the wedding who couldn't keep his eyes off Lynlee. Why do you think Dad deeded this place to the three of you?"

"Blaine, I've never done anything inappropriate with Lynlee."

"You think they have?" Blaine asked Royce pointedly.

Royce shrugged. "Guess it depends on what you and Lynlee consider acceptable. In my heart, I know I haven't done anything wrong."

"Lusting after your brother's wife is okay?" Blaine asked.

Royce glared at Blaine.

Carlisle intervened. “Blaine, if you got something on your mind, why don’t ya just say it?”

Blaine ran his hand through his hair. After a deep and definitely tortured breath, he said, “You love her. Ain’t a question in my mind about how much. After I saw you at the hospital, sitting by her bed with tears in your eyes, I know it. And Rhett? You can’t deny it either. You would’ve killed Marks with your bare hands if you’d found him after you saw what he did to Lynlee.”

“I never said—”

“Never said, hell!” Blaine stood and paced. “Let’s cut to the chase, boys. I read the messages exchanged. I saw every single text you sent Lynlee. Heck, at least Carlisle tried to let Lynlee down easy, but you! Dear God, Rhett, if I didn’t love you like a brother, I’d probably have to knock the devil out of ya. You didn’t just pursue my wife while she was on our honeymoon. Oh no. You went as far as to ask for text sex!”

Carlisle spewed his beer. Laughing, he wiped his chin and looked at Rhett. “You did what?”

Royce rolled his eyes. “Good Lord. I know you’ve got it bad, but sexting? Really?”

“It wasn’t like that,” Rhett grumbled.

“I made it up?” Blaine asked, arching a brow.

Rhett bowed his head, and when he lifted his gaze again, Blaine braced for what he was about to say.

“Blaine, I want to take you back to a year and a half ago, to a horse show where you were insistent on sharing Lynlee with me.”

“I seem to remember a fellow who was hell-bent on losing his pants just so he could join us,” Blaine remarked coolly.

“Either way—whichever way it started doesn’t matter—Lynlee was in my bed, and it could’ve stopped there in that camper. Only, you were the one who said she needed more experience, felt guilty or something because you’d been in bed with so many different women. All I know is that one night, a few days after we all got back in

Anderson, the booze was flowing, the girl was hot, and you—not Lynlee—invited me to join the two of you again.”

Blaine shot Carlisle a sideways glance and Rhett was all over that. “And let’s not even start with Carlisle. I reckon you asked Lynlee if it would be all right if Carlisle came in and watched.”

“Hell, I was drunk!”

“Yep. And you should’ve sobered up long enough to tell Carlisle all he could do was sit on that window seat and eat his heart out. Instead, you asked him if he wanted Lynlee.”

“He didn’t have to say yes!”

“Ah, hell, Blaine,” Rhett said. “It’s done, man. We’ve both been in bed with her as much as you have. You had to spend nearly six months on the road. So what if we were there with her together, we still bonded with her independently. You told us not to take her to bed, one without the other, and as far as I know, Carlisle didn’t. I didn’t. But there was foreplay, a lot of sneaking around for a kiss here or there, and you knew it. Lynlee told me she told you everything!”

Blaine’s heart was in shambles, but at the same time, he was beginning to see where this was all headed, and while he faced his fears and dealt with some measure of anguish, he was beginning to find acceptance as well. Coming to terms with what he’d set in motion was a little easier when he thought about the way Lynlee enjoyed herself when she found more than one of them in her bed.

Remarkably, Royce remained quiet. Blaine decided to meet his other obstacle, take it by the horns. “Do you care about Lynlee, Royce?”

“What kind of question is that?”

“A loaded one,” Carlisle said, rubbing his jaw.

“One I’d like answered.”

“If I were you, I’d be careful, Royce,” Rhett said.

“Do you care about Lynlee?” Blaine remained persistent.

“Blaine, all of us want her safe and happy. If we didn’t, do you think we’d be here now, ready to fight off whoever is out there planning to harm her?”

Carlisle shrugged. “Man made his point, Blaine.”

“He didn’t answer the question.”

“She’s beautiful, smart, sexy, and a woman I’m comfortable around. She always has been, but am I going to do something that will jeopardize a relationship with my brother? No, Blaine. I’m not. Now if you decide—you, not me or Lynlee—that you can share her with me, too, well I gotta tell ya. I’m probably not going to turn away the opportunity. If you’re selling chances, I’m first in line to buy.”

Chapter Fourteen

Lynlee talked Lantry into riding for the forest. They galloped into the woods and came across a pond. Sliding out of her saddle, Lynlee was surprised when Lantry was there to soften her descent.

She turned around, facing him quickly as he bracketed his arms around her. Shyly, he backed away, something she was surprised to find in a McCain brother.

Leading her mount to the water, she secured her reins over the horse's head and flopped down on the ground, dusting off her hands as she noticed Lantry's uneasiness. He seemed to stand guard, his gaze darting across the short distance of the pond while he searched the hills like he expected to spot someone watching them.

"Do you think he's out there?" Lynlee asked, studying a dilapidated shack nestled between scattered witch hazels with their low branches and splayed limbs.

"Somewhere," he said, removing his cowboy hat.

Lynlee stared into Lantry's hot chocolate eyes, searching his faraway gaze for the answers he wouldn't supply. Lantry was the McCain renegade. He always kept his beard in a five o'clock shadow, a little thicker than the average man might, and his wavy dark hair fell halfway down his ears. Typically, he wore a biker's attire—leather jacket, T-shirt, and tight, dark jeans. Today, he was dressed in faded denim, rugged holes exposing his knees and a white T-shirt clinging to every muscle.

As if he knew she was summing him up, he copped a wicked smile and said, "Let me know when you're through, hon. I'm not in any hurry, Lynlee."

She jerked. "What do you mean?"

He sat next to her. "Never mind."

Feeling her skin blush, she scooted over, placing a few feet between them. She convinced herself she needed some distance, and with that reasoning came a good stout dose of knowledge. Damn if she didn't find Lantry McCain sexy, too. What was it about the McCain men? At what point had she stopped looking at them as her friends and instead viewed them, one by one, as a possible lover?

"I need you to take me back to the night you were abducted, Lynlee."

"And here I thought you just wanted to get me somewhere alone."

"Is that what you were hoping?" he asked, winking. "Probably isn't your best move right now, all things considered."

She swallowed. She'd forgotten that about Lantry. He possessed the innate ability to make her squirm. He loved to embarrass her.

"Maybe that's what you wish for, Lantry. Ever thought about that?"

He moistened his lips and glanced at the dip of her low-cut shirt. "How are you feeling, by the way? Did the ride wear you out?"

"No. I feel better than I've felt in about a week and a half."

"I guess so. You're at least conscious. That's an improvement."

She drew her knees to her chest and stared at the sorrel-colored horses. "Lee Marks won't stop until he kills me, will he?"

"Lynlee, he's not going to kill you. Thank God he didn't when he had the chance. I swear to you—he'll never have another opportunity."

"You don't know for sure, Lantry."

"I know one thing—he's gonna have a lot of cowboys standing in his way if he tries again."

"He'll try though, right?"

Lantry crossed his legs, leaned back on his elbows. He clucked once, like he was contemplating the best way to answer. Finally, he rolled over to his side and touched her hand. When his fingers rested

against her flesh, visible chill bumps rushed up and down her arm. Their eyes met. "Look at that, why don't cha?"

She swallowed hard. "I'm cold."

"It's seventy-eight degrees out here."

She started to stand up, and he pulled her down. "I'm not going to seduce you, Lynlee. Relax."

Again, they gazed into one another's eyes. And as if she'd been thinking about that very thing for years and years, she asked him, "What if I wanted you to?"

* * * *

Lantry could've taken her words and ran for home right then. He was staring at an angel, a woman with internal scars, a woman who would always know fear, thanks to that son of a bitch Lee Marks. In their defining moment, he wanted to hold her, assure her that he would never allow her any harm. But he couldn't draw her against him. He couldn't comfort her.

To show her that side of him wouldn't be right. And worse, if Lantry ever let himself go, allowed himself to pursue one moment with Lynlee, others would follow, intimate situations for which he wouldn't explain, for there would be no explanation except one—personal greed.

He caressed her hand, dragging his fingers back and forth over her wrist and arm, before he reluctantly stopped. God, what he'd give to banter back and forth, work her over with a few lines here or there to get the juices flowing. Instead, he remembered his brother.

Lynlee was his brother's wife. Blaine had Carlisle and Rhett to worry about. He didn't need his name added to the list.

Clearing his throat, Lantry said, "Walk me through what happened."

Lynlee faced him. Sitting Indian-style, she picked at firm grass blades and began with, "Blaine and I had a rough day."

"I heard. You don't have to tell me about that."

"I don't mind. The McCains don't have secrets. If they do, this one will surely come out anyway, if it hasn't already been discussed over at the shooting range."

Lantry snickered. "Wouldn't you like to be one of those bullets in a plastic case over there?"

"I'd probably be a target," she teased.

When the laughter subsided, he cupped her face and said, "Never."

Another uncomfortable silence passed, and he released her. "Tell me what happened before I get in trouble here."

Lynlee nervously tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. "Blaine's phone was dead, so he asked to borrow mine. He said he needed to talk to someone at the Wheeler feedlots. While he was on the phone, Rhett was texting...a lot. When Blaine disconnected the call, he read the text from Rhett. It was pretty personal."

"Really?" Lantry asked, definitely probing.

"Rhett asked for text sex."

Lantry snorted at that.

"Yeah, I know. Well, you'd have to understand the relationship Rhett and I have."

"Relationship?" Lantry asked, feeling a twinge of jealousy and pissed at himself for feeling envy in the first place.

"Don't pretend you don't know about us. We have a history. I'm sure you've heard all about it."

"A short one," Lantry reminded her. "It's about to get shorter, too."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, come on now, Lynlee, I mean, look at the past you have with the McCains. We were family before you married Blaine. There's nothing I don't know about you."

"You keep telling yourself that, Lantry McCain," she whispered, patting his hand until he jerked away. He was afraid of her touch, of

how her fingers raking across his made him feel as if a sudden surge of electricity zipped straight through his balls.

“Anyway,” she continued, “after the first text was behind him, Blaine read the others. For some reason I’d saved them.”

“Why?”

She shrugged. “You have to understand how things were between all of us. Before the wedding, your parents were traveling. Blaine was in Texas every week, and he knew what was going on with Carlisle and Rhett. He gave his consent, his blessing, really.”

“So Blaine knew from the beginning you were sleeping with Carlisle and Rhett when he wasn’t in town?”

“Of course, he knew. I love him.”

Lantry took a deep breath. “Do you love Rhett and Carlisle, too?”

“I thought you wanted to know what happened the night I met Marks.”

“I do, and you’re right. Don’t answer that. How you feel about Carlisle and Rhett is none of my business.”

“Are you sure about that?” she asked, the question a real humdinger.

“Don’t go there with me, Lynlee,” he warned. “You can’t handle what you’ve got, much less what you’re inviting.”

“You don’t know that,” Lynlee replied, gnawing her bottom lip. “Besides, I feel safe with you.”

“You should,” Lantry said, tipping the end of her nose with his forefinger. “I’ve been looking out for you since you were a kid.”

“Yes, but I’m not a child anymore, Lantry.”

He pushed away from the ground and stood. Pushing his fingers through his hair, he said, “Maybe we should go back to the house and talk about this.”

“I’m not ready to leave. It’s a beautiful day, and I’m content right here.”

He grunted and sat back down.

“I won’t bite, Lantry.”

“You’re hitting on me, Lynlee.”

“A little harmless flirting never hurt anyone, did it?”

“I don’t know. Is that how it started with Carlisle?”

Lynlee tilted her head and shot him a million dollar smile. “That’s exactly how everything began with Carlisle.”

Chapter Fifteen

Lynlee should've been talking to a shrink instead of confiding in Lantry. For some reason, while she was sharing the events of that fateful morning, she found herself toying with Lantry, testing the waters of endless possibilities.

The interrogator came out at some point, and Lantry would pace in front of her as he considered the various facts. Occasionally, he'd squat, look her straight in the eye, and ask another difficult question.

"So you were trying to convince Marks that Blaine was up ahead, somewhere on the beach waiting for you?"

"Yes, but I knew better. I figured Blaine wouldn't wake up. After I realized Marks posed a threat, I tried to keep him talking and walking, silently praying that someone would pass us. No one passed. The beach was deserted."

"You must've been scared to death."

"Obviously, I was terrified, but somehow I remained calm. The detectives said that's probably why I only had the one cut down my back. A police officer told me Marks has a nasty habit of slicing and dicing his victims."

Lantry's chest rose and fell more rapidly. He pursed his lips. After a moment, he said, "The officers on the scene told me there was a lot of blood."

"I'm anemic."

"That's what Blaine told me. We believe Marks was headed for Daufuskie Island, which is located near Hilton Head. After he sliced your back and saw all that blood, he may have realized you were anemic. He likes his victims coherent and generally transports them

all the same way, in an oblong freight box. His other victims were found near large containers. All the boxes had some blood in them. Your box had more and the cuts on your back weren't that deep. He must've noticed the difference, the way you bled out, and decided to wait to finish the job. Being anemic saved your life."

Suddenly, Lynlee had a thought. "Oh, my God, Lantry. He's a doctor."

"Who?"

"What do you mean, who? Lee Marks...he's a doctor."

Lantry stared at her blankly. "That would make sense, wouldn't it?"

"Yes! You don't understand. Everything about him suggests that he's educated—his mannerisms and demeanor. He's well spoken and arrogant enough to believe he can get away with anything. He told me his name for crying out loud. Why? Because he was certain he would finish the job. He had no reason to believe otherwise because he's killed over and over again, gotten away with it each time."

"Marks wouldn't be his name if he's practicing medicine. Someone would've reported him."

"Maybe he isn't practicing now, or maybe his real name is Marks but his medical license is in another name."

"I'll check that out," he said, grinning. "You're pretty bright for a dumb blonde, aren't 'cha?"

"Who says I'm a dumb blonde?"

He laughed. "I could burn my brother a new one about right now and swear it was him, couldn't I?"

"Blaine wouldn't say that."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know Blaine."

Lantry frowned, and she found his reaction peculiar. He appeared deeply troubled for a moment, and then he dropped the big question, the one she'd expected from the start. "Dad said you weren't raped. Is that the truth?"

“I wasn’t,” she snapped, leaving it at that.

“Lynlee, I’ve been following this guy for a long time. He forces the women he kills to perform fellatio on him. Most of them are raped within seconds of their final breaths but—”

“I didn’t give him a blow job,” she stated flatly.

“Good. That’s good to know. I, uh...well, I don’t think I could take it if I found out you were forced to do something you didn’t want to do.”

“Lantry, you should’ve asked Blaine about that stuff. He would’ve told you,” she said, standing. “Besides, if I’d given him head, there’s no way he would’ve been so intent on killing me.”

“Oh, yeah?” Lantry asked, following her to the pond. “Why’s that?”

She stopped abruptly and looked at him. Pure devilment danced in his eyes, and well, Lynlee sort of figured he was man enough to take whatever she dished. “Well, for starters, a man who sees a woman on her knees that likes being there would have to be a pure lunatic to kill her.”

He gulped.

“And I like it, Lantry. I enjoy it a lot.”

“You do?” he asked, a guttural edge in his voice.

“Yep,” she said saucily. “And according to Carlisle, Rhett, and Blaine, I’m pretty good at working my mouth when it’s full of something delicious and sweet.”

* * * *

If Lynlee’s intentions were to tease another McCain, she’d succeeded. Lantry watched her walk up the hill, leading the horses away from the pond. Her breasts bounced as she took long strides toward him. After she slapped his horse’s reins in his open palm, he used his free arm to catch her, securing her small frame against his hard body.

“Don’t say a word,” he said, pressing his lips against hers. “Not one word.”

Lantry lapped at her full, pouty lips, easing his tongue inside her mouth. The warmth found in her kiss soothed him. She looped her arms around his neck and kissed him like crazy, acting as if she’d hungered for him as much as he’d recently begun to long for her.

She pulled away, not entirely, but enough to fuel the longing. “Not yet, Lynlee,” he whispered across her lips. “Don’t make me stop, sugar.”

A sharp, sensual cry tore from her chest as her hands clutched his shirt. Instead of pushing him away, she drew him forward, arching against him, rubbing that sweet cunt all over his rigid cock. God help him, he was losing his mind.

He asked her not to stop him, but he hadn’t told her to encourage him.

Her talented tongue swirled around his. She sipped at the tip as she drew him forward and back, giving new meaning to the kiss the French perfected. She was slow and gentle and then ravenous and greedy until Lantry became a man on a mission, a cowboy with a purpose, and a brother without a conscience.

A breath or two later, Lantry flattened her against her mount, securing her wrists against her sides as he ground against her, kissing his way to her ear and then daring to drag his tongue along her tempting neck, tracing the tiny veins pulsing with her excitement, her intoxicating energy.

She shook herself from his grip. One hand tangled in his hair, and she forced him closer, taking his lips and sealing them with her own, wedging her willing tongue inside his mouth like a hungry vixen, an insatiable woman...his brother’s woman.

He jerked at that, grasping the concept of betrayal and understanding this was not what he wanted for Blaine and Lynlee. Her hands brushed across his chest, propelling lower, going for his belt.

“Oh, God, Lynlee,” he crooned, turning his head and nuzzling her, breathing in that rich scent of vanilla and honeydew. “You smell so good, baby, too damn fine.”

He kept telling himself to stall, or to find the strength of a real cowboy, a Southern gentleman, and put some distance between them. Instead, his thighs bunched and he lifted her to him, shifting the weight of his cock under her. The heat of her arousal tempted his erection, coaxing the lover he couldn’t wait to show her.

“Lantry,” Lynlee rasped, pure need driving the pitch. His name was the name on her lips, and his cock would soon stroke her sweet pussy. He couldn’t slow down. He wouldn’t stop himself. The need was too great, the desire already kindled, and the lust properly fed.

Yes, he was Blaine’s brother. But by damn, he was still a man!

“Ride me, sweets,” he hissed, gripping her thighs, raising her body to meet his. The clothing kept them separated, but there was something about dry humping Lynlee that made the experience personal, more intimate than he expected.

“Ah, God, Lynlee, I ought to be shot,” he mumbled, thinking his feelings for Lynlee deepened, changed altogether when he realized what the McCain family almost lost.

Lynlee pampered his lips as her legs locked around his back. “It’s so good, Lantry.”

“Ah, yes, it’s good. That’s it, sweets. Work it, baby. Ride me. Show me how you can move.” He brushed his beard across her soft cheek as he gave himself one final internal cussing, but even then, he couldn’t stop himself. He grabbed hold of his belt and just started to loosen the buckle when a shot was fired in the distance.

“Fuck! Get down!” he yelled, cradling her under his much larger form.

“Lantry!” she screeched, looking up at him with pure fear marking her eyes.

God help him, what had he done? What kind of danger gathered while he’d pursued a woman who wasn’t his to chase?

Another blast of gunfire resounded around them. Several shots bounced off the hills, giving the impression of a good old-fashioned shoot-out.

“Stay down,” he warned.

“Lantry, I’m scared!”

“Don’t be afraid, Lynlee. I’ve got ya. I won’t let anything happen to you. We’ve got this. Do you hear me?” He framed her face and pressed his forehead against hers.

“I know, Lantry. I trust you. Just get us out of this.”

He yanked a gun from his belt and another from his boot. He placed a small pistol in her hands, clasping her fingers around the grip. His body hovered over hers, and he caged her between himself and her horse, providing enough shelter to protect her. “Get down, Lynlee. If something happens, you shoot. Understand?”

“Yes,” she choked out.

He peered over his horse’s back and her shoulder. Lynlee’s breath was ragged. Her breasts heaved against his chest while his heart thumped against his own, practically knocking the wind out of him. While he’d been kissing Lynlee, taking intimate experiences that weren’t his to have, someone had snuck up on them.

Fuck! What kind of man put his own needs before the life of the woman he vowed to protect?

He wondered then. As he scoured the property, the barbwire fences on the other side of a distant stream, he asked himself what he’d been thinking when he’d pursued Lynlee. Hadn’t he known he’d get drunk on her taste? Hadn’t he realized one kiss would lead to another, and one feel of her hot body rubbing against his would only make him crave something more satisfying, far more intense?

Of course he’d known! And he still didn’t give a damn.

“Do you see anybody?” Lynlee asked in a small voice.

“No,” Lantry replied hoarsely. “But that’s not good enough. Grab the cell out of my front pocket. Call Blaine. Tell him where we are,

and tell him to get down here and pick you up now. You're not moving until they get here."

Lynlee hurriedly fumbled for his phone. She followed Lantry's instructions. "Hurry, Lantry thinks Marks may be here. We're down at the pond on the lower end. You need to pick me up now."

When she slapped the phone closed and returned the device to his jeans, she said, "By the size of that thing, I'd say you're using a gunshot fired in the distance to keep me close."

He ground against her once and grinned. "Lynlee, after that kiss, you have no idea what I have on my mind."

Lynlee smiled, and his heart, what was left of the part she hadn't already stolen, melted. "You think I'm sexy." She practically sang as she teased him. "You think I'm pretty."

"Sugar, I'm thinking a right smart more than about your looks," he assured her, glancing down at the angel he held in his arms. "And you need to behave until your husband gets here. Otherwise, I may not be able to keep my promise."

"And what promise is that?" she asked, batting those long eyelashes.

"I told you I'd keep you safe. That's what I plan to do, only right now, I'm sort of worried about other pressing matters. I'm terrified if Blaine doesn't hurry up and get down here, I'm gonna fuck the life out of ya regardless of who is out there watchin' us. If I do that once Lynlee, I may decide the only way to protect you is to keep you in my arms."

Chapter Sixteen

Lynlee walked inside the house with Blaine, Rhett, and Carlisle. Royce stayed behind with Lantry, so they could ride back together.

“Are you feeling okay?” Blaine asked, brushing her bangs away from her face.

“I could use something to drink,” she responded, heading for the wet bar. She retrieved a bottle of water and sat on the sofa, immediately drawing her knees to her chest.

“What happened out there?” Blaine asked, pinning his gaze to hers.

“Lantry wanted to know about the night I was kidnapped. I walked him through everything step by step. We were getting ready to head back here, and a gun was fired in the distance. I really don’t think it was Marks.”

“How would you know, Lynlee?” Carlisle asked, stomping toward them. “Do you think Marks will shoot off a flare, give us some kind of warning before he tries for you again?”

“That’s enough, Carlisle,” Rhett said, sitting beside her and looking at her like he could eat her up.

“Don’t you butt in here, Rhett,” Blaine accused. “Carlisle is right. Lynlee is gonna have to understand something, if nothing else. Lee Marks wants *her*. He’s gonna try his damndest to get to her. If she doesn’t come to terms with that and start taking the same precautions we are, she could end up chop suey!”

“Here now!” Lantry yelled, entering through the front hall. He stormed across the room, tossing his cowboy hat on an end table as he passed. “What the hell are you doing badgering her like that?”

“Oh, dear God,” Carlisle said, eyeing Lynlee and then shifting his complete focus toward Lantry.

“Did ya have a nice ride?” Rhett asked, picking up on what must’ve been the obvious.

“Grand,” Lantry bit out. “Blaine, there’s no sense in scaring her like that.”

“The hell there isn’t,” Blaine said. “Ask her what she just told me!”

Lantry released an exasperated sigh. “Lynlee?”

“I told him we heard a gunshot fired and that I didn’t think it was Marks.”

He narrowed his gaze on her chest. He bit his bottom lip and looked like he was trying his best to bite back a smile, too.

“Well?” Blaine asked. “See why I’m upset? She thinks this is a game.”

“Like hell, Blaine,” Lantry said.

“Oh, yeah? How would you know? You don’t know Lynlee like I know her.”

Lantry shrugged. “Outside of the fact that you’ve been in her bed and I haven’t, I tend to disagree. Let me remind you of who got stuck babysitting Lynlee when she was a kid. While you and Carlisle were out late at night partying, Royce and I had kid-duty.”

“I’m not a kid,” Lynlee reminded him, her statement followed by a quick pursuit of that hard body he’d pushed up against hers only an hour earlier.

“Sorry, hon,” he said, too affectionately. “But yes, back when Mom and Dad couldn’t keep the younger McCains committed to the camping experience, Royce and I were called upon for babysitting services. We entertained you because your dad and ours paid us to babysit.”

“They had to pay you?” She grunted at that. “You should’ve considered the experience a privilege.”

Lantry's nose twitched. "I hate to break it to you, but back then, we charged for our services."

She slapped her palms against the leather sofa and rose to her feet. "Well, looks like things haven't changed much since then, have they?" She stormed toward the foyer.

"What are you talking about?" Blaine asked, following her.

"Why don't you ask him!" she exclaimed, pointing toward Lantry. "He's still getting paid for his services!"

* * * *

Lynlee disappeared upstairs. Royce was right behind her.

Blaine glared at Lantry until he finally decided to just lay everything out on the table. "I kissed her."

"What?" Carlisle and Blaine screeched at the same time.

Rhett spread his arms over the back of the sofa, crossing his left leg over his right. "The shit just keeps gettin' deeper and deeper."

"And I plan to fuck her, too," Lantry told them, trying out honesty rather than taking the approach the other two had used. Denial hadn't worked for Rhett and Carlisle. Avoiding Lynlee or the feelings she stirred inside him wouldn't do any of them a bit of good.

"Oh, dear God," Rhett said, rolling his eyes.

"Is that right?" Blaine asked, studying Carlisle rather than Lantry.

"That's about the truth as I see it," Lantry replied, standing outside of striking distance on the chance Blaine decided to throw his best punch.

Rhett sniffed, fighting back a grin, no doubt. "So, Lantry, when did you reach this decision? I mean, is Lynlee gonna be another notch in the belt, and if so, which belt are you on now, number five, or is it twenty-five?"

"This doesn't concern you, Rhett," Lantry said from the corner of his mouth.

“The hell it doesn’t,” Carlisle interjected. “While you were gone, Blaine agreed to something that might interest you.”

“Oh yeah?” Lantry asked, realizing Blaine would do the right thing and share what was never really his to control in the first place. “Mind letting me in on the big secret?”

Blaine grunted. He looked at Carlisle’s blank expression and then studied Rhett’s more amused one. Then, he stomped over to the steps and yelled, “Lynlee! Get down here!”

Chapter Seventeen

“Lynlee is resting,” Royce announced, standing at the landing overlooking the foyer.

“Well ain’t that just convenient?” Blaine said, scratching his head. “Tell you what, Lantry, you said you had big ideas. Why don’t you go on upstairs and test that for yourself?”

Lantry traipsed across the hardwood floor, his boots making a pronounced sound as he pursued what he wanted, something he planned to acquire.

“I wouldn’t do that, if I were you,” Rhett warned. “You’re putting Lynlee in a bad situation.”

“The hell I am,” Lantry said, slapping Blaine on the back as he headed toward the bedrooms. “I suspect Blaine here will be right behind me.”

Royce arched a brow when they passed him. “Are you sure about this, Blaine?”

Blaine shrugged. “If this is what Lynlee wants, this is what she’s gonna get.”

“You know no one would fault you if you put your foot down and told all of us no.”

Carlisle sneered. “Speak for yourself, Royce.”

Royce kept his eyes pinned to Blaine. “Give us a minute, Carlisle.”

Carlisle started to say something and Royce cut him off, “I said give us a minute, and damn you, I have a right to talk to Blaine in private. I don’t have a dick in this pussy, and I intend to have a word with my brother before I do.”

When Carlisle, Lantry, and Rhett disappeared into Lynlee's room, Blaine said, "He's gonna love her. I can't stop that. It's like a curse. I picked the one woman who was born with a McCain brand stamped on her pretty ass."

"Blaine, she's your wife. She picked you, married ya. Far as I know, there isn't a clause engraved on a marriage certificate that says a man is required to share his wife with his brothers and best friend."

"Maybe not," Blaine said. "But that's what Lynlee wants."

"How do you know? Have you asked her?" Royce persisted. "Have you?"

Blaine shook his head before he bowed it. "Things just got out of hand, Royce. You don't understand. Lantry was right about one thing. I took a virgin to bed, and then I put her in a situation where I expected her to fool around with Carlisle and Rhett. Hell, I even enjoy her most when we're all in bed with her. After we were married...I don't know, I guess I just expected her to cut off her feelings when I said playtime was over."

"What you're allowing here is more than fun and games, Blaine. Someone could get hurt."

"So far the only one hurting is Lynlee. Look at what happened. Do you honestly think Lynlee would've been on that beach alone if she'd had all of us there looking out for her?"

"You can't blame yourself."

"I do. I pointed my finger and accused Carlisle. I've blamed Rhett, too. Heck, I've even wondered if Lantry isn't responsible since he's the one who spent the last few years tracking this son of a bitch."

"If you're gonna shake fingers, then resting 'em on him is probably the most accurate assumption, but Blaine, why does anyone have to be blamed with anything? The past is behind you. The best you can do now as Lynlee's husband is love and protect her in the future."

"That's right. And who better to protect her than a man who loves her?"

“That’s what I’m saying.”

“Yes, but you aren’t hearing me.”

Royce arched a brow.

“I know you care about Lynlee, too. Carlisle and Rhett love her. Hell, Lantry was bold enough to tell me he’d kissed her and planned on fucking her. Do you honestly think he doesn’t care something about her?”

“We’ve known Lynlee her entire life. Of course we care about her, Blaine.”

“Yes, and like you said, who can protect Lynlee better than a man in love? Who can and will keep her safer than the McCains?”

* * * *

Lynlee rolled over and threw her right arm over her head. She opened her eyes and stared into Lantry’s.

She smiled. “Hi.”

Lantry’s large hands worked over his buttons. She watched his fingers as they slid the glossy white beads away from the material one by one. He shrugged out of his shirt and never turned away. “If you plan on saying no, now would probably be the best time to do that.”

Lynlee swallowed. Under the sheet, she pinched her thigh. Was this a dream? Rhett and Carlisle entered the room. Royce and Blaine were behind them.

She peered over Lantry’s shoulder. “Blaine?”

“I’m fine with this, Lynlee. Are you?”

She moistened her lips and stared at Lantry’s. “You must’ve been persuasive.”

“I am.”

“You always get what you want, don’t you?”

“I don’t wait for what I want, Lynlee. I take what’s mine to have.”

“Like me?”

“Exactly like you,” he whispered, yanking her from the bed and claiming her lips, selfishly wedging his tongue inside her mouth until their hot kiss nearly burned her lips.

Her fingers raked over his broad shoulders until she felt guilty for being so greedy in front of the others. Lantry was eating her alive, making her ache for his touch, but the only thing they were doing was a little smooching, a good bit of necking.

Their kiss broke, and Lynlee tried to steady her ragged breathing. She crossed one arm over the other and pulled the hem of her short silk nightshirt, yanking the material over her head.

“Dear God, woman, I forgot how beautiful you are,” Carlisle said in the distance.

She smiled when she heard his voice, closed her eyes, and even savored the pitch. Blaine’s lips were at her back. She knew the shape of them, felt the agonized way his mouth traveled over what promised to leave a permanent jagged scar, the eerie pattern left behind by a madman’s weapon.

“So, little lady,” Lantry said, rubbing his thumbs over her pointed nipples. “What’s it going to be?”

“Blaine?” She turned her head to the side and Blaine cupped her chin.

“Lynlee, do you love me?”

“You know how much,” she whispered as his lips brushed hers. “I’ll always love you.”

“And you love Carlisle and Rhett?”

“They know I do,” she breathed, nuzzling him, hoping this wasn’t a dream, willing this moment to last forever. The excitement and energy was overpowering, like nothing she’d ever experienced.

“Then show them,” he said, backing away from the bed.

Lantry left her then. His eyes heated her to the quick as he backed away long enough to disrobe, kicking off his boots and then releasing his belt and zipper. He peeled off his jeans and briefs, taking hold of

one well-stocked member, a cock she'd heard beauty shop tales about soon after she arrived in Anderson.

Apparently, in matters of size and ability, Lantry was well credited for past performances. Her mouth watered thinking about the current one in progress.

Carlisle and Rhett were familiar with her body, and she was equally acquainted with them. They joined her on the bed. Carlisle, dragging her over him, began massaging her shoulders. His fingers caressed her back before he gently traced the healing wound.

In the moment, Lynlee felt guilty. Because of her decision to walk down that dark beach, the men in her room, the men she'd cared about for most of her life, were destined to carry the blame that was ultimately only hers. She noticed the way Blaine winced as he focused on Carlisle, as if he thought Carlisle's hand evoked pain, a reminder of what she'd suffered and endured.

Lantry watched her, tilting his head right and left as he studied the way Carlisle maneuvered her one way and then another. "Damn, you're beautiful."

"She is, now," Blaine drawled. "I'm a lucky man."

"Well, I'm damn sure glad you're generous, little brother," Lantry said, his hooded eyes filled with pure lust. "After seeing her like this, I swear I'd be the lesser man."

There was something dark and seductive in Lantry's voice. To add to his alluring qualities, he possessed tortured eyes. The truth that he perhaps tried to conceal had been revealed.

Lynlee's suspicions about Lantry began at the wedding. He attempted to bury the attraction, his interest, but their chemistry was too strong, nearly overpowering.

Lantry's attraction wasn't new. His desire for her may have been one he'd fought, perhaps even tried to convince himself it wasn't anything more than a passing crush or maybe an admiration. Now, there was no way to deny what they felt for one another.

Lynlee imagined whatever Lantry felt in the past, he'd never planned to let things progress to this.

Carlisle lifted her up, massaging her lower back with his thumbs as he pressed against her globes. "That's it, baby. Relax."

She searched the room for Royce. In the corner, he sat with his legs splayed, hands dropped casually between his legs. A few times, he ran his hand through his short, sandy brown hair, and his turquoise eyes pierced through hers.

Was he judging her? No, that's not what she saw. He longed to join them and awaited his turn. Royce's expression was all male, the proof of his interest oozing from his sensual mouth as he wet his lips and rolled his tongue over them. His eyes grew heavy and his hard penis pressed against his snug jeans.

Finally, Royce stood. Using the toe of one boot, he rid himself of the other, stripping away his button-down shirt.

Rhett parted her knees, his fingers digging into her flesh. He positioned himself over her. In one fluid motion, he spread her wider, lying between her legs and immediately finding his own special place, rubbing her clit until she was moaning, arching, pleading for more.

Lantry knelt to the bed, fisting his cock and rubbing his way through the seam of her lips. "So I hear the lady has a special talent."

Carlisle grunted. "Rest assured, you've got one of the best positions in the house."

"And here I was beginning to think you do," Lantry said, dragging his cock back and forth, encircling her lips with his tip.

Carlisle fumbled with her nipples, twirling them between his fingers and thumbs. Lantry growled when Carlisle released them. He pinched a beaded nipple as soon as the point was exposed. Rhett's palms flattened on either side of her hips, and he kissed her belly, licking his way to her mound where he flicked her clit again and again, licking the hard gem until her hips shot off the bed.

Lynlee whimpered, enjoying the attention. Rhett loved her again. His tongue plunged inside her pussy as he ate her, sipping at her juices like a man gone wild, a carnal beast forever unleashed.

Carlisle's mouth covered her ear. "Enjoy us, Lynlee. Nothing has changed. Everything is still the same. Relax, honey."

But Carlisle was wrong.

This wasn't identical to any experience she'd enjoyed in the past. This moment was like an aphrodisiac, a remarkable memory-in-the-making she wanted to frame, permanently record for later instant recall. Oh, God, yes, this hour trumped all others. Surely the foreplay surpassed all life's precious moments, even though they moved rather quickly toward the end. The connection she wanted established was nearly complete.

Her gaze swept over one handsome man after the next, settling on Lantry. He teased her, tantalized her with the taste of him, the tiny speckle of his lust crowning his engorged head.

Blaine sat next to her. Royce joined them. Carlisle spread her cheeks, parting her ass with the tip of his cock. Lantry claimed her mouth. And Rhett? Rhett shifted his weight and changed his position, his palms flat next to her hips. Lynlee barely had time to prepare for the torpedo Rhett launched, but when his body lowered to hers, she rose to meet him, rolling her hips forward and arching for penetration, anticipating the incredible way he'd fill her.

Rhett's steely cock parted her folds. He gave one rushed thrust, pounding his way inside her cunt until she was writhing under the weight of his body, her pussy convulsing as he stroked her.

"Ah, Rhett! Right there!"

"Yes, honey. I know what you like," Rhett crooned, fucking her like he'd waited long enough, like he'd never stand in the shadows and patiently await his turn again.

Chapter Eighteen

Lantry couldn't believe what he was watching. The little vixen's body moved under Rhett like a woman who couldn't get enough of sex. She came alive with the penetration, bucking underneath him, tossing her head from side to side, and the pleasure, oh, God, the pleasure marked her face the moment Rhett buried his cock inside her.

Postponing his own measure of bliss, Lantry slanted his lips over hers and tasted her sweet kiss again. Her satisfaction rocked through his senses. The way she responded was remarkable. She possessed few, if any, reservations.

Her palm flattened against his head. She sipped at his lips, leading the way while dueling his tongue. Lynlee made a fine art out of kissing, and they lost themselves in their own special place.

"I'm coming," she whispered against his lips, as if telling him of her gratification was the most natural thing in the world.

"Not yet you don't," Carlisle rasped, literally sliding her over him, causing a break in Rhett's uneven strokes.

Carlisle pressed forward on her hips. Her body positioned in an arc before falling over him again. This time when she landed against his chest, her expression was different, a look of complete fulfillment washed over her. She moaned aloud, bucking wildly with the force of dual penetration.

Beads of sweat poured from Rhett's brow. His pace was slower after Carlisle gained his place, setting a new pace.

Lantry watched the way they fucked her, eyeing Blaine and wondering, just for a second, how he could allow his wife the

opportunity to participate in something like this. Bringing his cock to her lips again, Lantry was reluctant to seal the deal. He pumped his thick flesh through his fingertips, rubbing the crest over the shape of her mouth.

Her hot little tongue whipped around the top, and she sucked, drawing him between her lips. She wasted no time taking him to her throat, moaning as she sipped and swallowed, her reflexes conditioned to do a woman's job, a lover's work.

Lantry thrust between her lips. He admired the woman he'd known for too many years to even consider her as a lover, but in that moment he knew love. He embraced the kind of passion he'd suspected as dormant, lying still, awaiting him.

Maybe he'd always anticipated a delicious connection just like this. And while he should've been afraid of the emotions Lynlee stirred within him, he just couldn't get enough.

* * * *

Lynlee's body was sensitized. She was drowning in heat, the kind of hotness guaranteed to make a woman sizzle. Her right hand found Blaine's cock. Her left was guided toward Royce's as Royce's fingers laced through hers.

Blaine pushed the weight of his dick through her hand. She squeezed and released both Royce and Blaine, taking hold of them as deliberately as she sucked for Lantry's satisfaction. She longed for the delicious taste of a sated man, a man she wanted oozing down her throat, slivering across her tongue as her senses filled with the rich scent of his release.

"Oh, shit!" Rhett yelled, changing his gait and then fucking her wild, holding her legs further apart. She bent her knees, allowed him to push them toward her chest. Blaine and Royce inched away, giving Rhett plenty of room to give his all and make a nice finish.

And Lynlee was lost. She pumped the two cocks in tightly clenched fists, indulging in the way skin overlapped skin. Lantry stroked her cheek with his fingertips, looking at her like he already admired her, maybe even loved her.

“That’s it!” Rhett screamed. “Ah, yeah, baby. Roll those pretty hips this way.”

She flattened her feet against the mattress. Carlisle gave her strength, pushing her forward and pulling her back, helping her meet Rhett stroke for stroke, thrust after thrust.

Lantry flinched. His sweet and spicy taste drizzled across her tongue. He was ready. Reluctantly, she released Blaine and Royce, realizing they wouldn’t be without her attention long.

She cupped Lantry’s sac, pressed her thumb to his base, and gave him something to think about, something she hoped he’d later dream about. She tightened her suction and enveloped his penis, using her hand to draw him forward and back, devouring the end like he was her new favorite candy.

“Fuck!” Lantry screamed, thrusting between her cheeks.

Lynlee’s hands dropped to her breasts. She twirled her nipples. A hazy look of pure joy washed over Rhett, a lover she’d known intimately. He was willing to let go of his angst, not to mention a release he’d held in reserve just for her.

And it didn’t come a minute too soon.

“Right here, baby,” Carlisle crooned, pumping his thick dick inside her hole. She couldn’t help but squirm as he locked himself inside her channel, fully buried between her cheeks. He stroked her, meeting Rhett fuck for fuck.

They hammered inside her as her body undulated with theirs. Blaine rubbed his cock against her breasts. Lynlee shivered when the new sensation inspired her, made her wet and eager, lust rushing over her like a warm, new tidal wave, wrought with the many pleasures found in the highest of seas. Royce watched, lust gathering behind his

dark eyes as the others took her, screwed her, made her feel completely desirable all over again.

The hot stream of Lantry's cum jetted across her tongue and awakened her palate until she was swallowing over and over again. She drank in the essence of another McCain and wondered if he'd ever look at her the same way again, like he had when they'd been seated by the pond.

Whatever apprehension she endured disintegrated as Carlisle nuzzled her hair and whispered, "Come, baby. Let us watch that pretty body move."

Rhett forged ahead. Carlisle pounded from behind, taking her rear like a real prize.

Lynlee grabbed hold of the greatest orgasm of her life, the kind of climax that just kept coming and coming. Kind of like the men surrounding her.

* * * *

Royce waited until Carlisle, Lantry, and Rhett left the room. Then, he drew Lynlee in his arms and held her. Brushing her hair away from her face, he looked at her like he'd looked at her a thousand times as a lover, not as the child who used to run around the campground waiting to tease him about another girl she'd caught him kissing.

His lips fed from hers. He took his own sweet time, loving on them, showing her affection as his hands wandered, gliding down the curve of her breasts, sliding over her hips until he tucked them behind her, cupping her ass.

Blaine was on the bed. Acting like a cocky man who realized he'd never go home with anything less than first prize, he pumped his cock in and out of his hand, watching as Royce and Lynlee made out, pursuing one another like lovers searching for the good stuff.

"Come here, Lynlee. I want you to give me head, sugar."

Royce shot him a disapproving glare.

“She likes sucking cock,” Blaine said, grabbing her by the hair of her head and kissing her hard on the mouth before she broke the kiss and headed down his belly, tracing the scattered dark hairs across his stomach as she made her way toward his thick dick.

Spread across the bed, she towered over Blaine, bringing herself up to all fours on purpose. Maybe Royce would take the opportunity and claim her ass as his, but Royce had other things in store.

His careening hand fell to her hip. He smoothed his palm across her flesh and then smacked her so hard she fell face forward against Blaine. “Ouch!”

“What the fuck, Royce?” Blaine screeched.

“Lynlee’s been a bad little girl,” Royce told him, biting her playfully on the hip. “I think she needs a spanking.”

Lynlee gulped. Blaine shook his head. “You don’t have to do this.”

Taking his hand in hers, Lynlee shoved his fingers between her legs and said, “Do I feel like a woman who’s opposed to an erotic spanking?”

A devilish smile curved his mouth as his fingers danced inside her pussy. “You know what? Royce may have to spank that pretty tail more often.”

She wiggled her butt, and Royce apparently saw a green light on her bare bottom. He delivered a few more smart swats while Blaine fingered her cunt, wedging three fingers inside her and driving her to another orgasm. The intense pleasure made her shake so violently, he rose to a seated position and held her, forcing her to experience ecstasy, ride out the climax, and own it.

After he withdrew from her body, she lowered her head over him, sipping at his tip and loving the way her husband’s cock swelled between her lips as she drew him inside her mouth inch by inch. That’s when Royce spread her and came to his knees behind her.

Using the lube one of the guys left behind when they headed for the showers, Royce doused himself in the oily substance. He entered

her, grabbing hold of a handful of hair as he came over her, fucking her like this was his one and only chance.

And by the look on Blaine's face, for a minute, she wondered if it was. Only that's when things changed considerably.

Royce used her hair to Blaine's advantage, riding her like a trained mare, forcing her head up and down over Blaine's lap as he fucked her ass, made her cream until she was dying for another, one more cock to fully sate her.

"Fuck!" Blaine said, sitting up and watching her go at him like forbidden fruit. She cupped his balls, treasured them as she bathed them with her tongue, handling them like jewels before she dropped her head over him again and devoured him, sucking him to her throat for one good final blow.

Then, when Royce gave her the first opportunity, she mounted Blaine, gave Royce her hips, taking turns bucking against Royce and riding Blaine.

Seconds passed, they were still at it. They shared her without conditions or rules, and she enjoyed the way they rocked her, fucking her in tandem, screwing her as if they'd orchestrated the entire event from start to finish.

When the climax came, the *oohs* and *ahs* were equally synchronized as Blaine pulled her forward and Royce tugged her back. Her body was well drenched in the evidence of pleasure, the satisfying aftermath of some mighty fine loving.

Chapter Nineteen

A gun was slapped against Blaine's chest in the middle of the night. "We think he's here," Rhett said in a scratchy voice. "Royce, Carlisle, and Lantry are outside tracking him."

"What time is it?" Rhett whispered, easing Lynlee away from his arms and glancing down when she stirred beside him.

"Three o'clock. Somebody tried to get in the sunroom and activated the alarm."

"I slept through that?"

"Like a baby," Rhett reported, grinning. "Our girl wore you out."

Blaine groaned, picked up her hand, and pointed toward the wedding ring on Lynlee's finger. "My girl, Rhett. She's still married to me. That's not changing. Lynlee is shared when I say she's shared. Got it?"

"Uh, I hope you don't mind my pointing this out, but I really think we can talk about this at a better time, like say when there isn't a serial killer lurking outside!"

About that time, Lantry rushed in the bedroom. He flipped the light switch and the overhead bulbs beamed down on Lynlee. "He's here. We're certain."

Lynlee sat straight up all at once and glared at Lantry's gun. "What are you doing with *that*?"

"Hurry," Blaine said, yanking her out of bed. With Rhett's help, they dressed her in a T-shirt, blue jeans, and boots before she had time to object.

"Lantry?" she screeched, pointing at his pistol. "You promised me."

Blaine and Lantry locked eyes. In that moment, Blaine saw the future. Lantry had always had his way with women. Lantry was a protector, a leader, and the one man he was certain could and would save his wife's life. Taking her head in his hands, Blaine placed a kiss on her forehead. He kissed her so hard he was shocked he didn't leave the imprint of his lips embedded in her skin. "Lynlee, listen to me."

She was shaking so violently, he drew her against him and stared at Lantry as he spoke. "I want you with Lantry right now."

"What?"

"Listen to me. You listen to me well. There's a truck downstairs in the basement garage. I want you and Lantry in it, and I want you out of here. Lantry will protect you. Do you hear me? Lantry can get you out of here and guard you at the same time. He knows people. He can take you somewhere safe and keep you there until you can come home to me."

Lynlee quickly backed away from him. She searched his eyes before glancing at Rhett.

"Listen to him, Lynlee. We don't have time to fool around here."

"I don't want to leave you!" she cried, turning her focus to Lantry. "I don't want to leave any of you behind!"

Rhett nodded toward Lantry. "We'll have her ready in five. Anyone going with you?"

"I need a driver who can make sure we get away without a tail. Get Carlisle."

"Where is he?" Blaine asked.

Before Lantry could answer, the lights went out. Lantry hurried inside the room, slammed the door, and locked it behind him. "Damn it! Now it's too late for that. We've gotta get her out of here now!"

Rhett rushed in the bathroom and tried the light switch there. "Fuck! He's cut the lines."

"Damn genius," Blaine mumbled. "Did you buy that common sense, or was it instilled at birth?"

Lantry tossed Blaine a flashlight. "You and Rhett stick together. Listen to me. Marks knows who's here and what he's up against, and he still came anyway. He's prepared, and he's here with the intention to kill as many of us as he can. I've got Lynlee. We're going room by room until we make it to the basement. If you see Carlisle, have him meet us in the garage. If not, I'll keep her safe, and I'll keep her alive. If we make it through those gates, you know we're okay and we're out. You trust that. Understand?"

"Yes," Blaine replied, watching as Rhett emptied cosmetics, clothing, and other Lynlee-items into a duffel bag.

"We'll be in touch in a few days."

Blaine kissed Lynlee and hugged Lantry. "Take care of our girl."

"I thought she was your girl," Rhett grumbled.

"She is," he said, winking at Lynlee and tilting her chin toward his before taking a final kiss. "But right now I have to share."

Rhett pinched her on the bottom and said, "You behave, baby."

"You, too."

"I love you," Rhett mouthed.

"I love you, too," she said aloud. "Blaine?"

"I know," he said, winking. "You're my heart, Lynlee. Always."

Rhett and Blaine disappeared down the hall, and Lantry pressed his ear to the door soon after they closed it behind them. "All right, sweet thing, let's see if we can't make it to the other side of the morning."

Chapter Twenty

Rushing down the hallway, Lantry held fast to Lynlee's hand as he dragged her through the darkness. "Stay down," he whispered. "If he comes up behind you, squeeze my hand."

"I'm scared, Lantry," she said, breaking his heart as her grip tightened.

"I know," he whispered, turning to look at her. The catastrophe of a man's existence—or at least his—was discovered right there in that moment, and damn if the timing couldn't have been any worse.

Lantry was head-over-heels in love with Lynlee. Not only would he die protecting her, but he would also send any bastard straight to hell if they came within inches of harming her.

The moonlight cast an unusual gleam on her cheeks, and he noticed the trickling tears, the silent evidence of fright looming in her eyes. Instead of pursuing the stairs, he pushed her inside the half-bath and drew her against him after shining the flashlight around the small space.

"I don't want to die, Lantry!" she gasped, the obvious fight in her voice long gone before she apparently gave herself a chance to realize her own inner strength.

"You listen to me, Lynlee. Are you listening?" he asked, bunching handfuls of hair as he held her face in his hands.

She nodded.

"You are not going to die. Do you hear me?" He kissed her hard, pressing his dry lips against hers and defying his need to feed from them. "All right then. Let's get out of here. Walk fast. Don't lag behind."

He slid the strap of her overnight bag around his neck and took a firm hold on her right hand again. "Okay. Let's go. No stopping until we're in the truck. Do you hear me?"

"Yes," she said, barely offering her compliance.

Then, Lantry swung open the door. To his surprise, he was met with a fiery gaze, one he quickly dimmed when he raised his gun and pulled the trigger.

"Oh, God! Help! Somebody help us!" Lynlee cried out, covering her face and screaming bloody hell.

"What the fuck is going on up there?" Carlisle yelled. "Is somebody down? Who fired?"

"We're all right!" Lantry held Lynlee against him as she bawled like a baby, trembling in his arms. He pressed his head against the wall, glaring at the fallen body at his feet. Gulping for air, he tried to remain calm. Attempting to gather his senses, Lantry took in the death surrounding them, the corpse of the man he'd long since wanted, the murderer he'd wanted to stop.

"Lynlee!" Blaine hollered. "Lantry! Are you all right?"

Running. Everyone was running toward them.

"Lantry! Damn it to hell, answer me!" Blaine screamed.

Lantry tugged Lynlee still closer, holding her as she shook beneath his heavy arms, limbs that seemed rigid, heavier than usual. "We're okay!"

Lynlee continued to squeal. Lantry held her head in his splayed palm. "It's all right, baby. I've gotcha. I've gotcha, and I'm never letting go."

Blaine and Rhett ran down the hall. Flashlights cast beams from all directions. Carlisle and Royce appeared from the other end, tripping up the steps as they tried to keep from stepping on the one slumped to the floor, the man who'd met an unexpected death.

"Is he dead?" Royce asked, shining his light on Lee Marks's body.

"If he's not, then he's seconds away from a final breath," Carlisle said, nudging him with his foot until he turned him.

Still, set eyes stared back at them, wide and observant, just as they'd been when Lantry had opened the bathroom door. "Shit," Blaine muttered, looking away.

"Blaine, get Lynlee out of here," Lantry said, trying to pass her off to Blaine.

Lynlee draped her arms around Lantry's neck, refusing to let him go. Coming apart in his arms, she quivered all over as her tears soaked his shirt.

"Let Blaine take you, honey."

"I...I..." She was unable to choke out the rest.

"Lynlee, listen to me," Lantry whispered, trying to unhook her arms, secured tighter around his neck. "He's dead, honey. He can't hurt you now, and I need to talk to the locals when they get here. We need to get this mess cleaned up."

"Oh, God," she choked out. "Mess. What mess?"

"Lynlee, come on, baby." Blaine tried to soothe her, stroking her back. "Just keep your eyes closed, and let me get you out of here. We'll take care of you. Come on, baby."

With some reassurance, she reluctantly slid away from Lantry's arms and fell against Blaine, burying her face in his neck. He picked her up and cradled her small form against him.

Lantry had never been so torn, but Lynlee was where she should've been—in her husband's arms. "Rhett, stay with them. Make sure Lynlee has everything she needs."

"I'll see if he cut the lines or just hit the breaker box," Royce volunteered, stepping over Lee Marks's dead body.

Carlisle knelt beside the criminal's corpse about the time Lantry's cell rang. "Did you call the police?"

"No," Carlisle replied. "Royce said you wanted to handle this, and apparently you did what you set out to do."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Lantry asked, answering the phone at the same time. "This is Lantry McCain. Hang on a second."

Carlisle tugged a piece of crumpled paper from the dead man's grasp. "I think you made the right choice, Lantry. That's all I'm saying. You made a decision and put a plan in motion. It paid off. A man who deserved to be put down like a rabid dog won't stand trial. He won't sit in a cell and revel in a limelight he doesn't deserve while using up taxpayers' dollars. He won't be fed and boarded better than the homeless people who are out there searching for shelter. You killed a man who took the lives of many. In my book, that's justice."

Carlisle unraveled the paper and glared down, reading something as Lantry returned to his call. "This is Lantry McCain. Who is this?"

"My name isn't important. I'm the man who is picking up where Lee Marks left off. Tell me something, McCain, does Lynlee taste as good as she looks?" An evil chuckle filled the line.

Carlisle rose in slow motion, still reading whatever he'd discovered in Marks's hand. "Lantry, you need to take a look at this."

Lantry waved Carlisle away, clutching the phone and pacing down the hall. "What do you want?"

"I want what your brother and that friend of his are holding in their arms right now as we're speaking. I want what you and the others enjoyed last night. I deserve what every McCain man apparently shares. I want the one who got away."

"Who. Is. This?" Lantry bellowed, rage pumping through his veins.

Carlisle stood inches from him. He held up a letter and Lantry shone his flashlight over the lettering, trying to skim over it as he spoke to a madman. About that time a hissing sound filled the hallways, resounding like a generator more than a heating and cooling unit. The lights blinked overhead.

"I'm outside, McCain. Knock. Knock. It's time to let Lynlee's real killer come in and play."

The line went dead.

"Hurry!" Lantry screamed. "Get Lynlee. We've gotta get her out of here!"

Chapter Twenty-One

Four Hours Later - Columbia, South Carolina

Carlisle and Lantry stood over Lynlee, watching her sleep. They'd checked in at an extended stay lodge located next to the interstate where guests lodging there easily walked to various retail shops and restaurants.

Soon after they arrived, Carlisle went to a local twenty-four-hour superstore and purchased clothing, swimwear, and groceries, anything they might need over the course of a week. Then, he delivered the goods, returned to the superstore, left the truck in an inconspicuous location, and took a cab back to the hotel.

"At least we're in good company," Carlisle said, brushing her hair away from her face.

"Yeah," Lantry remarked somewhat weakly, taking one last look at Lynlee before returning to the living area, where he sat on the sofa.

"Did you report the letter to the police?" Carlisle asked.

"I kept a copy and left the original for Blaine. He'll hand it off to the detective working the case. Dad should be there by now. He'll know how to handle this."

"You're okay, though, right?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" Lantry asked.

"You killed a man at point-blank range tonight. I'd say that's enough to rattle even you."

"Killing would have bothered me if the target hadn't been a vicious animal. Maybe I was shook up there at first, but then I remembered some of those families I spoke to while trying to track

Marks. I thought about the harrowing way those people were forced to come to terms with the loss of their loved ones. Then, I shook off the shock and tried to comfort Lynlee. This won't be easy for her. Blood and guts went flying everywhere. I'm surprised the man still had eyes left in his head to set."

"How'd it happen that you got so close to him?"

"I took Lynlee in the bathroom to reassure her before we started for the basement. After she acted calm enough to leave, I swung the door open, and there he was, lurking in the hall with this smug look plastered on his face. I fired. I didn't think twice about it. I just lifted the weapon and *bam!*"

"I've hunted this guy for a long time, Carlisle. I knew what kind of death he inflicted on these women, and when I thought of what he might do to Lynlee, given the chance, I just wanted his blood. From the moment I found out he'd abducted her, it wasn't business anymore, it was damn personal."

Carlisle slowly nodded. "Can I ask you something?"

"Go ahead."

"Were you and Lynlee ever intimate before all this happened?"

"God no," Lantry replied. "Are you kidding me? Dad had her picked out for Blaine a long time ago. He sure didn't have a sweet little thing like that fingered for me."

"Nice word choice."

Lantry clucked. "After seeing her body in motion, that's the only word that comes to mind."

"I can think of a few more explicit ones," Carlisle said, waggling his brows.

"Me, too," Lantry admitted, glancing at Lynlee still sprawled across the bed in the next room.

"So what happens now?"

"We sit and wait. This guy making his claims that he's going to pick up where the Beaches and Lakes Serial Killer left off may represent a viable threat."

“He was outside our home tonight for God’s sake. I’d say he’s for real. He’s willing to make a name for himself.”

“Being a serial killer in this day and age is generally a short-lived career. The deranged often discover their time on the run is limited because of all the technology we have at our disposal. You know that. You’ve been in the courtroom enough to understand that the lunatics out there are clumsy. They’re generally the folks we catch and lock up,” Lantry said, quickly adding with a smile, “unless they have Carlisle McCain for an attorney, that is.”

“Thank God representing kooks and criminals is behind me now,” Carlisle reminded him, yawning.

“Because of Lynlee?”

Carlisle shrugged. “I guess we’ll have to wait and see.”

“Carlisle, she’ll never belong to just one McCain. I see that after she’s been in bed with us. Do you?”

Carlisle frowned. “Sure. Besides, she’s Blaine’s wife.”

“And you’re okay with that?”

“I love her, man. I’ll take her any way I can get her. If it means sharing her with you and four others or you and ten others, I don’t care as long as I get a chance to love her, too.”

“You must care a lot about her.”

“And you don’t?”

Lantry rubbed his temples. “I guess we’ll have to wait and see what happens.”

“I won’t be disappointed if you decide to move on,” Carlisle muttered, yawning once more. “I’m gonna hit the hay.”

“Long day, tomorrow?” Lantry teased.

Carlisle glanced around the room. “By the looks of things, we have three options for recreational activities while we’re here. We can cook, swim in the hotel’s heated pool, or fuck. That’s pretty much it.”

“Well for a man who makes fucking look like his favorite pastime sport, you sure don’t act like you like your selections,” Lynlee said from behind him.

Carlisle jerked and turned around. "You need your rest, young lady."

Lantry's eyes met the source behind their reason for being on the run. "She looks rested to me."

Lynlee crooked her finger back and forth. "I need both of you to help me go to sleep."

"Damn, I see why you didn't want to give her up," Lantry said. "She's insatiable."

Carlisle was stripped down to his briefs by the time he hit the bed. "Come here, baby."

"Aren't you going to join us, Lantry?" she crooned.

"Give me five minutes. I've gotta step outside and make a call."

"You can't make it here?" she asked, sitting up and showing off the fact she'd slipped under the covers wearing nothing but her birthday suit.

Lantry's mouth watered. "Five and counting."

Carlisle winked and then turned his attention toward Lynlee. "I won't miss you, but she will. Lantry, I wouldn't dally long if I were you."

Lantry reluctantly left them. He punched in a number he knew by heart but never kept in his contact list. Dallas picked up at once.

"What'd ya have for me?" Lantry asked, closing the door behind him and walking down the hotel's interior corridor.

"Are you out of your fucking mind?" Dallas screeched. "You and Carlisle are on the road with Lynlee? Dad is going berserk!"

"Let him throw his tantrum. Maybe now he knows how Mom felt when he was chasing Lynlee's mother. She never knew where he was, and he never bothered to tell her. Payback is a bitch."

"This is different, Lantry," Dallas said. "You damn well know it."

"Why? Because you wish you were in my shoes?"

A long silence separated them more than phone lines. The tension was thick enough for Lantry to realize he didn't have his wires crossed. He recalled how Dallas had watched Lynlee at the wedding

and reception. He'd known then what he refused to accept now. Dallas, Austin, and Houston were as interested in Lynlee as the rest of the McCains, and that bothered him. Lynlee wasn't equipped to handle the triplets or their dark desires.

"My job is to keep Lynlee safe. I'm doing that the best way I know how. I have Blaine's support and so does Carlisle."

"Then that's all you need, right?"

"That's right."

"Bullshit, Lantry! You know what that girl means to this family, and you're doing the exact same thing Carlisle and Rhett did. You're going to end up in her bed. Mark my word."

"I will, and I have."

"Huh?"

"I'm marking it down that you told me, and I've already been there, thank you very much. I had a fine time, too, so much in fact that you might as well accept the fact that our brother's wife will be a shared woman."

"Ah, shit," Dallas grumbled.

"Problems?"

"You got no idea."

"Oh yeah I do, brother. Trust me. I got a world of notions on that subject. You're not fooling anyone, least of all me."

"What are you saying?" Dallas asked.

"You want to get into this right now?"

Dallas grunted. "No, I don't."

"I didn't think so."

"Where are ya?"

"Not important. Tell me what's on the news."

"Don't you have a television?"

"Yep, but I don't want Lynlee to know about the letter."

"Great. What a way to start a new relationship. Bang a brother's broad, run off with her in the middle of the night, and oh, let's not forget to lie and keep secrets, too. That always works."

“Dallas, I don’t have all day.”

“You’re so damned headstrong!”

“I know what I want, Dallas, and my desires don’t concern you or anyone else. From here forward, Lynlee is not something I’ll discuss with you. I don’t think you’d understand anyway, at least not yet.” The latter irked Lantry most of all because down deep he knew what was destined to happen between Lynlee and all the McCains.

A long silence separated them before Dallas finally said, “If you go anywhere in public, you’ll have a hard time going unnoticed. Her pictures are all over the Internet and in the news. Parts of the letter have been quoted verbatim, particularly the segment where Marks informs you that he’s left behind several apprentices, all of whom want to finish the job their predecessor wasn’t able to complete.”

“What about this guy who called me?”

“Local PD in Asheville gathered cigarette butts outside Lynlee’s window, but they could’ve belonged to Marks.”

“Marks didn’t smoke.”

“Well then I guess that leaves one other possibility. Somebody else was there, and they got mighty close to Lynlee.”

“Damn it!” So the guy had been there with Marks, watching as he’d said as Blaine and Rhett tried to comfort Lynlee.

“Lantry, I don’t know what’s going on here, but if you can’t protect Lynlee, you gotta hire somebody who can. I’ve never seen Dad like this. He’s like a mother hen rather than a father-in-law. He’s ranting and raving, making threats, and swearing with every breath he takes.”

“He loved Lynlee’s mother a lot, Dallas. When she died, something died inside him, too. That is, until Blaine brought Lynlee home and told him he planned to marry her. You saw him with your own eyes. From the time he discovered Blaine and Lynlee were going to be married, he was like a new man. He acted like he’d been given a second chance at life or like he used to act when he brought home a new puppy.”

“Yeah, but, Lantry, Lynlee isn’t a puppy. She’s in a lot of danger, and if she gets hurt, if you fail to keep her safe, Dad won’t get over this. Mark my word.”

“I hear ya,” Lantry grumbled, studying a good-looking gal who walked through the hotel lobby. Turning away, like he didn’t have the right to look twice, he quickly added, “I’ll guard Lynlee with my life. You can count on that. Now find out who’s out there looking for her and get back to me. I want these guys stopped before they have a chance to get started.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

Carlisle gathered Lynlee in his arms and held her against his bare chest. He wanted to hold her, love her, consume her every thought, but he realized that wasn't possible. Since the first time he'd taken Lynlee to bed, she'd always safeguarded a part of her heart Carlisle imagined she'd held in reserve for Blaine.

He raked his fingers up and down her thin arms, savoring the sensations as he caressed her. Her sweet breath brushed his nipple. The flat disc protruded the instant she flicked her tongue across the beaded shape.

Lynlee rose over him then, losing the white sheet as she threw her leg over his hip and lowered herself to his cock. He gripped her hips and thrust forward, rising to meet her, taking her lips and smothering her with his kisses, breathing her in and enjoying their time alone, no matter how limited their time together might be now or in the future.

Carlisle had learned to appreciate the present. With Lynlee, nothing was guaranteed as forever. As much as he'd hate to lose her, as much as he'd resent it even, if Blaine asked him, he would let her go. Or at least, he would try.

Her hair swept behind her shoulders, and she pushed her chest forward. He dipped his head and lapped her nipple. Her mouth fell open, and her hands flattened on his chest. "Oh, Carlisle, when I was away from you, I missed you so."

Yes, if Blaine asked, he'd do as a brother required. But losing Lynlee would certainly be the death of him. Missing this woman would be a slow kill, an imminent demise he couldn't escape.

Carlisle nuzzled her fullness. "I love you, Lynlee. Always believe that."

She framed his face with her small hands, drawing his lips to hers as he penetrated her. He thrust between her folds, splaying his legs as she sat over him, her lean limbs draped over his. Using his palm for leverage, he rose and fell, pumping inside her. He looped one arm around her, devouring a firm breast, sipping at her nipple until she responded the best way a lady knew how.

"Carlisle!" she screamed, bouncing over him, using his shoulders for balance as she enveloped his dick with her sleek, hot pussy.

"That's right, babe. Rub that sweet cunt all over me, Lynlee. Let me feel you. Milk it, honey. Ah, yeah, that's good, right there. Oh, yes, baby! Right fucking there!"

Her hair swirled around them, forming a curtain over her face. She went buck wild screwing him. She was untamed as he took her, and when he exploded, they came together like long lost lovers meeting in the storm. Their lips melded together as their bodies slapped in time, finding that notorious and quite aged rhythm familiar lovers couldn't possibly deny.

"Carlisle, don't stop. Oh, God, don't you dare stop fucking me!"

"Never, baby," he promised, kissing her, pushing himself from the mattress and taking her to the edge, positioning her on all fours, so he could fuck her again, claim her in another way, take her deeper and harder than in the previous moments.

He bracketed his arm around her middle and fingered her, dragging his fingers from front to back, doing his best to stretch the tiny opening, the rear passage he needed to penetrate, if for no other reason than the fact he was still horny and wanted more. He needed inside her, longed to feel her body pumping him, taking him, and encouraging another hot release.

Securing her hips in his hands, he immediately slipped between her globes. She cried out as he locked his cock inside her channel. "Easy, honey," he rasped, looping her long hair around his wrist.

“That’s my girl, Lynlee. Damnation, baby, your ass is so fucking tight.”

With his cock in place, he hammered forward, holding her by the hair of the head until she squirmed under him. “Are you all right?” he asked, leaning over and kissing her ear.

“I feel like I’ve been bridled and saddled, but I’m...Oh, God! I’m perfect! This is what I need. This is what I am.”

“What’s that, baby?” he asked, sucking her lobe, burying himself still deeper. “Tell me what you are.”

“I’m your woman, Carlisle,” she breathed. “I’m a McCain woman.”

“You got that right,” Lantry said in a husky voice, approaching the bed with a towel around his waist. Carlisle had been so entranced by loving Lynlee, he’d never seen or heard Lantry when he reentered the room. He hadn’t heard the running water, but Lantry had obviously showered given the fact his hair was damp.

Lynlee twisted under him. Her body responded as he pounded inside her.

Carlisle charged forward, mentally cursing as he fought to regain his obvious lack of control. “Fuck, Lynlee. Hold still, doll.”

“No. Faster, damn it! Give me what I want. Deeper!” Lynlee ordered, working those legs like a call girl might.

“Demanding little thing, aren’t ya?” Carlisle whispered, stroking her with his cock as his hands propelled across her lower back.

Hearing her sensual cries shook him to his core and at the same time reminded him of something more important. Carlisle hadn’t heard Lantry. He’d let down his guard. That awareness made him shiver, and he slipped from her hot channel, releasing her to Lantry, who took the opportunity to drag her atop him. “Come here, baby girl,” Lantry crooned.

“We couldn’t wait,” she said saucily, acting as if she didn’t mind the interruption and maybe she didn’t. She was quite taken with Lantry.

“Why, you sexy thing, you.” Lantry kissed her nose and headed south for those luscious breasts. “I never want to keep you waiting.”

Lantry slid inside her without a preamble, without anything to stall his intentions. His foreplay must’ve been watching Carlisle enjoy her, and Carlisle knew plenty about that. He’d been a bystander before, an outsider looking in. He backed away, standing at the end of the bed watching as his brother impaled the woman he loved.

The mattress started shaking. The headboard began banging. Lantry was in the throes of passion when Carlisle heard him say, “That’s it, baby girl. Ride me, lover. Fuck me all night, and don’t you dare stop until we’ve loved one another right.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Lynlee watched the way Lantry took her, eyeing the point of penetration as Lantry thrust inside her with precise moves, grinding against her in slow motion, pounding inside her with hard and even strokes. Her eyes met his, and it was if she saw the lust collide with an undeniable expression of love.

Moistening his lips, he winked. “Give it to me hard, Lynlee. Feel me, baby.”

Lynlee glanced over her shoulder. Carlisle moved behind them then. “Hurry,” she choked out. “Damn it, Carlisle. Get over here now!”

“Greedy vixen,” Carlisle said, roughly grabbing her hips and pulling her completely away from Lantry.

“Fuck!” Lantry growled, moving aside when Carlisle fell against the bed, dragging Lynlee over him.

“Here you go, sweetheart,” Carlisle said, nudging the tip of his cock against her rear opening.

She spread her legs and fingered her clit, rolling the small nub in a circular fashion.

Lantry smirked. “Damn if you don’t make that look sexier than I’ve ever seen.”

His gaze held at her cunt, and Carlisle fucked her, entering her ass with painstakingly slow thrusts. The heat pooled at her entrance, and she worked harder, rolling her clit against her fingertips.

“Lantry! Please!”

“Please, what?”

“Fuck me! Give it to me, now!”

Lantry straddled her hip, aimed his cock at her pussy, and slipped inside her. “Oh, yeah, that’s perfect. Tight and sweet, Lynlee. Dear God, you’re addictive.”

Carlisle fucked her from behind while Lantry showered her breasts, screwing himself higher and higher inside her, lapping at her nipples as he hammered forward.

She was on fire. Her body was one flame burning hotter with every stroke. From front to back, she was cradled, fucked, and undoubtedly loved.

“Damn it!” Lantry exclaimed, pushing her knees to her chest and coming over her like a barbarian. He gripped the headboard behind Carlisle’s head and the weight of his cock pulsed inside her.

She couldn’t stop herself from clawing him, from drawing him closer. Oh, God, she was coming undone!

She cried out in pleasure, whispering their names over and over again. With his tongue to his upper lip, Lantry growled, a low roar seeping from his lungs. He latched his upper teeth over his bottom lip and gave one final push, burying himself completely inside a heat that would never cool, a hotness determined to erupt into various flames of unquenchable desire.

“Oh, God, Lynlee. Oh, dear God,” Lantry said, collapsing against her. “What the hell have you done to me?”

* * * *

Carlisle’s cock pulsed inside her ass, and he screamed her name. His dick thrummed inside her small hole, stretching her until it not only burned, but the painful sensation exploded into sparks of pleasure, heating her pussy again until she climaxed once more, her juices heating around the flaccid cock still tucked inside her.

Moving away from the bed moments later, Lynlee shot them a sideways glance. “Now that was some mighty fine loving.”

Lantry winked. “Shh, don’t tempt me, lover. I may join you in that shower and give you some more.”

“Was that supposed to be a threat?” she asked, striking a pose against the door.

Lantry’s gaze went on tour. Carlisle’s eyes pinned to hers.

“Well, was it?”

“Only promises, here, babe,” Carlisle said, leaving the bed.

“Lantry?”

“Do you want promises from me, Lynlee?” he asked, arching a brow.

She didn’t respond.

“Well?” Lantry pressed.

Lynlee hid behind the biggest grin she could leave with them and darted in the bathroom, slamming the door. From the other side, she heard Lantry’s guttural voice. “That may work with the rest of these guys, Lynlee, but not here. I won’t let you hide from me, baby. You remember that. You’ll never hide from me.”

* * * *

Casey McCain was pissed off, and he was looking for answers. After the local authorities left, he’d taken care of some business for Lantry, working with some of the detectives privately in order to pass along whatever information he could gather about the new threats to Lynlee.

Finally, he stood in front of Blaine, Rhett, and Royce. A scowl covered his face, and Blaine realized his father wasn’t going to tiptoe around what he wanted to know.

“Do you mind telling me why you aren’t with your wife?”

“Dad,” Royce began, “Blaine wasn’t equipped to protect Lynlee. You know that. Carlisle knows how the legal system works. He’s placed many clients in the witness protection program. Lantry is nothing but all rogue. If anyone can keep her safe, Lantry can.”

“First, did I ask you, Royce? Secondly, is Lynlee in the witness protection program? No. And finally, are *you* married to Lynlee?”

Royce looked like he’d taken a hard hit straight across his face. Before Blaine could respond in his own defense or in turn for his brother, Royce blurted out, “I have as much at stake here as he does.”

“Oh, really? And how is that, Royce?”

“I love her,” Royce admitted.

Blaine about swallowed his tongue.

“You what?” Casey bellowed. “Oh, for crying out loud, boys! This has gone too far!”

“Maybe so, but you’re gonna come to terms with the facts. I love her, Dad. I think maybe she could fall in love with me, too. In fact, I think she’s not only in love with Blaine, but Rhett and Carlisle, as well. Who knows? Maybe she even cares for Lantry as much as she cares for them. They sure have some kind of connection. You should’ve seen how she clung to him after Lantry shot Marks. She didn’t want anyone except Lantry.”

Casey McCain’s large frame slumped to the sofa. A defeated expression stamped his face. “Blaine, how in the hell could you let this happen?”

“Coming from you, a question like that shouldn’t have to be answered, Dad,” Blaine said, recalling the perpetual chaos his father and mother used to stir when they were known to swap partners with other swingers in the area.

“Why? Because I loved her mother and yours at the same time?”

Blaine shrugged. “You didn’t try hard enough to make a life with Lynlee’s mother, but at one time, you would’ve married her. If she hadn’t left you at the altar, you would have. She was willing to make a life with you. If she’d been willing to have your children, and accept you for what you were, you would’ve married her. Lynlee’s father wouldn’t have stood a chance. We’ve all heard the stories.”

“I did the right thing, son! I knew my lifestyle wouldn’t be appropriate for Lynlee’s mother and I let her go, damn you!”

"I can't let Lynlee go!" Blaine screamed. "And that's not what you want anyway!"

"I didn't ask you to let her go," Casey said, regret lacing through every syllable. "But maybe I should have. Hell, how did I know you'd start these games with her? You were supposed to love her!"

"And I do love her!" Blaine yelled, his rage gaining momentum. "I love her so much that I want her happy. I want her to have a good life, Dad. She can't live a content life with just one McCain, and you know it. For starters, the business keeps us strapped. We have more real estate and cattle than we can manage as a family. We're always on the road, traveling here or there, going to take care of one catastrophe after another. There isn't one McCain man who can stand by a woman and make her happy. You of all people should know that!"

"So what you're trying to say is that if one can't make her happy, several McCains can do the trick. That's absurd, Blaine! And you know it! This is not all right, son!"

Blaine swallowed hard. He cut his gaze toward Royce and then Rhett, hoping one of them would come to his rescue because he didn't want to go up against his father alone.

"Casey," Rhett began, clearing his throat and obviously intimidated before he even started to make his case. "Lynlee is better off with all of us than she would be with just one."

"I didn't ask you, Rhett. You and Royce don't have a wedding band on your hand to prove this is your business."

"Maybe not," Rhett agreed. "But we both have a woman in our bed that we fully intend to keep there. With all due respect, Casey, you can't change that. What's done is done, and Lynlee doesn't want to give us up."

"And how the hell do you know?"

"Because she tried," Rhett explained. "She wouldn't have been on that beach by herself if she wasn't deeply troubled by the fact that

while she was on her honeymoon with one man, there were two more she needed to love.”

“And two more wasn’t enough either, huh?” Casey asked, shooting Royce a cold stare. “I expected more from you, Royce.”

“I did, too,” Royce calmly admitted. “But Lynlee didn’t. She went after what she wanted and got what she deserved. She has five men ready to love her, five who can’t wait to make sure she’s well provided for and protected. If you ask me, Lynlee is the luckiest woman in the world.”

“Why...because you say so? Royce, you know better than this! This is America for God’s sake. This kind of thing is not acceptable in our culture.”

“It may not be acceptable in this culture or any other, Dad. But that’s the way it’s gotta be. You’re right. This is America, and in America, we have certain freedoms. I choose to love a woman who belongs to my brother, and he’s made a choice, too.”

“Which is?”

Blaine cleared his throat. “Dad, you might as well accept the fact that Lynlee belongs to me, Rhett, Carlisle, and Royce. Maybe Lantry, too. We’ve made a choice to love her, and if society has a problem with it, then that’s okay. We’ve embraced the decision and given Lynlee the opportunity to explore her feelings for each of us.”

“She has the freedom to love, Casey,” Rhett said. “And we expect to pamper and spoil her until we’re worthy of that love. That’s what she deserves.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

“Any news?” Lantry asked, holding the cell between his shoulder and ear while dressing the next morning.

“Yeah,” Dallas said. “Cops think it’s safe to come home. They reviewed Marks’s cell phone records. They found three different numbers worth tracing. All of them led back to criminals. One guy had a pretty violent record for rapes, and the other two racked up extensive lists for petty crimes. These are the type of guys who set out to make a name for themselves. They’re in custody.”

“Are there any others?”

“They don’t know for sure, but they seem to believe they’ve got the only three who would present probable threats.”

Lantry glanced up and caught a glimpse of Lynlee’s nude form coming out of the bathroom. Her hair was wet, locks of hair clung to her moist cheeks, and her bare bottom was the prettiest sighting a man could enjoy first thing in the morning. “Everything else okay there?”

“You mean outside of the fact that Dad is a raging lunatic and out for blood? Sure, everything here is just swell.”

“What’s Dad’s problem?” Lantry asked, gnawing his bottom lip, watching Lynlee as she swayed toward him.

“You, for starters,” Dallas said. “All of you.”

“He’ll get over it.”

“Not until he talks to Lynlee,” Dallas informed him. “I may wanna discuss something with her, too. How do you feel about that?”

“You don’t want to know,” Lantry said, studying the gorgeous tease standing in the doorway. Lynlee cupped her breasts, parted her legs, and slowly slid her hands lower, dipping those slender fingers

between her parted thighs. "Oh, dear God," Lantry muttered, sitting down and splaying his legs.

"That's the way it's gonna be," Dallas went on. "Oh and about Dad? When he gets something on his mind, no one changes it. He's determined to see Blaine and Lynlee happily married without complications."

"He considers me an obstacle, I take it?"

"You and a few others," Dallas replied.

Patting his cock, Lantry summoned Lynlee. The sexy siren strutted across the room.

She giggled, her laughter filling the room.

"I'll have to get back to you, Dallas," Lantry said, closing the phone.

"What was that about?" she asked, kneeling in front of him and loosening his belt.

"Nothing important," he assured her, helping her rid them of the barriers separating them.

"Nothing?" she asked, tugging his cock free and catching him between her lips as the length uncurled from his jeans. Sipping at his length, she said, "Oh, Lantry, I think this is something."

He placed his hand to the back of her head, guiding her. He relaxed his neck against the cushions and sighed. "You know what, Lynlee?"

"Hmm?" she mumbled, lapping at the crest, swirling her tongue around the mushroom shape of the engorged head.

"You're right. This is definitely something."

"Uh-huh," she whispered, licking the slit and making him jerk when she took him to the back of her throat.

"You'd better be careful, or I'll give you a mouthful this morning."

She gripped him in her hand and pumped his length slow and easy, bringing one hand around to meet the other. Two hands were

better than one when a woman knew how to use them, and undoubtedly, Lynlee had plenty of practice.

Licking her lips, she rolled back on her heels, giving him a glimpse of the glistening moisture pooling at her entrance. "Stand up," she rasped. "Now."

"Bossy little woman, aren't ya?"

"Yes," she said, whipping that hot tongue around his shape. "Now, fuck me, Lantry. Fuck my mouth and make me hot."

Her hands fell to his ass and she gripped him, pulling him closer as her tight lips closed around him. He sank inside her mouth and drove forward. She slid up and down, and he guided her as he grabbed her hair and held her right where he wanted her.

"Ah hell, Lynlee," he breathed, admiring the way her eyelashes flickered and her mouth greedily consumed him. When he was buried to the hilt, he screamed out her name, and even though he didn't want to do something she might view as offensive, he grabbed her silken hair and held her away from him, staring into her eyes as her tongue darted in and out.

Chuckling after he teased the vixen as much as either of them could stand, he pushed her head toward his groin again. "That's it, baby, suck it up. I got what you want right here."

He exploded inside her mouth and she sucked him to her throat. Her tongue taunted him while her suction ruined him for another. He cried out her name, swore to protect her and made all sorts of promises as she blew him to kingdom come. Then, when she finished, he yanked her into his arms, bracketing her legs around his waist.

Slipping inside her folds, he fucked her with quick strokes, grinding his way into her cunt until her body milked his. She jerked against him almost as soon as he penetrated her, and he enjoyed the way she came apart in his arms.

"Don't let me go, Lantry," she whispered, her heels at his back, her fingernails digging into his forearms.

“Never. You’re mine, baby. You’re as much mine as you are Blaine’s.”

“I have faith in you,” she whispered, her pussy pulsing against his cock. “I trust you more than I’ve ever trusted another.”

Lantry carried her to the sofa and sat, her legs draped over his thighs, and she fucked him there, kissing him as he entered her. His heart soared as he thought of the words she’d whispered, the soft confession she’d shared.

Lynlee trusted him more than she’d ever trusted another.

He wasn’t sure how he’d earned such a reward, a true gift. But he was certain of one thing.

As a child, he’d been her guardian. As a man, he would be her protector. As a lover, he’d always cherish her as a woman. And he’d never let her go.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Lynlee was a nervous wreck. The McCain helicopter had picked them up in Columbia and taken them to the McCain ranch in Anderson.

Before leaving, Carlisle spent the morning by the pool, catching a few rays while Lantry and Lynlee spent some time together. Seeing the setup from a mile away, Lynlee understood why now. Carlisle thought Lantry cared about her, and he gave them time to explore their feelings for one another.

She hadn't needed the time. What she felt for Lantry was real. What they shared together was something she couldn't begin to describe. The sex was incredible, the intense way he loved her was incomparable to anything she'd ever experienced before in her life, and while that scared her to some degree, it was also exciting, fresh, and new.

She held hands with Carlisle and Lantry as they strolled across the lawn. Carlisle held the door open, and she walked through, her fingers still entwined with Lantry's.

They were greeted immediately by Victoria. "Lynlee, darling, I'm so glad you're okay," she said, snapping a kiss on each cheek.

"Lantry," she said coolly, kissing his cheek, too, before hugging him, which wasn't an easy task since he refused to let go of Lynlee's hand.

Finally, Victoria looked down. "I think I'd lose the connection when you face your father. He isn't pleased about this situation."

"Victoria, can I talk to you?" Lynlee asked.

“You know you can, dear,” Victoria replied, sweetness oozing in her voice. “Let’s go upstairs to the room you and Blaine share, shall we?”

Lantry snorted at that. “Mother, there’s no need to be coy.”

“Lantry, there’s no need for sass, son. Lynlee and I will have a nice chat, and you can go talk with your father. He’s waiting with the others in the study.”

“Blaine’s here?”

“Why, yes, dear, didn’t you know?”

Lynlee took off down the hall, and right before she entered the room, she turned. Victoria looked smug, almost as if she were relieved Lynlee couldn’t wait to see Blaine. Carlisle winked, and Lantry looked like he was indifferent, something that disturbed Lynlee for a second or more.

Taking a deep breath, she said, “Victoria?”

“Yes, dear?”

“I love your sons. I’m devoted to them—Lantry, Royce, Blaine, and Carlisle. Rhett, too, and I know you think of him as a son. I can’t help my feelings, and I certainly can’t explain them. Please don’t ask me to apologize.”

“I won’t, Lynlee,” she said, her voice full of regret. “But I must advise against this. This is not what your mother had in mind for you. I’m certain of it. You also have your father to think about. Your father will never agree to any of this. Casey isn’t happy.”

“It doesn’t matter who agrees or disagrees. Don’t you see? Love is such a fragile thing, a precious gift so few people experience.” She walked toward Victoria and took hold of her wrists. “Victoria, I know all about the lifestyle you and Casey enjoyed.”

“I won’t discuss my past personal life with you or in front of my sons.”

“You shouldn’t,” Lynlee said. “I don’t expect it, but I hope you can somehow come to terms with what’s going on here and maybe someday even give us the same consideration folks gave you. I want

to love without rules, find happiness without barriers, and be my own person without conditions. I want to love your sons without judgment. Can't you see that?"

When Victoria didn't reply, Lynlee sighed and said, "I love them. That's all. And they love me, too."

"I never said one way or the other, wench," Lantry said, winking.

She winked back. "You didn't have to. A woman feels a man's love when it's real."

Lantry rolled his thick tongue over his bottom lip and yanked her to him. "Mother, turn the other direction or walk away."

Victoria grumbled and then disappeared down the hall.

"Then, feel this, Mrs. McCain," Lantry growled. Dipping his head, he devoured her lips and pushed her hand toward his cock.

"Lantry," she whispered, giggling.

Carlisle chuckled. "You've got your hands full now, Lynlee."

The door swung open to the study. Blaine, Rhett, and Royce appeared in the doorway. Behind them, Lynlee could see the triplets and her heart skipped three beats just for them. Dallas, Austin, and Houston glanced up, and for the first time, she was truly taken aback by the startling amount of sex appeal surrounding her.

Glancing over her shoulder, she looked at Carlisle and said, "You know what. You're right. I've got my hands full, and I have a feeling the weight there is about to get heavier."

"Don't even think about it," Blaine said, catching her in his arms when she ran straight for him.

"Too late," she said, laughing. "I already have this wonderful fantasy in my head."

Blaine grunted, picked her up and twirled her around. "Woman, there's only so much a man can stand."

"I know. That's why I need so many of you!"

Their lips met, and it was like waves crashing together with a tide certain to pull them asunder. The others surrounded them—Dallas, Houston, Austin, Rhett, Carlisle, Royce, and Lantry.

It was strange and yet familiar, awkward and yet comfortable. She'd never been intimate with the triplets, but she had a feeling they had something special in store. Their gazes were hot, each of them possessing the unspoken ability to make her aware of previously unexpressed desires.

She glanced over Blaine's shoulder and spotted Casey McCain, standing at his desk with his thick arms folded over his chest. Pushing away from Blaine and the others, she walked straight up to Casey and threw her arms around his neck.

"I love your sons. I've always loved each of them in one way or another."

He frowned. "Your mother wouldn't approve, Lynlee."

"Maybe not, but will you?"

"I don't know, Lynlee," he said, glancing away. "Probably not."

"Will you at least look the other way since this is a matter that doesn't concern you?"

Casey took a deep breath. He bowed his head and said, "Women have torn families apart, Lynlee. They've destroyed empires, ruined governments, and broken down institutions. There are laws in place regarding the sanctity of marriage because men and women should be required to choose."

"Says who?" she asked, smiling. "You never lived that way."

"How I've lived hasn't been a model for anyone. Those living under the confines of this society expect marriage to exist between two people. That's just the way it is."

"What about you and Victoria? Did you play by the rules because you feared what other people might think?"

"You know we didn't," he said regrettably. "And we hurt one another and those we love."

"I don't want to hurt your sons or Rhett."

"Do you honestly believe no one will get hurt here, Lynlee?"

Lynlee faced the men she cared about and then looked at Casey McCain again. "I don't know."

Casey narrowed his gaze on the triplets. With a tilt of his head, he asked, "What about them?"

Lynlee studied Dallas, Austin, and Houston—sex in a package. She shrugged, feeling a smile tugging at her lips. "What about them?"

Casey finally conceded. "Here's what I'll do. I'll take Victoria away for a few weeks. When we get back, I want an answer."

"About?"

Casey took a deep breath. "You can't toy with emotions, and I'm not going to stand for it. Decide if you want all of them or none of them."

"What?" she screeched.

He shrugged. "I asked you about Dallas, Austin, and Houston for a reason."

She shot "the trips" a sideways glance. They looked like they each held the grandest independent secrets of all time. "You think I'm attracted to them."

"Yes. Are you denying your feelings?"

Lynlee held her head high. "Not at all." Behind her Blaine cursed but he was immediately consoled by Rhett and Carlisle. In a matter of seconds, they were chuckling and slapping backs.

"Apparently my sons have a weakness for you like their father had a weakness for your mother. I'll go to my grave with a thirst that will never be quenched because I couldn't have the one woman who was able to make my heart beat a little faster than all the rest. I don't want my sons to know that kind of fate. I don't want any of them to later take another woman to their bed, a gal they'll only resent because she isn't you."

Was this Casey McCain giving his permission, maybe his blessings? Was this his way of approving an explicit affair for which she'd already begun with several of his sons? If so, was he strong-arming her as he'd done his sons in the past by requiring her to explore possible feelings for the triplets, too?

Swallowing, she said, "I'm not sure what you want me to say."

“According to Blaine, you know what you want, and if that’s so, then my guess is, you’ll know what to do with Dallas, Austin, and Houston, as well. Assuming you decide you want to do anything with them at all.” Casey squeezed her hand in passing. “Boys, I’ll see you in a few minutes down at the barn.”

Casey left the room. Lynlee stared straight ahead. She searched the eyes of each man staring back at her. The triplets looked at her with pure sex streaming from their eyes, the lust running her over like a freight train with no direction and too much cargo for the undetermined destination.

Blaine looked satisfied, like he accepted his father’s wishes. On the other hand, Lantry and Carlisle acted miffed, pissed because their father handed down an unusual request, an outrageous order with a probable outcome.

Her father-in-law wanted her to play fair or not at all.

Studying their handsome faces again, Lynlee reached a decision that had long since been there, swept under the table like a hidden mess waiting for someone to clean it up, orchestrate the housecleaning.

As Lynlee’s heart took off at a running-go, her pulse striking an unreasonable beat, she found acceptance. She was going to love the McCains. She would take three more McCains into her bed and see what feelings she discovered there.

Things were about to get very complicated. Fortunately, she had a pretty good idea of what she could anticipate in the coming weeks.

Lynlee planned to be loved hard and rode well. These men would make her feel like a well-bred mare, bridled and saddled by the kind of studs who knew exactly what they wanted in a woman.

As luck would have it—Lynlee Lewis McCain was that woman. She belonged to the McCain men, and in many ways Lynlee thought of her future as fated, sealed. The McCain men had always been her cowboys, her faithful friends. And they were undoubtedly destined to become *her* men.

THE END

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Natalie Acres is one pseudonym for a Tennessee author multi-published in several genres. Natalie writes exclusively for Siren Publishing.

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