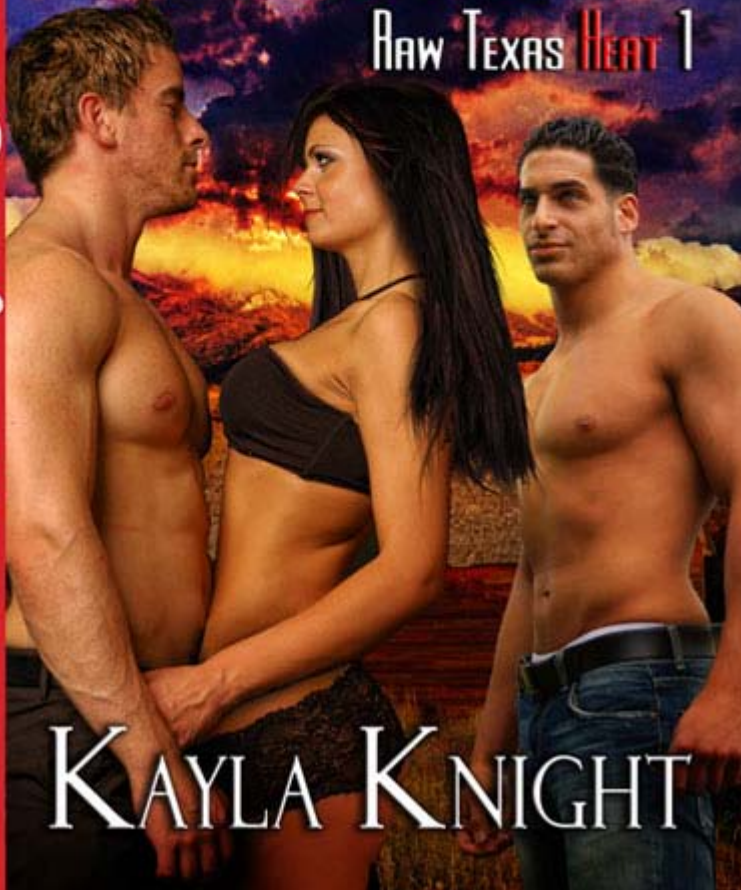


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HER TEXAS BILLIONAIRE OIL MEN

RAW TEXAS HEAT 1



KAYLA KNIGHT

Raw Texas Heat 1

Her Texas Billionaire Oil Men

Rugged Texas billionaire oilmen Jake McKenna and Brody Quinn head off into the mountains of Montana for a well-deserved month-long vacation. There's plenty of good hunting and fishing around the isolated ranch house to keep them occupied.

Things heat up when they decide it's far more exciting to hunt their beautiful personal assistant, Taylor Matthews, instead. Brody and Jake are Alpha males and very demanding.

Still hurting from a recent break up with a long-term boyfriend, Taylor has no intention of making it easy for the temptingly rich and very attractive oil barons. But what's a girl to do? Just fantasize about the two gorgeous guys she works for? Or enjoy all they have to offer?

Genre: Contemporary, Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Western/Cowboys

Length: 41,747 words

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“Time heals griefs and quarrels, for we change and are no longer the same persons.”—Blaise Pascal

HER TEXAS BILLIONAIRE OIL MEN

Raw Texas Heat 1

KAYLA KNIGHT
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Chapter One

Jake McKenna signed the last of the documents with a flourish of his platinum fountain pen. With his hands behind his head, he leaned back in his leather executive chair and placed his booted feet on the mahogany desk. Yep, life was pretty damned good at the moment. He smiled as he studied the gray Dallas skyline from his office on the fifty-sixth floor of McKenna Quinn Oil. Having reached the top of his game in the business, financial worries were now a thing of the past.

He idly flicked through his diary. Maybe, he'd take an early day. Relax by the pool. Watch that movie he'd promised himself. Perhaps, he'd be able to persuade Brody to come, too. Without delay, he went out into the open plan suite of offices adjoining his own.

"I'm going to call it a day, Joan," he announced to his secretary on the way out.

Jake scanned the large office. Brody, his business partner, was still there, sitting in the same chair, just staring out at the concrete jungle below. Ever since Paige, his wife, had died, he hadn't been able to reach him. No amount of cajoling, coaxing, or pleading had brought him out of his mourning. It had been one whole year, and

Jake was becoming worried. He guessed Brody had had the real deal. He'd loved his wife dearly.

Jake grimaced. He'd loved Paige, too, but obviously not in the same way as Brody. Paige had understood that. He'd never been the type of guy to take things seriously. He doubted he would ever find that all-consuming passion. There were plenty of women out there, but they never piqued his curiosity long enough to get to know them better. That was the way he liked it. By becoming emotionally attached, Brody had opened himself up to all this heartache. That was something he'd never allow to happen.

He smoothed a hand over his jaw, feeling the stubble rasp against his fingertips. He needed to find a way to reach Brody. But how? At the moment, Brody was leaving all the business decisions up to him. He seemed to have lost interest in life. He'd turn up for work day after day but contribute very little. Even members of staff were beginning to talk. How long before the news became public knowledge? He guessed the headlines would read, "Brody Quinn loses grip on McKenna Quinn Oil."

Their share price would plummet.

He spoke to his secretary. "Has he moved at all, Joan?"

She shook her head. "Not an inch, Jake. I've tried everything. I've even tried to tempt him with his favorite sushi."

He glanced across at Brody. His forehead was pressed against the cool glass as he stared absently at the city below. His dark hair looked disheveled as though he'd just got out of bed. Jake doubted he'd even combed it. If he weren't careful, his best friend would slip further into depression. "Hmm, what he needs is a vacation. Any suggestions, Joan?"

His secretary shrugged. "Vegas or Hawaii?"

He laughed and wagged a finger, gently admonishing her. "You've been reading the papers. Those are my style of haunts, as you well know. My guess is Brody would appreciate something a little closer to nature. Maybe a trip to his ranch in Montana would do

the trick. Get back to the simple life, do some hunting and fishing. Chill out. A month oughta do it.”

“Sounds ideal.”

“It’s all hypothetical. We really can’t leave the business for more than a few days.” Jake suddenly had an idea. “Say, Joan, would you like to come? It would make things run more smoothly.”

Joan had worked at McKenna Quinn for more than a decade. She’d been with them from the very beginning, when they’d first struck oil. She was a dependable rock in a storm. He knew by her face that she was going to say no. “I’m sorry, Jake, but my first grandchild is about to be born any day soon.”

He gently squeezed her shoulder. “That’s okay. I know how much you’re looking forward to it.” Joan had spoken of little else these past few months. “We’ll just have to find another way.”

“Jake, I think I have the perfect solution.”

“Yes?” Joan was a bit of a magician. Could she pull a rabbit from the hat, yet again?

“I’ve been training a couple of girls from the personnel department. I thought it wise considering I might be called up for Grandma duties at any moment. They’re both fully up to speed on how things work here at McKenna Quinn. One of them would be ideal to liaise between yourselves and the office on a day-to-day basis.”

To Jake, that sounded very workable. If they took somebody with them, they could field the telephone calls and at least give them some quality time alone. “Joan, you’re a star. Now all I’ve got to do is convince Brody.”

* * * *

One week later

Brody slumped in his chair in the office he shared with Jake. They both had a desk, set at right angles to each other. It was a formidable set up when dealing with clients. Psychologically, it put them in charge and their clients at a disadvantage.

He held his hands out, palms upward. "Look, Jake. You've got me to agree to this damned vacation. I don't see why I need to be here. You choose. I really couldn't give a fuck."

"Brody, I've said it 'til I'm blue in the face. This personal assistant we're taking along is going to be with us twenty-four-seven. It's the only way we can keep in contact with the office back here and still find time to relax. Besides, we both have to like her. Otherwise, it will be a month of sheer hell."

Resigned to his fate, Brody raised his hands. "Okay, okay." He breathed out. "Let's just get this over with."

With any luck, they could wrap this up in an hour or so. Since Paige had died, he just didn't feel sociable anymore. There just didn't seem a point to anything.

Jake flicked a switch on his intercom. "Joan, send Candice Novak in."

Brody watched as the first candidate entered the office.

Jake motioned toward a chair. "Do sit down." It was placed dead center between them and was designed to give them the upper hand.

A typical blonde, she wore far too much makeup. The woman almost spilled from her tight-fitting top, and she hung on Jake's every word. At thirty-seven, Jake was two years older than himself. They'd met at Harvard and struck up a true friendship. They'd shared everything together. The good times, and the bad. He had those devil-may-care looks that the women just seemed to go for. Jake was a real charmer all right. He knew exactly which buttons to push. The women always flocked toward him.

Well, if Jake insisted he stay, he'd make sure his best friend didn't get it all his own way. As far as he was concerned, Candice was strictly off limits. He guessed he was just being grumpy, but he didn't

feel much like watching his business partner and life-long friend womanize for a whole month. When she finally left, he just hoped the next candidate was far more suitable.

Jake turned to him. "Well, you were a great help."

"Look, you've got me to stay. Don't push it."

"Okay, buddy." He heard him sigh, and then Jake flicked a switch on his desk intercom again. "Joan, send in Taylor Matthews."

Within seconds, there was a knock at the door, and a rather slim, mousy woman entered. She wore a pair of dark-rimmed glasses and a dull, gray business suit. It did little for her complexion, making her look far too pasty and pale. Her chestnut hair had been coiled on top of her head and secured with a large pin. It was the type of pin that defied the laws of physics. He stared at it. How the hell was one pin holding it all together?

Jake slipped into his charm offensive again. "Taylor, what a beautiful name. Please take a seat."

As she sat down, her glasses slipped forward, and she pushed them back onto the bridge of her nose. It was a simple act but one that Brody considered cute. He firmed his mouth into a thin line. He was taking far too much interest in the woman. Paige deserved better. Taylor fit the bill of studious employee perfectly. She was exactly what they needed for a month long vacation. Plain. He sat back and let Jake do all the talking. He'd already made up his mind.

* * * *

Taylor Matthews took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. To say she felt intimidated was an understatement. The two business partners behind the oil company, McKenna Quinn, had already acquired legendary status in the ten years they'd held the reins. To actually meet them in the flesh had practically rendered her speechless. She'd seen them around the office, but never this close.

She clasped her hands nervously together on her knees and tried to relax. It felt rather difficult considering her interrogators were the two most attractive men she'd ever seen. Jake McKenna's persona exuded charm, but that was hardly surprising given his reputation. The newspapers had coined him "The Texas Playboy." He had the most wonderful smile and piercing blue eyes. They seemed to stare right into her soul as he studied her from his side of the desk. Brody, on the other hand, appeared moody and quiet. He didn't smile at all and just kept idly chewing a pencil as though bored with everything. Occasionally, he would stare at her, and she wondered what he was looking at. She nervously patted her hair into shape, making sure the pin that secured it was still firmly held in place.

When it came to looks, they were polar opposites. Jake had thick blond hair that fell disheveled about his face, whereas Brody had short dark hair that tapered neatly into his neck. He had a certain vulnerability to him, too. Taylor knew his wife had died about year ago, so she guessed that might be the reason for his melancholy.

Jake cleared his throat and smiled. "So, Taylor. We've read your résumé. At twenty-seven, you have plenty of experience, and Joan tells me she's advised you how to execute all her duties."

"That's correct, Mr. McKenna. I'm perfectly familiar with the way Joan works. She's shown me everything."

"That's good. As you know, you would assist us while we go on vacation."

Taylor pushed the glasses back up the bridge of her nose. It had been a last minute decision to wear spectacles instead of her usual contacts, but she thought she looked more businesslike. Besides, it seemed a good idea to give her eyes a rest. Now she regretted her decision. The damned things would keep slipping down her face.

Jake spoke again. "So, tell me, Taylor, why do you think you would be suitable for the position?"

This was the opportunity she'd been waiting for since starting to work at McKenna Quinn. Maybe it would lead to better prospects in the future.

"I'm punctual, discreet, and attentive to my clients needs."

Jake grinned. "Excellent. That's just what we're looking for. Taylor, do you like horses? Can you ride?"

She felt her brows shoot upward in surprise. What did horseback riding have to do with working as a personal assistant? "Why?" she asked, feeling perplexed.

"Let me explain." Jake folded his arms and leaned forward, and Taylor could clearly see the muscles on his arms flex under his shirt. With her curiosity piqued, she let her gaze wander over his impressive physique. The collar and top two buttons of his shirt were undone, and she could just see the slight smattering of masculine hair on his chest. She traced the powerful ridges of his neck to his full, sensual mouth then moved her gaze to his piercing blue eyes. This man had an air of confidence that consumed her rational thoughts. Surely, any woman would be Jell-O in his hands?

When he smiled, Taylor swallowed hard. A set of dimples creased into his cheeks and caressed his eyes with amusement. Now, dimples were her favorite. As a blush began to form on her face, she pushed his presence from her mind. Fantasies about employers were a strict no-no. Jake McKenna had a reputation. No doubt he was amusing himself at her expense.

He continued, "We'll be heading up to Montana to a private ranch in the mountains. From past experience, we need someone to deal with any calls and inquiries related to the business but only convey the important messages to us, which need our full attention. There will be an element of horseback riding, should you need to contact us during the day, because we will be out fishing and hunting and do not intend to take a cell phone with us. You see, Taylor," he smiled, "we need rest and relaxation just like everyone else."

“I grew up on a ranch, so I can ride, Mr. McKenna.” The idea of spending an entire month with these two attractive men unnerved her. “The accommodation, how will that be arranged?”

Jake McKenna leaned back in his executive chair. He steepled his fingers together against his chin. Without releasing eye contact with her, he said, “You can explain that, Brody, better than I. It’s your ranch.”

Taylor turned to Brody. The guy clearly didn’t want to be there. He dropped the pencil he’d been chewing into a penholder. His voice was deeper than Jake’s, with a heavier Texas twang. “You’ll have your own personal annex, a short distance from the main ranch house. Two members of staff will come during the day to take care of the livestock, clean, and prepare meals. They will leave before it gets dark, and then it will be just the three of us.”

It sounded very intimate. “My own annex, you say?”

His light gray eyes caressed her face. With the dark lashes curling down onto his cheeks, he looked very sexy. A five o’clock shadow stained his jaw and made him appear incredibly masculine. His full mouth almost curved into a smile. Almost. “Everything will be strictly above board and totally professional, Ms. Matthews. You will have complete privacy.” He turned to Jake, and they both nodded their agreement. “We would like to offer you the position, Taylor.” Had they just concurred with one look? These guys had been together for so long they’d become intuitive to one another. Now that seemed sexy as hell, and just a little bit dangerous. “Double the trouble” came to mind.

Chapter Two

Taylor removed the last of her clothes from the wardrobe and then laid them on the bed. Just how much should she take? She heard it could get mighty cold in Montana. After slipping the coat hangers from the garments, she began packing them neatly into one of two suitcases.

Her best friend, Sofia, leaned against the open doorway, looking suitably sad. They'd shared the apartment for the last three years. Eventually, she spoke. "I can't believe you're leaving me all on my own for a whole month." Her mouth pouted petulantly.

Taylor smiled. Sofia couldn't fool her for one minute. She tucked the last of her thick woolen jumpers into the suitcase and went over to the drawer where she kept her underwear. She grabbed a handful and began tossing it on top of the pile.

"I don't think you'll be on your own for long. I'm sure Steve will be keeping you company."

"Maybe."

"Don't make me feel guilty. There's no maybe. As soon as I'm gone, he'll be moving in."

Sofia giggled and walked over to her. "I think we're getting serious, Taylor." She held out her hand. Sitting on her finger was a gold and diamond solitaire ring. It sparkled brightly.

"Oh. My. God! He's asked you to marry him. That's fantastic!" Taylor hugged her friend as they both squealed with delight. "I'm so happy for you."

"Me, too." Tears of joy stained her friend's cheeks.

"When did this happen?"

“A few weeks ago.” Sofia placed a hand on her arm and looked earnestly into her eyes. “I didn’t want to say something before because you’d only just split up with Justin.”

Just the mention of her ex’s name brought her out in a cold sweat. Four years she’d been going out with him, and he’d just dropped her without a backward glance—again. Justin had been a control freak. Nearly everything about her had been molded and altered by him over the years. He didn’t like the way she dressed. He didn’t like the friends she kept. In fact, what had he seen in her in the first place? After all, he had tried to change everything about her. That was one of the reasons why she’d agreed to go to Montana with her employers. It would do her the world of good to get away.

Taylor patted her friend’s hand for reassurance. “I’m fine about Justin, really. It’s his loss.”

“Good for you, girl. Anyway, I’m sure a month with those two billionaires will soon make you forget about him.”

“And what does that mean?”

“Nothing. They’re just very good-looking guys, that’s all, and you’re a very good-looking woman.”

“Thanks for the compliment, but you have the wrong idea entirely, Sofia. Two’s company, three’s a crowd. Besides, I have complete privacy. I’ll be living away from them.”

“If you say so.” Her friend had a smirk on her face.

“Come on, I know you’ve got something else to say. Out with it.”

“Okay, if you insist. It was a few years ago, but I seem to remember there was something in the newspapers about them both.”

“Go on,” she urged.

“Well, it was a kiss-and-tell piece from their student days at Harvard. Apparently, they both shared the same woman, at the same time.”

Taylor snorted. “What? And you think I might fall for the same trick. Firstly, if it were true, then it probably happened while they

were drunk or stoned. Everybody makes mistakes when they're young. Secondly, the woman was probably lying."

"They didn't sue the newspaper."

"That's still not proof, Sofia." As she continued packing, the vision of a woman sandwiched between the two sexiest men she'd ever encountered swam into focus. Strangely, the idea didn't seem abhorrent. On the contrary, it made her heart race. To have their undivided attention would be breathtaking. She shook the thought from her head. Being without a man these past few months had made her crazy.

When the telephone rang, she called out, "I'll get it." She headed quickly into the living area. It just might be her employers with further instructions. They planned to pick her up on the way to the airport in just an hour's time.

"We need to talk." Justin's voice on the end of the line immediately took the spring from her step.

"I don't want to talk, Justin. I'm just about to leave on vacation." No need to tell him she was working.

"Where?"

"I don't answer to you anymore. Don't call me again, we're history." She noisily replaced the receiver on its cradle. She dusted her hands together. For the first time in four years, she was her own woman. It felt good.

When she returned to the bedroom, her friend was sitting on top of one of the suitcases, flattening it down. "Who was that?"

"Oh, nothing important. Just a wrong number." Taylor had suddenly realized that Justin had been wrong for her all along. They had absolutely nothing in common.

After securing the catches on the suitcase, Sofia jumped off and pointed at it. "Now I've put a surprise present in this one. So don't open it until you get there. Promise?"

Taylor nodded. "Okay, thank you. What is it?"

Sofia tapped her own nose. "It wouldn't be a surprise if I told you. Wait and see. I know you'll love it."

* * * *

"Taylor seems very efficient," Jake stated as the limousine whisked them closer to Brody's ranch.

Brody nodded as they both stared at the woman sitting up front with the driver. A glass partition separated her from them. She'd made a series of calls on her cell phone and was now busily making notes on a pad.

Jake couldn't help letting his gaze wander up her back. With her hair still pinned up, her elegant neck caught his attention. He imagined tasting it with his tongue, feeling the soft downy hairs caress against his mouth. He licked his lips, and he heard his friend chuckle.

When he turned to look at him, Brody was shaking his head, a smile on his face. It was good to see his mood lifting the closer they got to his ranch. If things carried on the way they were going, it would be worth the extra effort he'd put in.

"You just can't help yourself, can you?" Brody stated.

"What?"

"See, you don't even know you're doing it."

"Doing what?"

"Eyeing her up."

"How do you figure that?" Jake wasn't about to admit to anything.

"I've never seen a man look more ravenous."

It was Jake's turn to laugh. "Guess you know me too well, buddy. I've been thinking that Ms. Matthews would make a right tasty meal."

"She's hardly your usual type, Jake. She seems very reserved."

"Hmm, I think that's just there to fool us. I reckon there's a real wild cat hiding under all those unflattering clothes."

"How do you figure that?"

"I watched her on the flight up here. Every so often when she looks at one of us, you can see a tiny blush bloom on her cheeks. I guess she's wondering if the rumors about us are true."

"And you think she'd like to find out?"

"Yes."

"Those days are over for me, Jake. We had some high old times together when we were younger, and I don't regret a moment of it. But since Paige died, I'm not interested in other women."

"We'll see. We'll see." He touched his friend's shoulder. Even the idea of another woman seemed to fill Brody with horror. Well, he had a month with which to convince his friend that life was for the living. Paige wouldn't want to see Brody wasting his life like this, either. He just hoped he'd be able to reach him.

Jake looked at his watch. "We'll be there soon. Shall I ask Taylor to dinner this evening?" He held his hand up to stop Brody from speaking. "Just so we get to know her a little better. It might break the ice between us all. You know what they say. A happy employee is an efficient employee."

"Okay, so long as that's all."

At least it would be a way of introducing Brody back into socializing again.

* * * *

Finally, Taylor finished the last of her calls and allowed herself a moment to stare out the window. Montana was breathtaking. A range of mountains lined the valley on both sides. Vast forests of pine trees rose up their magnificent slopes and disappeared into the snowy white peaks. When the driver turned the limousine down a small track, she knew they were almost there.

Some ten minutes later, after driving through a forest, a group of log cabins appeared. They were huddled together in a large clearing. Smoke swirled lazily upward from their chimneys, giving them

picture-postcard appeal. An area had been fenced off and several horses grazed on the grass. It all looked very idyllic.

The driver brought the car to a gentle halt outside a small cabin, and Taylor knew that this must be the annex where she would be staying. “Thanks for the ride, Tom.”

“My pleasure, Taylor.” He popped the trunk and made to get out.

“No, it’s okay. I’ll get them.” Taylor hooked a bag over her shoulder and stepped from the limousine.

Jake and Brody had beaten her to it and were already lifting her bags from the trunk. They placed them on the decking and then opened the door to the annex. “I hope you’ll be comfortable here, Taylor.” Brody showed her around the small cabin. One bedroom with ensuite, and a living area with kitchenette. A log fire glowed in a small wood burner.

“It’s perfect.”

Jake brought one of her bags in. “Brody and I hope you will join us for dinner. How does eight o’clock sound?”

She looked into his eyes, trying to guess his motives. He appeared sincere. Everything seemed perfectly above board.

“It’s just my way of getting to know one another,” he said, perhaps guessing her reticence to anything remotely intimate.

After what her friend, Sofia, had told her, she couldn’t help but wonder how they did it. Who was on top, and who was on the bottom? Brody or Jake? With the two men now taking up nearly all the available space in her cabin, her voice sounded flustered as she accepted their dinner invitation.

“Thank you.”

Brody walked back outside, and she followed him. He pointed at the main building. “Just come over when you’re ready.”

Jake made to pick up her remaining case, but she stopped him. “No, it’s fine. I’ve got it.” Her hand must have caught on one of the catches because no sooner had she lifted it from the floor than the lid sprung wide open, depositing all her clothes on the ground. Taylor

could feel herself blush as her lacy thongs and bras spread out for all to see. Now why had she packed those? What use were they in the middle of nowhere? Dropping the case, she quickly bent down and began gathering up the silky scraps. “How silly of me,” she mumbled with acute embarrassment.

Brody and Jake weren’t looking at her underwear, though. They were both staring at an object that had tipped out behind her. When she looked over her shoulder, she gasped. The heat in her face burned even hotter as her blush intensified into what she knew was deep scarlet red.

Jake leaned down and picked up the neatly boxed vibrator. His mouth spread into a wicked grin as he read a note attached to it. He then handed it to her without a word.

Taylor wished the ground would swallow her up whole. She had never felt so embarrassed. “Oh, my God, I am going to kill my roommate.” She then fled inside the cabin and shut the door quickly behind her. When she heard both men laughing uncontrollably outside, it only added to her acute embarrassment.

“Sofia, I am going to kill you when I get home,” she muttered under her breath. She fanned a hand in front of her face, hoping to cool her burning cheeks. After tossing the underwear on a nearby table, she looked at the message Sofia had attached to the vibrator’s box.

*If your sexy billionaires don’t service your needs,
then this will have to keep you company.
Enjoy. Sofia*

“Oh, my God.” Taylor closed her eyes. It got worse by the minute. Jake had read the message, too. Whatever must he think of her? What must they both think? Because as sure as eggs were eggs, he would have told Brody.

Just how was she going to face them both at dinner now?

Chapter Three

“Leave it alone,” Brody warned as Jake threw another log onto the fire and began prodding it with a poker.

“There’s something primal about an open fire, Brody. It’s my duty to breathe life into it.”

“Well, you’re gonna kill it if you keep messing.”

Jake leaned the poker against the stone chimney and dusted his hands on his jeans. “Guess you’re right. I don’t want our lady friend getting cold.”

“What do you mean *our* lady friend, Jake?”

“Just a figure of speech, buddy.” He watched Jake settle his tall frame into the large leather couch. From their conversation earlier that day, he knew Jake was thinking about a return to their threesome days.

Brody shook his head as he relaxed in front of the fire. “You are obsessed with the opposite sex.”

“Even you must be a little curious, after what we learned this afternoon.”

“A sex toy secretly hidden in her luggage by a friend as a joke does not make the woman a rampant nymphomaniac.”

“No, but I’m telling you, all those sexy scraps of lace do.”

Brody laughed. “Yes, they were kinda skimpy. Sort of out of sync with how she dresses. Even I think the woman may have hidden depths.”

“Yes, Ms. Matthews is certainly an enigma.” Jake held a gleam in his eye. It was a challenge that Brody ignored. He didn’t want to find Taylor remotely attractive. As far as he was concerned, his life had

ended the day Paige died. His friend continued, "I'll be on the lookout for any sign of those slinky garments tonight."

"And how do you plan on doing that?"

"That's easy. If I can see the line of her panties through her clothes, then she's not wearing one of those sexy little G-strings."

Brody chuckled. He hadn't felt this relaxed for quite a while, but he wasn't about to help Jake seduce the woman. He decided to wind him up instead. "On the other hand, if there's no panty line, it could mean she's wearing absolutely nothing underneath."

Jake groaned. "Trust you to point that out. Now I'll have a hard-on every time I look at her cute little butt."

"Then for your sake, I hope she's wearing a pair of good old-fashioned, cast iron knickers that your grandma would approve of." They both laughed. When he saw Taylor walking across the yard to their cabin, he announced. "I'll let her in." He stood and turned to his friend. "Jake, I'm not ready to return to the land of the living yet. I still miss Paige."

"I know, I know, but there's no harm in looking, Brody. Life's for the living."

"Even looking feels like a betrayal."

"That's why we're here. By the time we return to Dallas, you'll be your old self again." Jake sounded confident, but Brody wasn't so sure.

"Maybe."

Brody stepped outside onto the wraparound porch. The wooden decking creaked under his weight. The smell of wood smoke assailed his senses. Now he was glad Jake had persuaded him to come to the ranch. He'd always loved this place. It had never appealed to Paige. She'd been a city girl, through and through. So they hadn't visited the ranch very often in the three years they'd been married.

Taylor was busy petting his Karakachan dog in the middle of the yard, and he called out, "That's Molly, our grizzly bear guard dog."

Immediately, Taylor's head snapped up, and he could see he'd spooked her. Her mouth held a perfect O shape until she spoke. "Grizzly bears, oh my God, you get grizzly bears out here?"

He walked over to her. With her hair still held up with the largest pin that he'd ever seen, Taylor wore a little black cocktail dress that clung to all the right places. She certainly had a good figure. Her breasts were large and firm, and her waist tapered in deliciously. Without thinking, his gaze wandered down to her perfect, shapely ass. No panty line was visible. He chuckled to himself. Jake was gonna suffer for sure. And maybe, just maybe, he might, too.

"We get all kinds of wild critters wandering through the ranch, Taylor, and grizzly bears are just one of them." There was something different about her that he couldn't quite put his finger on. He knew his forehead held a frown as he tried to figure out what it was.

She pointed at Molly. "But this dog's not big enough to fight a bear."

He laughed out loud. "No, she's been trained to warn us when there's one around. She can pick up their scent in the wind. They have been known to chase bears clean away, but mainly she's just here for extra safety," he patted the dog's head, "and of course a little petting."

"Oh, she's adorable." Her smile transformed her face. A tiny dimple formed on either cheek, and her eyes held a hint of amusement. Taylor had the most wonderful green irises he'd ever seen. Flecks of gold interspersed the soft forest green and contrasted perfectly with her long, dark lashes. The combination proved difficult to resist. Like a starving man, he feasted on their beauty, wondering why he hadn't noticed before. Then he realized. He pointed at his own eyes.

"Your glasses. You're not wearing any."

"I wear contacts mostly. Occasionally I give my eyes a rest, and of course, if I'm flying, I don't use them. They're too uncomfortable to wear in the dry atmosphere of a plane." He guessed Jake would notice her transformation from plain to pretty, too.

“Come on in, Taylor. You must be getting hungry.” He guided her inside. She was a good ten inches shorter than him because, at six foot three, he towered over her. As she walked in front of him, he noticed the elegant slant to her neck and shoulders. Brody knew he was taking far too much interest in their guest for the evening, but he figured looking was okay. Yeah, there was nothing wrong in a man enjoying the physical beauty of a woman. It didn’t mean there’d be any fucking going on. He’d leave that up to Jake.

* * * *

As soon as Taylor walked through the door, Jake knew he wanted her. The woman had changed beyond all recognition. Gone were her glasses and unfashionable clothes, and in their place stood a highly attractive woman. She had an elegance that he found highly alluring. He realized then that she was a woman of hidden depths. She might come across as plain and dowdy at work, but scratch the surface and there was layer upon layer of secret desires just waiting to express themselves. He’d bet a million dollars that Taylor had plenty of sexual fantasies.

He stared at her sweet, ripe ass as she walked in front of him. Her hips swayed seductively. No panty line was visible, and he groaned inwardly. Fuck, if she didn’t have the perfect figure, too. Brody grinned at him as she sat down at the table. His best friend knew he desired her, and he relished the fact that there wasn’t a darn thing he could do about it.

Yet.

Well, if there was one thing that Jake prided himself on, it was the chase. If he wanted a woman, he’d go all out to get her. Bedding Taylor would be a challenge he would certainly enjoy. For a woman of her sublime beauty, he’d make the extra effort.

He cleared his throat, trying not to stare at her shapely thighs. “I hope you’re settling in after all the traveling, Taylor.”

She beamed a dazzling smile with her perfect, luscious lips. “Oh, I’m very comfortable over there. I have everything I could possibly need.”

Brody called from the kitchen as he spooned food onto their plates. “Make yourself useful, Jake. Pour the wine.”

Jake did as his friend asked and filled their glasses. Brody served the plated food. “Enjoy.” Once he’d sat down, he lifted his glass. “To new friendships.”

Jake chinked his glass with them both. A month with Brody and Taylor stretched out ahead, and he echoed the sentiment. “To new friendships.”

* * * *

“I couldn’t eat another mouthful. You certainly cook a mean steak, Brody.” Taylor placed her knife and fork neatly on the plate. He smiled at her compliment. Brody didn’t seem as moody as he’d been back in Dallas. She guessed it was the calming atmosphere of the ranch. It was the perfect place to unwind. The fire crackled and spit in the large open grate. Jake seemed to have taken ownership of the blaze and threw another log into the roaring flames.

“Another bourbon?” Brody asked as she reclined on the large leather couch. She gazed, mesmerized, into the flickering firelight.

“Just a small one, and then I must leave you both in peace.” The hem of her dress rose higher as she crossed her legs. Self-consciously, she smoothed a hand down her thighs. Yes, it was definitely too short. When she glanced at Jake standing casually by the fireplace, the breath seized in her throat. She knew lust when she saw it. The heat in his gaze as he followed the movements of her fingers unnerved her, but it also excited her, too. They were both powerful, attractive men in their prime. Any attention, however fleeting, would always prove a potent aphrodisiac.

As if in slow motion, his eyes raised to hers. All she had to do was turn away, but for the life of her, she couldn't. He stared right at her. The connection was made. Something passed between them. An unspoken message that would no doubt keep her awake half the night. Jake wanted her, and because she hadn't turned away, she'd given him the green light to come and get her. Desire pooled in her panties. The idea that that might include Brody turned her on even more.

The spell was broken when Brody handed her a glass of bourbon. Jake stared at the fire. His blond hair highlighted by the flickering flames. Perhaps, she had imagined it all. Keeping her voice light, she decided to divert their attention away from her.

"This is a lovely spot to live, Brody. How come you bought it when it's so far from Dallas?"

Brody sat beside her and stretched out in front of the fire. It was the first time he'd looked completely relaxed. He swirled the bourbon around in his glass. "I was on a hunting trip a few years ago, and I happened to come across this ranch. When I found out it was up for sale, I just had to buy it."

"It is very peaceful."

"I'll show you around tomorrow, so you can get your bearings, Taylor. We'll go out on the horses."

"Thank you, that sounds lovely." For a few minutes she listened to the fire crackling in the grate and then asked, "How did you both get started in the oil business?" Taylor had read a few articles about their early life but wanted to hear the real facts for herself.

Jake spoke first. "Brody and I ran a geological survey company. When we were up in Alaska, working on a project, a piece of land came up for sale a hundred miles south of Prudhoe Bay. It had already been surveyed with a fine-tooth comb by all the major oil companies but had yielded nothing."

Brody joined in. "Jake and I were convinced their surveyors didn't know Jack shit. We figured their geology was flawed. Our experience in the field all pointed to oil being there, so we bought the land at a

knockdown price and refinanced our homes to fund a skeleton drilling crew. The rest, as they say, is history.”

“You took a chance. You could have lost everything.”

Jake grinned. “Yep, we were in way over our heads. We wouldn’t even have been left with the shirts on our backs if the land had been dry.”

Brody chuckled as he stared into the firelight. “We almost ran out of money, too, but at the very last hour, we struck the black stuff.”

“We sure did, buddy. The relief when that oil came flooding out the ground.” Jake shook his head as he remembered the event. “Boy, did we get drunk that night. It was a real celebration.”

“You’ve been celebrating ever since.”

“True.” Jake grinned.

“I admire your courage,” Taylor observed. “I don’t think I would have had the nerve to lay everything on the line like you two.”

Jake stared at her. “I see it this way. Big risks, big rewards. That’s my motto for life.”

The seductive, relaxing combination of the alcohol and the mesmerizing blaze in the grate made Taylor feel tired. Her eyelids began to droop, and sleep threatened to overwhelm her. Almost immediately, a vision floated before her eyes of them both making love to her. The two sexiest men in the world looked after her every need. Her eyes flew wide open at the intense vivid scene. This just wouldn’t do. She was their employee and needed to remain professional at all times. She stood and placed her half-finished glass of bourbon on the table. They were her employers, she reminded herself. Any fanciful notion of Jake and Brody becoming her lovers was a strict no-no, God forbid.

She made her excuses. “I hope you don’t mind, but I feel really tired all of a sudden. I guess it’s been a long day, what with the traveling.” Quickly, she began walking toward the door. Away from their masculine presence, she’d be able to think straight and not indulge herself with any sexual fantasies.

“Sure thing, Taylor, sleep well,” Brody called after her. “Good night.”

“I’ll walk you across to your cabin.” Jake managed to reach the door before her. His tall frame overwhelmed her, making her feel incredibly small and vulnerable.

Without looking directly at him, she focused on his shirt collar and replied, “No, I’ll be fine. Thank you, Jake.” She didn’t want to be alone with him. Not because she didn’t trust him, but because she didn’t trust herself. Whenever she was around Jake McKenna, she came out in a hot sweat. Just what was it about this guy?

“I insist. There could well be a grizzly out there. It’s not safe to go on your own.”

“Grizzly? Oh, I see.” Her voice sounded weak as he led her out onto the decking. In trying to escape, she had cornered herself. There didn’t seem an alternative as they made their way across the yard. All the time she was aware of every inch of the man walking beside her.

Molly, yapped as they passed her, putting her more at ease. A comforting light lit up her cabin.

“We’ll see you in the morning, Taylor. We’ll be ready to ride out just after eight.” His deep, masculine voice lifted the hairs on the nape of her neck.

She grasped the door handle, ready to disappear inside. Jake placed an arm across the doorway, thwarting her escape. She stared into his eyes. “I’ll be there. Goodnight, Jake,” she answered nervously.

A set of dimples lined his mouth as his lips spread into a wicked grin. Sun-kissed blond hair fell disheveled over his forehead. His vivid blue eyes held hers. There was no way she could drag her gaze away. Surely he was going to kiss her.

Now.

Chapter Four

He leaned in. Instead of kissing her, he whispered against her ear, “My, you’re like a cat on a hot tin roof. So, Taylor, let’s not pretend. I’ve been watching you tonight. You want me, just as much as I want you.”

A small whimper escaped her lips. “You are mistaken, Mr. McKenna.”

“Uh-uh, darlin’. I can tell. You want me to take charge. You want me to rip your pretty little panties from your body and bend you over the nearest chair.”

Taylor gasped, her pussy flooding with desire. She could feel her womb clenching at his choice of words. No man had ever spoken to her like that before. The idea of this beautiful, powerful man bending her over a chair turned her on, but it also worried her, too. Someone as commanding as Jake McKenna would use her and then cast her aside without a backward glance. He had a reputation as a womanizer. He would never take her seriously. He may be able to second-guess her deepest, darkest fantasies, but she knew it could never lead anywhere. After her failed relationship with Justin, she wasn’t about to make the same mistake.

He smiled. “I was right. All you can think about is my big cock filling your pussy. I know you’ve heard the rumors about Brody and me.”

“I haven’t heard any rumors,” she lied, trying to be as detached as she could. It was almost impossible. How could you be detached from someone as good looking as Jake McKenna?

“Well, the rumors about us are true. We definitely like threesomes.”

Her heart fluttered at how easily he’d admitted it. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He smiled. “Hmm, there’s no use denying it, Taylor. I can see it in your eyes. You want to know what it’s like to be fucked by two men at the same time.”

She raised her chin and stared into his eyes. With Jake just a few inches from her, denial seemed the safest option. “As I said before, you are mistaken.”

“If you say so, darlin’. As for Brody, he just loves to watch.” He leaned in and whispered quietly against her ear. “Would it turn you on, knowing he was watching me service your hot, wet pussy?” He was so close his warm breath fanned against her flesh. He nuzzled her neck, tasting her with his mouth and tongue. A small whimper escaped her lips as the erotic vision flooded her thoughts. “My hard dick slipping so easily inside you, while he looks on. I know it turns you on,” he whispered. He kissed her then, and God help her she kissed him right back, pressing her body against his as she wound her arms around his neck. She could feel the hard ridge of his erection through her clothing. It felt wonderful as he pinned her in place with his hips.

“Hmm, sealed with a kiss, darlin’.” He stared at her mouth and then flicked his gaze to hers. “A promise is a promise, and I always keep mine.” He brushed a hand into her hair and then smiled into her eyes. “You’re a beautiful woman. When I fuck you for the first time in front of Brody, it will be the best sex you’ve ever had.” With that final breathtaking statement, he turned and walked away.

Taylor sagged against the door. She was positive she hadn’t a bone left in her body. She’d been right. The guy had just turned her into Jell-O.

* * * *

At just past eight, Brody walked out onto the porch and breathed in. Ah, this felt better. The fresh Montana air heightened his senses. The last time he'd felt this good, Paige was still alive. He heard the wooden decking creak behind him and watched Jake emerge from the cabin. He was dressed in jeans and a pair of cowboy boots.

"We'll just wait for Taylor and then go and saddle up the horses."

"Okay," Jake murmured as though still half-asleep. He leaned back against the porch balustrade, resting his elbows on the railing.

"You look like shit this morning, buddy. Did you get any sleep last night?" he asked.

Jake yawned. "Not a lot. Couldn't stop thinking about Taylor's pussy." He grinned. "She and I had a little kiss outside her cabin last night. Believe me, that woman is one hot chick."

"You do whatever you want, Jake, but leave me out of it."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever you say, Brody. I just teased her a little last night, that's all. And she sure seemed to like it."

Just at that moment, Taylor opened the door to her cabin and stepped out into the sunlight. "What did you say to her?" Brody asked.

"The usual stuff like, *I know what you need*. The women always seem to go for that sort of thing."

"Perhaps you said too much, Jake."

"Why?"

Brody motioned with his head, and Jake glanced over his shoulder in Taylor's direction. She was walking toward them, dressed in the baggiest, dullest gray jumper. It must have taken her months to find something so hideous. Her hair had been scraped back into a severe bun, and she wore the worst pair of ill-fitting jeans he'd ever seen. She'd even put her glasses back on.

"Buddy, you sure must have impressed her with something because that hot chick from last night is nowhere to be seen." Brody chuckled.

At least Jake had the decency to look surprised. Then he smiled and said, "That means I got to her, Brody. She's just at the denial stage."

"You could have fooled me."

"I assure you, Taylor is a woman of hidden depths. She has a thousand fantasies just waiting to be unleashed. I just have to coax them from her."

"Well, don't overdo it because you may end up with her wearing sack cloth and ashes."

"All you need is a little patience, Brody. We're here for one whole month. I've got plenty of time. Besides, what else am I gonna do?"

"Careful, Jake. A month is a long time. You just might end up with more than you bargained for."

"And what would that be?"

"You could just end up losing your heart."

"Nah, it'll never happen to me." Jake shook his head, a look of pure confidence on his face.

"That's what I said, until I met Paige."

"Paige was different."

"Paige was a real flesh and blood woman with sensitivities and feelings just like Taylor. She wasn't *your* usual airhead type."

Jake laughed. "I've only been up twenty minutes, and you've already insulted *me* and the ladies I've had the pleasure of knowing."

"All I'm saying is Taylor's the sort of woman a man could get serious with. She's not just out for a good time."

"We'll see."

"And you can count me out for any sort of threesome, too." When he saw the expression on Jake's face, he held up his hands to stop any argument. "I mean it, buddy. Those days are long gone."

* * * *

Brody and Jake were busy talking as she walked across to them. Jake leaned over the railing and raised his hat. "Howdy," he greeted, grinning at her. Taylor had no doubt he'd noticed what she was wearing. His blue eyes sparkled in the early morning light with pure amusement. By choosing the most unflattering clothing possible, she was warning him to back off. Yes, okay, she might find him incredibly attractive, but he was also her boss. His words may have inflamed her last night, but she would make sure she remained strictly professional at all times from now on. If she gave Jake McKenna an inch, she knew he would take a mile.

"Good morning, gentlemen," she greeted as she drew level with them both.

Brody stepped down from the verandah. He looked sexy as hell in his jeans and cowboy boots and a tan leather sheepskin jacket. She had difficulty dragging her gaze away from his wide shoulders and strong, masculine hands. Everyday couldn't be like this. Surely if it continued, she'd become a nervous wreck.

"It sure is a fine day, Taylor. Jake and I will show you around the ranch. Most of the time, apart from the staff, you'll be on your own. We're here mainly for the hunting."

"That's right, Brody." Jake thwacked him on the back as they made their way over to the corral. "The chase is certainly what I love the most. How about you, darlin'? Have you ever been hunting?"

She shook her head. "Not unless you count shooting rabbits at my father's ranch."

"So you can shoot." Jake looked impressed.

"A little. I haven't done it for a while, though."

"We'll give you a gun. It's best if you have some protection when you go into the woods on your own," Brody said. "Just as a precaution, Taylor. No need to worry yourself."

She laughed nervously. "You mean like a grizzly, for instance?" The idea of coming across a bear scared the hell out of her.

“Exactly.” Brody squeezed her hand and assured her. “It’s highly unlikely it will happen though.”

Three horses were tethered on the corral fencing, and Brody introduced them to her. “This is your mount while you’re here, Taylor. Her name’s Bessie.”

Taylor stroked the soft muzzle on the black and white mare. Dark brown eyes with long, dark lashes stared back at her. “Bessie, it suits her.”

“And these are ours. Meet Pharaoh and Majestic.” Two magnificent black stallions stood shoulder to shoulder, their noble heads nodding gently with impatience. Taylor might have known they would both have impressive mounts.

“Here, I’ll help you onto your horse, Taylor.” Jake held out his hand. When his eyes connected with hers, she swallowed hard. He was the sexiest man alive. After grabbing hold of the saddle, she raised her knee, and Jake effortlessly lifted her onto Bessie. Her glasses slipped forward with the movement, and she pushed them back up the bridge of her nose, regretting her decision to wear them. The dowdy clothes didn’t seem to make a blind bit of difference to Jake. He still looked at her as though she was dinner. His hand rested on her thigh a little longer than was strictly necessary.

“I can tell you love the chase, Jake.” She stared directly into his eyes, not afraid to hold his gaze. “But sometimes you can’t always win.”

“Darlin’, it’s all about the hunter and the hunted. What I enjoy the most is tracking down the prey until they have nowhere else to run.” He motioned with his fingers, and she leaned down to his level. When he quietly whispered, “I always get what I want, Taylor,” ripples of energy tore through every nerve ending. Her whole body thrummed with sexual excitement.

“And what do you want, Jake?” She knew, but she had to ask anyway.

“Hmm.” He smiled, raising his eyes slowly up her body. “I think we understand one another perfectly.”

With her heart beating frantically out of control, she raised a brow, trying to look nonchalant. “We do? How do you figure that, Mr. McKenna?”

He gestured to her clothes. “You can’t hide, Taylor. You and I are on the same wavelength. You might be able to convince yourself, but not me.” He leaned in and whispered close to her ear, “Have no doubt, I always win.”

She watched him walk away and mount his horse in one effortless, fluid movement. His long, muscular legs controlled the beast as he guided the headstrong stallion along the track with practiced ease. He was an incredibly exciting man. He made her feel so very alive. Justin, she realized, had always made her feel the complete opposite, bringing her down into despondency and depression. It hadn’t always been like that. Once she’d been a happy, confident woman who enjoyed life to the full. By wearing the very clothes that Justin would have approved of, she was sticking firmly to safe ground.

Both Brody and Jake exuded a zest for life that was simply exhilarating. Perhaps, the time had come for her to embrace the world and not cling to the debilitating negativity of a control freak. As Taylor followed Jake and Brody along the trail, she vowed that when she returned to her cabin, she would cut her remaining frumpy clothes into tiny, little pieces and throw them on the fire. The time had come to allow herself to enjoy what the world around her had to offer. If that meant Jake and Brody, then perhaps it was time to indulge her deepest, darkest fantasies.

Chapter Five

Two weeks later

Jake cast the fly onto the water one more time. It was so peaceful, listening to the river lapping against the shoreline and the occasional loud drumroll of a woodpecker in the distance. It didn't get much more relaxed than this. He breathed in the fresh, rarefied Montana air. He guessed now would be the perfect time to have a heart-to-heart with Brody.

Brody looked as relaxed as he felt. The frown lines he'd been carrying around had all but disappeared.

"Remember when we went hunting in the Yukon with Bob and Jerry, and we caught that moose? What was it you said when we were all about to give up and go home empty handed?"

Brody smiled as he reflected on the day in question. "I think I said something like, life is for the living, and I ain't quitting 'til I catch me that moose. I'm not giving up." His friend stared at him. "Look, I know what you're trying to do, Jake, and it's not going to work. I've been waiting for the last two weeks for you to start railroading me. That is, after all, why you suggested this trip." He whipped the line back into the creek, casting the fly across the surface. The water rippled out where it landed.

"This just doesn't sound like the Brody I know. You can't give up your whole life. I know Paige dying hit you hard, but believe me, you just have to move on. You've got a lifetime to live yet."

"Jake, back off. I mean it." Brody glared at him as he began winding the line back in. His mouth compressed together in anger.

Jake guessed he'd just have to finish what he started, and he ploughed on regardless.

"When we were at Harvard, you lived every day to the full. Hell, you were the one who even convinced me to try the ménage scene."

Brody's eyes angered hotly. "Those days are long gone, Jake, so back the fuck off. If you and Taylor want to start something, that's fine, but you can count me out."

"What are you afraid of, Brody?"

"I'm not afraid of anything."

Jake shook his head. "No, you're afraid all right. You don't want to taint Paige's memory, but Paige is dead, and you have to learn to accept it."

Brody slung the fishing rod to the ground. "Just shut the fuck up, Jake, or I'll do it for you." With his fists clenched, Brody began to walk away. Jake guessed he was very close to being punched, but he had to reach out to his friend one more time.

"Paige wouldn't want you like this, buddy. This is not the man she married. It would break her heart to see you like this. If she were alive now, she'd kick your butt, and no mistake."

Brody gave him the finger. At least it was a sign that he'd heard. He watched his friend move to the other side of the creek and settle on a rock as far away from him as possible. This was not going well. All relaxation seemed to have evaporated. Now they probably wouldn't be on speaking terms for the rest of the day.

When he heard the sound of twigs breaking behind him, he spun around. He saw Taylor making her way toward him on horseback. He smiled. She was dressed in jeans and a pretty, red-checkered blouse, which emphasized the generous swell of her breasts. It was strange that she'd never worn the dowdy clothes again. He guessed that was women for you. She certainly was a sight for sore eyes. The shafts of light piercing through the forest trees lit up her chestnut hair with a halo effect. Every day, he would want her that little bit more. He knew the promise he'd made consumed her every waking thought. All

those furtive looks had practically made him an insomniac, too. When the time came, his reward would be all the sweeter.

“Anything wrong, Taylor?” he asked as she brought Bessie to a controlled stop. He just hoped it wasn’t something major that needed his attention in Dallas. He hadn’t even begun to reach Brody yet.

Taylor sounded serious. “I’m sorry to disturb you both, but it’s a matter of great urgency. I just had to contact you about it.”

“Damn.” He cursed out loud. “What is it?”

She held out a bag. “You forgot your lunch.” A smile lit up her entire face. Two small dimples appeared on her cheeks, and her eyes danced with amusement.

He took hold of the bag and pulled her from the horse. A gasp left her lips as she fell into his arms. Taylor touched her fingers to his shirt collar. Just that simple gesture made him harder than a stallion with a mare on heat. “Woman, don’t do that.”

“What?” She covered her mouth in mock surprise.

“Don’t come the innocent with me. You knew I’d think it had to do with work. You’re winding me up, and you know it.”

“Isn’t that what you do to me on a daily basis, Jake?” Her lips pouted provocatively.

As he looked into her beautiful green eyes, he saw an element of challenge. “You think I’m teasing you, darlin’?”

“Yes.”

He grinned at her. “You really have no idea, do you? What I said to you outside your cabin two weeks ago, I meant. I always keep my promises, darlin’.” He let her go and then pointed to his friend. “You sort Brody out, and you’ll find things change ’round here real quick.”

“Why, what’s wrong with Brody?”

“Oh, he’s just a little pissed, that’s all. I suppose I got too close to the truth. Hell, I don’t know, maybe he’s just not ready to move on yet. He can’t seem to let go of the past.”

“I’ll take him his lunch. Perhaps the gentle patience of a woman, rather than the brute force of a man, may be more helpful.” Taylor

removed a packed lunch from the bag and headed over the creek to Brody. She carefully picked her way across the boulders until she drew level with him. He hoped she could help his best friend, but he doubted it. Taylor had only known him two weeks. He'd known Brody for nearly twenty years and still couldn't reach him.

* * * *

Deep in thought, it was only when a shadow fell across Brody's face that he noticed Taylor standing beside him. She held out her hand.

"I've brought you some lunch. Cold beef, cheese, and some fresh fruit."

Brody reached forward and took the brown bag from her grasp then motioned for her to sit beside him. That way he could keep Jake from trying to speak to him again. He guessed he was only trying to help, but his friend had to know that it hurt him to talk about Paige. He began opening the pack. "Thanks, I'd rather have your company than Jake's at the moment."

"Oh? Have you both just had words?"

"You could say. Jake keeps insisting I thrash out the past. I know he means well, but I'm just not ready to talk about such things." He bit into a beef sandwich, grateful for the diversion.

Taylor lay back on the rock. With the sun at its zenith, she placed her hat over her eyes. He breathed in slowly, starting to relax again. Whenever he spoke of Paige, his whole body would tighten. A cool breeze blew across the creek bed, bringing with it the distinctive smell of the pine trees all around them. He wiped a hand over his face, feeling the stubble rasp against his fingertips. Now a man could relax out here and forget all his worries.

She sighed. "It is difficult talking about the death of a loved one."

He looked at the woman lying next to him, her knees bent. For some reason, he didn't feel that Taylor was a threat. On the contrary,

he felt her feminine presence relaxed the inner turmoil battling for supremacy in his head. Now he wanted to know if her experiences could help him.

“Have you lost someone close to you?” Maybe Taylor could give him an answer to the physical stress he felt every time Paige’s name was mentioned.

She lifted her hat several inches so that she could look at him. With her eyes squinting from the sun, she continued, “Not me personally, Brody, but my father did.”

“Oh?” He finished the sandwich and started on the second one.

“It happened long before I was born. My father’s first wife died some years before he met my mother. At the time, he didn’t want to go on.” This all sounded so familiar. He couldn’t comprehend how he could, either.

“So what changed his mind?”

“My mother. She helped him to move on.”

“I guess your mother is a very special lady if she was able to make him forget his first wife.”

“Yes, she is special.” Taylor sat upright and crossed her legs in front of her. With her palms upward, she rested her arms on her knees. “Brody, my father never forgot, Leanne, his first wife. Even now, he still has a photograph of her in his study, along with a picture of my mother.”

“And your mother doesn’t mind?”

Taylor smiled at him. “No, why would she? We can’t change the past, Brody. We can only change the future. My father moved on, and because he moved on, I was born.”

Brody took a swig from his water bottle. “I can’t imagine forgetting Paige, either. She died of breast cancer, you see. I remember after she died, when it was time to say goodbye, I just couldn’t close the door. I stayed staring at her through a tiny slit. I knew I had to go, but I just wanted to stay. Jake had to help me in the end.” He sighed. The memory still constricted his breathing. “I have

all the money in the world, and even that couldn't save her." He threw a stone into the creek and watched the concentric circles ripple slowly out. "Maybe I just didn't try hard enough."

"I'm sure you did everything you could."

"Maybe."

"It's quite natural to feel guilty, Brody."

Her simple words slammed into him like nothing else could. The emotions that had plagued him for the past year were exactly as Taylor described. Guilt. He felt guilty for still being alive.

Taylor stood. "When you think of Paige, you should celebrate her life and not dwell on the sadness of her death." She chewed on her bottom lip. "Look, I'm sure you've heard all this before, so I'll leave you in peace."

Brody realized it had been the first time he'd allowed himself to talk about Paige. When Taylor began walking back across the creek, he called out after her. "Taylor, thanks."

"What for?"

"For making me see that life goes on."

She smiled at him. "It has to. It's the only way, Brody."

"One more thing."

"Yes?"

"Do you like trout?"

"Yes."

"Then come across tonight at eight. I'm sure Jake and I can land a few before dinner."

A beaming smile lit up her entire face. "Thank you, I'd like that."

As she picked her way across the boulders and back to Jake, Brody reflected that he'd like that, too. There was nothing like the company of a beautiful woman to soothe a man's senses. His gaze caressed her cute butt in the tight jeans she wore as she reached the opposite shoreline. Taylor certainly had a wonderful figure. He lay back on the rock and put his arms behind his head. The sun soaked into his body, relaxing him for the first time in ages. He hoped she

would wear something slinky and sexy because tonight he would enjoy admiring her sweet, feminine form.

Chapter Six

As Taylor walked over to Bessie, she reflected on her new mode of transport. It made her feel as though she was living a hundred years ago. Time had indeed slowed down and almost stopped. She'd never felt so relaxed.

Jake came up to her. "Well?"

Taylor raised an eyebrow. There was something about Jake that made her want to tease him. She guessed it was his devil-may-care attitude. It certainly seemed to have rubbed off on her.

"Well what?" she quipped, knowing full well it would infuriate him.

A smile spread on his lips as his piercing blue eyes held hers. "I can see you getting into some serious hot water one day soon, young lady."

"Oh?"

"Never mind the teasing, woman. Has Brody forgiven me?"

"Now that I don't know, but he has invited me to dinner tonight."

A sexy grin covered Jake's face, and his gaze devoured her from head to toe. "Any idea what's on the menu?"

A quiver reverberated in her stomach. She knew exactly what his seemingly innocent words meant. Was she on the menu?

She touched his shirt, feeling the hard, masculine torso beneath. She licked her lips. "Only trout. Have you caught any yet?"

He shook his head, the amusement evident in his gaze. "Not one."

"Then I suggest you start fishing." She motioned toward Brody with her head. He looked fast asleep on the other side of the creek.

“Looks like your partner is leaving it all up to you. Best you catch something soon, or you’ll go hungry tonight.”

She let out a shriek of excitement as he suddenly took hold of her hand and pulled her into the forest. His torso covered hers as he pressed her hard against a tree. He was so close his hot breath caressed her skin. He leaned in and whispered in her ear. “I’ve no intention of going hungry, Ms. Matthews. So if you continue to wind me up, you may come unstuck.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

He brushed his lips across hers. His tongue snaking out to taste her. Taylor had never been with a man who exuded so much sex appeal. He knew exactly what turned her on. His hips ground erotically into hers as he focused on her mouth.

“I think we understand one another, perfectly, Taylor.”

The sun-kissed locks that fell disheveled around his manly features made him look sexy as hell. She stared into his eyes. Each blue iris was flecked with amethyst and fine slivers of gold. Pale blond lashes touched gently together as he blinked. A crease channeled either side of his mouth when he broke into a smile. With each breath that she took, her heart rate increased. In all her life, she had never felt such wanton desire. Jake McKenna simply overwhelmed her senses. She felt as though she were drowning in his attention. Surely this had to stop?

“I’m your employee, Jake. Aren’t you compromising that relationship?”

“Look, Taylor, this ranch is a million miles from the real world. Why don’t you just go with the flow?”

“And then what?”

“When the vacation is over, we all go back to Dallas.”

“As if nothing’s happened?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know if I can do that.” Jake was a good-time guy. He was the complete opposite to her ex in all respects. Whereas Justin was

methodical and planned every detail with precision, Jake was a suck-it-and-see type of man who took life as it came. Excitement just seemed to ooze from his veins. Surely excitement was exactly what she needed in her life right now? He was as exciting as Justin was boring. Maybe, finally, she could erase Justin from her mind once and for all and move on to new pastures.

Jake cupped her chin and caressed her lips with a deep, satisfying kiss. His tongue tangled with hers as he pressed her more forcefully against the tree. Desire pooled in her panties as her pussy throbbed with need. God help her, she wanted him to take her, to fuck her senseless right there against this tree. To spread her legs wide and fill her with his hard cock. Clearly visible through his tight jeans, the ridge of his erection ground deliciously against her moist cunt with just enough pressure to make her gasp for more. She felt it press unrelentingly against the V of her jeans, zipper to zipper. Of their own accord, her fingers wound into his hair, and she grasped it tightly, reveling in its silky smoothness.

“I know you like that.”

“Yes,” she managed to say.

“Hook your legs behind me,” he commanded as he pressed her harder against the tree. He lifted her legs onto his hips, and she crossed them behind him. Staring into her eyes, he began undoing the button of her jeans. “You see, Taylor, I can bring your fantasies to life.” He pulled her zipper down and then thrust his hand inside her panties. His fingers sought the aching center of her pussy. He circled her clit, making her moan and arch into his hand. “That’s it. Mmm, you’re so wet and hot for me, aren’t you? You’ve wanted me to touch you there, for days.”

“Oh, God, yes,” she ground out, feeling totally boneless in his presence.

When he speared two fingers inside her vagina and pressed his thumb against her clit, she closed her eyes and lifted her hips. His lips brushed across hers as he pumped his fingers relentlessly inside her.

He captured her moans with his mouth as he brought her to the very edge of orgasm. Never had anything felt so exciting and intense.

He licked her mouth, and she opened her eyes, her breath panting in short, sharp gasps. With his forehead now resting against hers, he whispered against her parted lips, “You need this, Taylor. My fingers slipping effortlessly inside you. Just imagine my fingers are my cock, and Brody’s watching. He loves to watch. Think how exciting that would be as I bend you over a chair and fill your cunt with my thick length.” Taylor moaned and flexed her hips as the erotic image consumed her thoughts. He was so close she could see his pupils dilate with desire as he stared down at his own hand pressed inside her panties. “That’s it, darlin’, take what you need. Mmm, my big dick’s filling you over, and over, and over, again.”

“Oh, Jake.” The idea made her whimper against his lips as he plundered her mouth with his tongue. He stopped the movement of his hand and grazed her clit with his thumb, pressing it hard against her sensitive, aroused flesh. Immediately, she came, clinging to his shoulders as she shuddered in relief. Her stomach convulsed as a delicious wanton feeling spasmed deep into her core.

When Jake pulled away, she saw the intense sexual desire reflected in his gaze as he stared into her eyes. “Just a little taste of what I can give you, darlin’.” He eased her legs from around his waist and helped her to stand. Her whole body shook from the effects of excitement and adrenaline, and she leaned against the tree for support. Her orgasm had simply blown her away. He smiled and said, “All you had to do was let go. I for one will look forward to tonight.”

As she began buttoning up her jeans, she watched in awe as he sucked her feminine juices from his fingers. He seemed so confident and self-assured. He was a potent aphrodisiac in his own right. “I may have let you touch me, Jake, but that doesn’t mean you can take me for granted.” She had to have some control over the situation.

He tenderly brushed the hair from her eyes. “Darlin’, it wouldn’t be as exciting if it were a foregone conclusion.” He traced a thumb

over her lips. “I like you, Taylor, and I’ll respect your wishes whatever you decide. It’s just my little gift. You see, I’m really grateful you were able to reach Brody. It’s been a long time since he’s been remotely sociable.”

Taylor laughed. “Dinner tonight won’t be very sociable if you haven’t caught any fish.”

He nodded. “You’re right. Guess I’d better get back to my rod.”

“Guess you had.”

A shaft of sunlight coming through the thick cover of trees lit up his blond hair. He looked magnificent. “When you get back to the ranch, you’d best tell Cook we’ll be arranging our own dinner tonight.”

“Okay.”

“And, Taylor.”

“Yes?”

“Thanks.” He motioned to Brody with his thumb.

Taylor felt a pang of emptiness as Jake moved away and began walking back to the creek.

Jake might be a good-time guy, but he had a heart of gold where his best friend was concerned. She guessed that once you made an impression on Jake, you’d made a friend for life.

* * * *

Later that evening

Jake let his gaze travel up the sexy red dress that Taylor wore. It clung to all the right places. With her back to him, he had a clear view of every delicious curve and swell of her body. Her hair was held up with a single pin, and he let his eyes trace a path from the delicate nape of her neck down to her cinched-in waist and the luscious swell of her cute butt. No panty line again. God, he was horny as hell, and she’d only just arrived. He breathed in. What was the old saying—

"Good things come to those who wait." Well, wait he would. Maybe, just maybe, Taylor had warmed to his way of thinking. He'd already told Brody that he might push Taylor just that little bit further. So who knew how the evening would play out?

Brody had certainly cheered up since he'd spoken with Taylor at the creek. He guessed she'd made an impact on them both but in very different ways. Whatever, he was grateful that she'd been able to reach him. He draped a proprietary arm over her shoulder as she leaned over the stove. He took deep satisfaction that she didn't resist or pull away. Instead, she turned and smiled at him. Her green eyes bright and animated.

"Brody's showing me how to cook the perfect trout."

"I hope he's doing the fish justice because they took me all afternoon to catch."

"You did well catching three."

"Don't praise him too much, it'll go to his head," Brody quipped. "The skill is in the cooking. Now that we've basted them in melted butter, we can griddle them for ten minutes." Obviously in his element, Brody raised a hand and motioned with an index finger. "And not a second more, mind, if you want perfection."

With a hand on both their shoulders, Jake said, "I'll leave the chef and his budding apprentice and go pour the wine."

"Yeah, make yourself useful for a change." Brody seemed happier than he'd been in a long time. The more the evening continued, the more Brody sounded like his old self. He stole a quick glance at Taylor. He wondered if she had something to do with it. Perhaps his best friend was getting his zest for life back. He figured Taylor had reached Brody on an emotional level back at the creek. Something, as a man, he'd been unable to do himself.

He moved across to the fridge and withdrew a chilled bottle of Chardonnay. The table was already set, and he poured the wine into their glasses. No sooner had he finished than Brody dished the freshly cooked trout onto their plates. When they were all seated, Jake raised

his glass. "To friends and lovers." Both his companions raised their glasses to chink together, echoing his sentiments, then immediately began eating their food.

"This is excellent, Brody," he said after forking some fish to his mouth. It tasted divine. "There's something very satisfying about catching, preparing, and cooking the whole meal."

"Mmm, absolutely," Taylor agreed. "Two alpha males hunting for food in the forest. Facing and overcoming the elements is so primitive. I find it so incredibly masculine and sexy." Taylor's enthusiasm made him smile as she continued speaking, "This is the best fish I've ever tasted, Brody." She forked another mouthful to her lips. "Mmm, the flavors are just—" Suddenly, she stopped midsentence and stared at them both. "What? Have I said something stupid?"

"Darlin', you talk all you like. If two men hunting and fishing turns you on, then I'm sure Brody and I are more than willing to oblige." He looked at Brody, who was equally amused.

Her mouth opened, and she gasped. "Oh, God." He could see her visibly squirm in her seat. She even blushed a little. "I've an excuse. I guess it's hardwired into the female brain. For millions of years through natural selection, women have always been attracted to the strongest and most powerful men."

"Same here, Taylor." Brody placed his fork onto his now empty plate. He leaned back in his chair. "Since time began, the male of the species has always looked for the mate with," he gestured with his hands, making an hourglass shape, "the perfect figure."

Taylor threw back her head and laughed. "You just mean big breasts and ass."

Brody continued, "Good childbearing hips are the natural choice when you need your offspring to be born alive. Likewise, ample breasts will keep that child well fed."

Taylor finished the last of her trout and then sipped some wine from her glass. A smile spread on her lips. “So what you’re saying is us women shouldn’t complain if we get stared at.”

“Exactly,” Brody stated.

“A well-argued point, buddy.” Jake lifted the bottle of wine from the table and began topping up their glasses. All this talk about hips and breasts made his cock hard as fuck. “Fancy a game of pool before dessert, Taylor?”

“Yes, I’d like that.”

They both rose from the table. He made eye contact with his best friend. Brody nodded. He knew it was time. “Brody, get a couple of those fine Havana cigars you brought back from Cuba. I’m just in the mood for one.”

“I didn’t know you both smoked.”

“We don’t. Just occasionally we have a cigar.” Jake motioned with his hands. “A kinda celebration.”

“Oh? What are you celebrating?” Taylor asked as she chose a cue from the rack.

Jake began lining up the balls on the table. “Winning.” He could see Brody’s amused smile from the other side of the room.

Taylor placed a hand on her hip. Her mouth pouted petulantly. “Typical man. You haven’t even won yet.”

“No, not yet, but I always win.” He stared at her long and hard. “I’ve told you before that I always get what I want, Taylor.”

Chapter Seven

With her mind only half on the pool game with Jake, she watched Brody carefully prepare two large Cuban cigars. Seated on a couch, he took his time. Clipping the end with a cutting tool in readiness for smoking. It was something she'd seen her father do many times when she'd been a small child, and it filled her with a sense of contentment. Soon, the heady aroma of the finest Havana tobacco would fill the log cabin. *Mmm, wonderful.*

When Brody finally lit the cigar, he stared into her eyes as he let the first puff of smoke past his lips. There could be no mistaking the lust evident in his gaze. She knew then that things were about to get a whole lot more serious between the three of them. As she made to take aim, Jake came up behind her. His hands smoothed a path around her waist. She stiffened as he removed the cue from her grasp and placed it carefully on the pool table.

"Shhh," he murmured, running his hands over her bare arms. "Don't fight it. Just go with the flow."

Taylor closed her eyes then shook her head and breathed in. With Jake's manly arousal pressing against her ass, it was hard to think straight. Her dress was very flimsy, and there was no mistaking the hard-ridged contours of his erect penis. Her heart beat rapidly in anticipation of things to come. "I don't think I can."

Jake whispered in her ear, "I'm going to fuck your lovely cunt over this pool table right now. You're going to yield to me because I know that's exactly what turns you on."

His words ignited a flame deep inside her. Her stomach tensed as a delicious wanton feeling seared into her pussy. In all her life, she

had never felt so sexy. The fact that Jake was making a pass right in front of his business partner turned her on even more. Just how this would all play out, she had no idea, but it excited the hell out of her.

She stood, transfixed, unable to move an inch. Like an animal caught in a trap, she awaited her fate, helpless to resist.

Jake pushed her against the pool table. His hard cock pressed against the back of her dress. She tried to convince herself that everything would be just fine. *Breathe, Taylor, breathe.*

She braced her hands on the table, flexing her fingers as his heat enveloped her.

“Go with the flow,” he whispered again in her ear. His one hand moved to circle her waist, his other hand caressed the nape of her neck with soft strokes of his fingers.

His cool lips trailed over her neck. She closed her eyes. At that precise moment, he owned her. She was his to do with as he pleased. Every last vestige of fight had been drained from her. His hands smoothed down her curves to the hem of her dress, and he roughly lifted it, exposing her ass and the tiny G-string that barely covered it, until it was rucked up around her waist. He threaded his fingers inside the lacy strip of material. The intimate touch of flesh on flesh sent a bolt of electricity surging through her veins.

“Mmm, Taylor, this is so sexy.” Without a second thought, he yanked the flimsy lace from her body, ripping it in two. The G-string tore noisily in the quiet of the cabin.

“Jake.” She gasped as her underwear fell to the floor ruined.

“Darlin’, I’ll buy you some new ones.”

Pinned in place, she felt the zipper of her dress being drawn down. The type of dress meant she didn’t wear a bra. Any moment now and she would be completely exposed in front of two men, but she didn’t care. Jake’s persuasive nature meant she couldn’t resist.

The decadent aroma of the finest Havana tobacco drifted to her nostrils. In her mind, it conjured up their power and potent

masculinity. It perfectly described the kind of men Jake and Brody were.

Her dress was peeled from her shoulders and pulled down around her waist, trapping her forearms in the garment. Her full breasts bounced free. She stared into Brody's eyes. His pupils were wide and dilated with desire.

"Isn't she perfect?" Jake murmured to Brody as he pressed her hard against the table.

Brody sat on the opposite side of the pool table, looking relaxed. He puffed on his cigar. His eyes were narrowed and concentrated on her. "Great breasts and definitely childbearing hips." A clear reference to their conversation at dinner.

"Mmm, that reminds me. Hold this, Taylor." A wrapped condom was thrust into her hand.

With her heart beating ever faster, she stared into Brody's eyes. A sexy smile slanted his lips as he drew once more on his cigar. He blew the smoke upward, still focused on her. Their connection felt tenfold. She wanted Brody as much as she wanted Jake. She knew they were working in tandem when Brody raised his gaze. He must have looked at Jake because almost immediately, Jake's strong hands covered her breasts. His fingers and thumbs squeezed together, trapping her nipples exquisitely between them until she arched back against Jake's chest. He'd removed his shirt, and the contact with his skin burning into hers, hard and masculine, assaulted her senses.

With one hand, Jake smoothed a path to her waist and down to her butt. His fingers molded over her ass and into the cleft.

"As ripe and smooth as a peach, Brody." He pushed her legs wider, spreading them with his own. Barely able to move, Taylor braced her hands against the side of the pool table. When Jake pushed his hand between her legs, she moaned out loud as two fingers penetrated her pussy. This felt so forbidden and erotic. Two men intent on her pleasure and their own. "Goddamn. As juicy as a peach, too. Now I know you're turned on by this, little darlin', big time."

Brody stared at her body. How she wanted him to touch her, too. His gaze adored her breasts, which heaved with her increased breathing. Jake's one hand caressed her breasts, massaging them, teasing her nipples. His other hand finger-fucked her pussy. A tight coil of desire began to pulsate low in her stomach. Building, building, ready to explode.

When Brody's gaze moved down her body, she held her breath and gasped as Jake circled her clit with his fingers. It was clear they were working as a team. They could read each other's thoughts and desires perfectly. The combination of Jake's teasing fingers filling her cunt and their gentle, soft strokes against her clitoris sent her into ecstasy. Her stomach muscles contracted, and she moaned, almost whimpering, as the most raw and potent orgasm spasmed through her body.

When it had finally subsided, she could barely stand. Jake took the foil-wrapped condom from her hand. As she fought for breath, he spoke behind her. "I sure enjoyed your purrs, little darlin'. They're a real turn-on."

She heard the unmistakable noise of a zipper and then the sound of a foil packet being ripped open. All the time, Brody watched. His one hand holding the cigar. His eyes connected with hers, holding her captive with his gaze.

"Brace yourself," said the voice from behind her.

Taylor gasped as she felt Jake take hold of her hips, and then she felt the unmistakable feeling of the head of his penis slipping between her legs. He pressed the top half of her body firmly down toward the green baize of the pool table. The tips of her nipples touched erotically against the soft felt material. With her ass tipped up, his cock lay poised to enter her at any moment.

When he penetrated her cunt just an inch, she realized that Jake was a big man in every respect. Her eyes flew wide open as he pushed deeper inside her. "Oh. My. God," she screamed. The feeling of

fullness overwhelmed her. Every nerve ending pulsed around his shaft as he stretched her channel to breaking point.

“God, she’s tight.”

Brody chuckled. “I can see that surprised you, honey, but most women would run a mile if they knew in advance how Jake’s built.”

Jake covered her body with his. His skin felt warm and masculine against her bare back as he began thrusting inside her. Tight, measured strokes that had her whimpering with need every time he moved. With one hand molded around her breast, he pressed a finger to her clit, and she moaned in ecstasy, unable to comprehend the sheer sensuality running through her.

“Isn’t that music to your ears, Brody? The sound of a woman mewling with pleasure. There’s nothing quite like it.”

Jake’s lips caressed the nape of her neck, and his tongue lapped at the sensitive flesh until he bit gently into her shoulder. To Taylor, this all felt so instinctive. Nothing in all her previous experience had ever prepared her for the sheer, unadulterated sexual satisfaction.

Brody drew on his cigar, blowing the smoke high into the air as Taylor finally gave into another incredible orgasm. Her whole body spasmed around Jake’s shaft with an intensity close to pain. She heard the unmistakable growl as he came inside her, shuddering against her back. He held her tight as their moans of ecstasy filled the softly lit cabin and contentment flooded through her.

* * * *

Brody rubbed a hand over the hard swelling in his jeans. Fuck, if he didn’t have a cock the size of Texas. He drew on his cigar and blew the smoke into rings. Watching Jake and Taylor had been a real turn-on. It had certainly been a long time since he’d felt so sexual. Jake grinned at him as he moved from Taylor’s limp body and threw the used condom onto the open fire. His best friend certainly had a way with women. One minute they would be sensible, and the next

they would be like putty in his hands. Hypnotized by his sheer persuasive presence. When Jake returned to the pool table, he tossed him the cigar he'd prepared earlier.

After lighting the cigar and holding it in his mouth, Jake adjusted Taylor's clothing, smoothing everything back in place. "You were wonderful," he heard him say.

That was the thing with Jake. He might be a love 'em and leave 'em kind of guy, but he always looked after his lovers when they were with him. He picked Taylor up and carried her over to the couch by the roaring fire. They looked like sweethearts as they snuggled together. Jake's arm around her, caressing her as he began blowing smoke into the air. The flickering light from the fire cast a warm glow over their bodies. That was when it hit him. The close contact with a woman. It had been so long he'd forgotten what it was like. He wanted to taste all the passion again. He wanted to free himself from the loneliness. He wanted to live again—but he still wanted to love Paige until the end of time.

He remembered Taylor's words in the forest earlier that day when she'd spoken about her father. Her father wouldn't have found happiness if he'd been unable to let go of the past. Maybe it was time to move on, start living again. He only had one life, after all, and he needed to seize every day as though it were his last. He of all people should know how precious life is.

Brody threw his cigar butt on the fire. He sat down on the couch, next to Jake and Taylor.

She raised her head and smiled at him. With her eyes all hooded, she looked like the cat who'd got the cream, all docile and pliable. "Hi, Brody." Her fingers grazed lazily over Jake's naked chest.

He stroked her feet, massaging the arches. Her toes curled appreciatively in response.

"Oh, that feels wonderful, Brody."

She had the prettiest feet. Each toenail perfectly manicured with glossy red polish.

“Thought we’d go hunting tomorrow, Jake,” he said, trying to distract himself from Taylor’s long legs. He already knew her pussy was trimmed and that her full breasts had dark-brown nipples. Brody closed his eyes, unable to shake the sight of her bent over the pool table with Jake pounding into her. The woman had so much sex appeal. He just couldn’t understand how he’d once thought her plain. Surely he’d never get to sleep now.

“Yeah, hunting is just fine.” Jake stretched his arms and yawned. He drew on his cigar. “Taylor, I’m gonna get me an early night.” He kissed her lips. “You, darlin’, were fabulous, but I know you’ll understand if I leave you in Brody’s capable hands.”

She made a small noise of protest as Jake rose from the couch. As he walked away, he squeezed him on the shoulder. He knew Jake was giving him the space to do things his way, without an audience. He guessed his best friend would always look out for him. When they were finally left alone, Taylor spoke.

“Hold me, Brody, please.”

He heard the urgency in her voice. Instinctively, he knew she needed comforting after sex with Jake. Women always did. He held out his arm, and she moved closer to him, resting her head on his shoulder. With light caresses, he gently rubbed his fingers into the nape of her neck, enjoying the feel of her soft skin against his. He breathed in her fresh, feminine scent. He turned and stared into her eyes. A man could lose himself in those green irises.

Brody cupped her chin with his thumb and forefinger and angled her face to his. He kissed her full lips. The image of Paige swam into his vision, and he pulled away. “I’m sorry, Taylor, I—”

She gently pressed a finger to his lips. “It’s okay, Brody. It’s okay,” she whispered. In his mind, the words were a soothing balm, calming the turmoil he felt inside. He leaned back against the couch and closed his eyes. Her hands threaded into his hair, and she kissed his forehead, tasting a line down to his eyes where she licked a drop of moisture that had settled there.

Brody wrapped his arms around her, holding her close. He breathed in. “I just need to be—”

“I know, and it’s okay.”

Opening his eyes, he stared into hers. “I just need to take it slow, Taylor.” With one hand, he caressed her face, letting the back of his fingers smooth over the soft, delicate skin. It felt so good to be with a woman again. Her lips parted as he brushed them with his own. Their tongues touched, and he held his breath, reveling in the sheer power she had over him. He skimmed his hands over her form, feeling each delicious curve and swell of her body through the tight dress she wore. She had a great figure. Taylor certainly had the body to please a man. Ripe and full, it was exactly the medicine he needed after his long nights of loneliness.

She stood and pulled off her dress. “I have nothing to hide from you, Brody. I like you to look.”

His cock sprung to attention as his gaze devoured every inch of her naked body. He only had to reach out and—touch.

Chapter Eight

Within a heartbeat, he reached forward and pulled her onto his lap so she straddled him. Her femininity enveloped him. He sucked on her breasts, teasing her nipples, seeking comfort from the most womanly part of her body. He drowned in their sweetness, enjoying how they bounced against his hands, so full and round. He stared into her eyes.

“Taylor, I just have to do this.” He reached up and pulled the giant pin from her hair. It was something he’d subconsciously wanted to do from the very moment he’d first laid eyes on her. He watched, mesmerized, as thick coils of shiny chestnut hair fell about her shoulders. Instinctively, he threaded his fingers into the silky locks. Her lips parted. How he’d missed this connection with the opposite sex. Now his cock pulsed with need inside his jeans. Quickly, he removed his sweater, yanking it over his head and casting it aside.

Almost immediately, Taylor’s cool hands smoothed over his chest, sending his desire spinning out of control. “Fuck, I’m desperate for you.” He fished a condom from his pocket. Then flipped her onto her back. As he kneeled between her legs, he undid his jeans and yanked them partially down.

He noticed Taylor lick her lips, and he smiled as he rolled the condom down his shaft. “Oh, yeah, you better believe it, honey. I’ve waited long enough. To hell with slow. Now I’m going to fuck you senseless.”

“Brody, quickly, I want you. Ever since you watched me bent over the pool table, I’ve thought of nothing else.”

He kissed her lips as he pressed his cock to her pussy. A wonderful feeling of contentment spread through his veins as he slid deep inside her. Her whole body arched beneath him, and he grabbed her wrists, holding them over her head. Pinned beneath him, she stared into his eyes, whimpering with pleasure as he thrust faster and faster inside her.

“God, you feel good, woman.”

She sheathed him so tightly. Her warmth and femininity wrapped so perfectly around his cock.

He let his gaze travel down between their bodies to where they joined so intimately together. He watched his thick shaft penetrating her cunt, over and over. Disappearing only to reappear coated with her womanly juices. When he lifted his head and looked into her eyes, he saw a beautiful woman in the throes of passion. With her orgasm in full flow, he savored her cries, tasting her lips with his tongue as her pussy milked his cock repeatedly.

“Brody,” she cried, arching her breasts against his chest.

With a hand under her buttocks to steady himself, he pounded into her with giant thrusts. A surge of adrenaline pulsed up his cock as he finally came inside her, spilling his seed in one mighty, potent rush.

They lay breathless, entwined together. Their bodies glistening with the perspiration from their lovemaking.

Once he’d caught his breath, he pulled from her and discarded the condom. He lay on the couch and wrapped her in his arms, his breathing heavy. Gently, he stroked the hair from her face as he stared into her eyes. “Taylor, thank you.”

“No need to say anything.” She pressed an immaculately manicured finger to his lips. He took hold of her hand and kissed her fingers one by one. Taking a deep breath, he spoke.

“You’ll see a new me from now on. No more looking back.”

“That’s good.”

“I feel good, Taylor. For the first time in a long time, I actually feel relaxed.”

She giggled.

“What’s up?” he asked, staring into her face. A sexy smile slanted her lips.

She pointed to his abdomen and the thick erection that lay throbbing against his stomach. “You told a lie. You’re not completely relaxed.”

He laughed and wrapped his hand around the solid shaft. “It’s been so long. I guess the beast is desperate for seconds.”

She snuggled against his chest and whispered, “I can relax you some more if you like.”

His balls tightened in anticipation. “Hmm, seeing that you’re such a delight, I’ll take you up on your offer.”

* * * *

Jake had lain awake for a couple of hours. Usually when he made love to a woman, he’d have her company for the whole night. And he missed that contact afterward. On this occasion, he thought it best to give Brody and Taylor some space. After all, he knew his best friend had been without a woman for a long time. Some things just needed to be taken slowly.

When he heard Molly bark several times, he rose from his bed and walked outside. Brody and Taylor were asleep on the couch. He loaded his shotgun just in case there were any grizzlies about. If Taylor needed to go back to her cabin, then he ought to make sure it was safe. He owed her big time. She’d been wonderful. She was exactly the type of woman he admired—intelligent and incredibly sexy. Taylor had made a big impression on Brody, too. Now he knew his best friend was on the mend, and that meant a lot to him.

He hoped the evening with Taylor could be repeated, only next time he would up the stakes. He felt sure Brody would want that, too. The sexual excitement of making love to a woman with another man

present could only be surpassed if they were both making love to her at the same time.

The door to the cabin swung open, and Taylor stepped through onto the verandah. She looked surprised to see him there. "I heard the dog barking," he explained. "I didn't want you coming face-to-face with a grizzly."

"Oh?" She sounded concerned. "Are they very dangerous?"

"They can be, darlin'. I'm just going to walk you back to your cabin, see that you're safe."

Her shoulders visibly relaxed. "Thank you, Jake, that's very thoughtful of you."

He picked up the shotgun that rested against the chair and walked her across the yard to her cabin. Taylor appeared deep in thought as they made their way in the cool night air. She rubbed her hands over her bare arms and shivered. "Here, darlin', put this on. There's a chill in the air tonight." He removed his jacket and laid it over her shoulders.

"Oh, that's lovely and warm."

When they reached her cabin, she handed back his jacket. Without looking at him, she spoke.

"Thank you."

"What's wrong, Taylor?"

"Nothing. Really."

"Just say what's on your mind."

"I've compromised my position. How can I possibly work for you both now?"

"Listen to me, darlin', as I said before, this ranch is a million miles from reality. Just go with the—"

She interrupted him. "And what if I can't go with the flow? What if I don't feel comfortable with all this?"

"Whatever happens here is just a fantasy."

She shook her head. "It's no use. I really think you should look for someone else to take my place. Preferably someone old and wrinkled who you have no sexual interest in."

Exasperated, Jake tried to make her see sense. "Darlin', how are we supposed to find a replacement out here?"

Taylor shrugged. "Perhaps you should have thought of that before—"

"Look, why don't you get some rest and we'll discuss this in the morning."

"I won't change my mind. You're my employer. You're even acting like one now. Frankly, I don't even think I can work with you and Brody again after what's happened tonight."

"I see. So you regret everything?"

"Strangely no, but I do regret the position I find myself in. It's untenable."

"I don't think so."

"Well, I do." Her eyes flared hotly as she raised them to his. He guessed Taylor would be a formidable opponent if you were ever to get on the wrong side of her.

"I can easily get you a transfer to another office if that's what you're worried about. There are branches of McKenna Quinn Oil all over the United States and Canada."

Taylor just looked at him. "That's great. So, I'm just shipped off to another branch." She folded her arms across her chest, her mouth a thin line of disapproval.

"That's not exactly how I meant it to sound." He touched her arm and noticed she immediately moved out of reach. "I think we should all get some rest. We're tired and may say something we later regret."

Taylor opened the door to her cabin. "I'll let you know my decision in the morning." Without another word, she slipped inside, leaving him completely alone.

He stared up at the night sky and sighed loudly. Him and his big mouth. Perhaps he should learn to be more tactful, like Brody.

* * * *

As soon as Taylor shut the cabin door, she sagged back against it. Just what was she going to do? Surely her position was untenable. After all, she had slept with both men, one after the other. She'd acted like a common whore. Yet deep down, she couldn't say she regretted it. So what did that make her?

Where Jake had been all macho and sexy, Brody had been passionate and sensitive. They were poles apart, and yet they complimented one another perfectly. Just thinking about the sex made her legs tremble even now. It had been best she'd ever had.

Taylor took a deep breath and wiped a tear from her eye. Deep down, she knew they couldn't continue with their little fantasy. They were her employers. They could hire and fire her at will. Jake had even hinted that he'd been more than willing to transfer her to another department. Jake and Brody were wealthy businessmen. To them, she was expendable. She was a minnow, someone they would easily forget about when they all returned to Dallas. For her, it wouldn't be so simple. Already she had strong feelings for them both.

No, she had done the right thing by calling an end to it. The last thing she wanted to do was waste time in a fruitless relationship. She'd already spent four wasted years with Justin. There was no way she'd go down the same route again.

It was time to take control of her life.

* * * *

Brody woke from the most restful sleep he'd had in a long time. He stretched his arms above his head, wondering where Taylor had gone. She had been a delicious delight. His mouth spread into a grin. One might even say, just what the doctor ordered.

When he heard the door open and close behind him, he craned his neck. Jake walked over to him, holding a shotgun. He watched him break the barrel open and remove the cartridges. He secured the gun on the gun rack and then came and sat on the couch. He knew Jake well enough to know something was wrong.

“Jake, for someone who’s just had the fuck of a lifetime, you’re not looking very happy.”

Jake rubbed a hand across his face and into his hair. “Taylor’s thinking of quitting the job.”

Brody could feel his brows draw together. “How could that have happened? I thought we all got on real well together.”

“We did.” Jake held his hands palms upward. “Obviously, she’s a little skittish about sleeping with both of us.”

“I figured it had to be something like that.” He still felt puzzled. “It’s a wonder your charm offensive didn’t set her straight. After all, we’re used to threesomes, and Taylor isn’t.”

Jake scratched the back of his head. “I may have actually made the situation worse.”

Brody had a sinking feeling form low in his stomach. He sat bolt upright when he realized Jake looked worried. “What exactly did you say to her?” He tried to keep his voice steady.

“That doesn’t matter. What matters is that we change—”

“Jake, buddy, what exactly did you say?” Brody grew impatient. He didn’t want to raise his voice, but he knew that if Jake didn’t come clean, then he would become annoyed.

His friend cleared his throat. “I told her I’d have no problem arranging a transfer to a different office if she felt awkward working for us.”

“You did what?” He stared at Jake. At least he had the decency to look embarrassed. “No doubt that immediately put her at her ease,” he said sarcastically. “Become our fuck buddy, Taylor, and when we go back to Dallas, we’ll just sweep you away as if you never existed. It’s a wonder she didn’t slap your face.”

“I never was good with words, better with actions.”

As anger began to surge through his veins Brody stood, and began pacing the floor in front of the fireplace. “Jake, women want to hear words of commitment and affection. They do not want to feel like they only exist to service your sexual needs.” He felt a lot of affection toward Taylor. She had helped him take that first step back into the land of the living.

“It’s not as though we know how this relationship will work out, Brody.”

“Yes, but, Jake, you can’t plan for the end when you’ve only just started at the beginning. I’m telling you, women still want to hear kind words however long a relationship lasts.”

“Guess I’ve a lot to learn. I actually do like her, Brody. She’s exactly the type of woman I admire. She’s beautiful, witty, and sexy.”

Brody spun around to face him. “Then that’s what you should have told her, Jake. Instead of,” he lifted his hands in dismay, “making her feel completely used.”

“I’ll have a word with her tomorrow.”

“Oh, no.” Brody shook his head. He trusted Jake with his life. They’d been through so much together, but on this matter, he wouldn’t take the chance. “*I’ll* have a word with her tomorrow. I’ll stand a far better chance of persuading her to stay than you ever will.”

Chapter Nine

After preparing a breakfast of cereal and dried fruit in her little kitchenette, Taylor went outside onto the verandah to eat it. She sat on one of the small whicker rockers and breathed in the fresh Montana air. She had to admit it was beautiful here. Gently rocking back and forth, she tried to eat the bowl of cereal, but unfortunately, her appetite had deserted her. Just how was she going to make her decision? All night she had lain awake wondering what to do.

Should she stay, or should she go? Either way, she couldn't continue a relationship with Brody and Jake. It would be impossible. She chewed on the nail of her index finger, trying to remove a snag. It had just been sex, nothing more. That wasn't all she wanted from a relationship. She needed much, much more. Justin had severely dented her self-esteem. She certainly wouldn't allow anyone else to do that. Least of all a couple of billionaires intent on their own sexual gratification.

Her stomach twisted into a tight knot as she recalled what had happened between them. They'd had mind-blowing sex. It had been beautiful beyond belief, but she was a woman and needed an emotional connection, too. She had to protect herself from the inevitable hurt that would surely follow.

When the door to the main house banged shut, she looked up. Brody was walking toward her. He looked real sexy in a pair of tight jeans and plaid shirt. Already, she felt a quiver of excitement as he drew closer. He smiled, and her heart skipped a beat. Surely she couldn't regret sleeping with Brody? The man had been so lost, and she had reached out to him. They had connected.

“Taylor.” Brody sat beside her. He stretched out his long legs and let his silver gaze drift over her from head to toe.

“Brody,” she answered, squirming in her seat under his intense scrutiny. How she wanted him to hold her in his arms just like he’d done the night before. He’d made her feel wanted and needed. Something she’d always craved and desired.

“Jake tells me you’re unsure about staying at the ranch.” He paused as if reflecting. “I hope I haven’t done anything to offend you. You’re a very special woman, and I assure you I only have your best interest at heart.”

Brody had an infectious smile, and she couldn’t help but smile back. “No, you haven’t offended me in the least. It’s just this strange situation I find myself in. The working relationship we had with one another has been compromised. I can’t imagine how it can continue.” She held her arms out. “I mean, what do you expect of me now?”

“Taylor, we don’t take anything for granted. We both like you very much. Any decision you make we would obviously respect.”

The tension she was feeling began to dissipate. “Then I’d like to stay another week if that’s okay with you and Jake, but just as work colleagues. If it all works out, I might be willing to stay ‘til we return to Dallas. We’ll have to see how it goes. You see, Brody, I’ve been hurt in the past, and I won’t allow myself to be hurt again. I’d rather leave right this minute if that were the case.” Her words tumbled out in a rush, and she felt close to tears.

Brody must have realized how upset she’d become because he said, “Aw, honey, don’t you fret none. I can see someone’s hurt you deeply. You just carry on with your wonderful duties as before, and we’ll put this all behind us.”

Her lower lip quivered. “Are you sure? I mean—”

“Not another word. Jake and I are going hunting. We’ll be gone most of the day. Please feel free to use all the facilities. We’ll be heading along the blue-marked track if you need to contact us.” He

rose and kissed her forehead. "Now you take care, and don't worry." He then began making his way back to the main house.

"Brody?" she called after him.

He turned back toward her. "Yes?"

"Thanks."

He smiled a beautiful relaxed smile. "You're welcome, honey."

* * * *

With the sun slanting through the trees, Jake and Brody made their way on horseback. Every now and then, they'd hear the sound of disturbed wildlife deep in the undergrowth. A partridge flew out into the open as they rode down the track.

Brody cocked his rifle and took aim. The gunshot echoed loudly around, causing a cacophony of sound to erupt from frightened birds and animals in the forest. Then all was silent until the partridge rose several feet and disappeared in a flutter of wings.

Jake laughed. "Brody, why do we come hunting when all we get is a few feathers to show for our trouble?"

Brody glanced at him and then reloaded his gun. "It doesn't matter if we catch anything, Jake. I just love the chase, and I know you do, too."

"Are we talking about wild critters or women?" With a quick jerk of the reins, Jake prompted his horse to start walking along the track again. Brody's mount soon fell into a smooth gait alongside him.

"I guess where you're concerned, probably both, Jake."

"Then I agree I love the chase, too. Women especially. It's a shame about Taylor, but I respect her decision. Thank God you managed to talk her out of leaving."

"For now." Brody breathed in, letting it out in a big sigh. "When I spoke to her this morning, I could tell some asshole of a guy has made her life hell. She's just scared we're gonna do the same."

“That’s too bad. We were just on the point of really getting to know her. Did she say what had happened?”

Brody shook his head. “No, but she was close to tears, so I didn’t want to push her any further.”

“I suppose this is one that we just have to let get away.”

“Hell, no, Jake. Where’s your can-do spirit? Life is for the living, and I am not quitting. I want this woman, and I know you do, too.”

When Jake realized Brody had quoted the very words he’d used years ago, he slapped him on the back. “She really got to you, didn’t she?”

“You bet.” Brody had an intense look on his face.

“Then what do you propose we do?”

“Absolutely nothing, Jake, other than be very courteous and attentive. Taylor just needs to feel comfortable with us. Then we just let nature take its course. If it’s meant to be, then everything will work out just fine.”

“It hardly sounds like a plan.” Jake couldn’t imagine how doing fuck all would get Taylor back.

“We did it your way, Jake, and it didn’t work. I think a little subtlety is required here.”

“Are you saying I lack tact?”

“Yep, it’s not your strong suit.”

“Okay.” Jake couldn’t take offence. To have Brody back to his old self meant everything to him. “Who am I to argue? We’ll do it your way.” He grinned at him. “Nice and easy, no pressure on Taylor.”

“Good.”

* * * *

Taylor fed Molly another tidbit of food. She knew she shouldn’t indulge her, but the grizzly guard dog was just so cute. With a sweet face, her tail curled over touching her back, and she wagged it incessantly.

“All right. Just one more, and then you’ll have to go, or you’ll get me into trouble.” She held out her hand, and a wet tongue swiped the last piece of biscuit clean away. Taylor giggled. “That tickles.” She patted the dog’s head and then stood, holding out her hands to show that there was nothing left. Molly understood and padded away. Taylor could see her sniff the air, and a small yap left her mouth.

“What is it, Molly? Can you smell something?” Her shoulders stiffened. Was there a grizzly about?

When she stared into the distance, instead of a grizzly bear, she saw two beautiful men enter the clearing on horseback. Brody and Jake had returned from their hunting expedition. Her body instantly relaxed and then stiffened again. Soon the staff would leave, and she’d be all on her own with them. It would depend on how things worked out between the three of them, whether she stayed the full month, or not.

They rode straight across to her and lifted their hats. “Howdy, Taylor,” they both said, smiling at her.

Her gaze drifted over them. “Looks like you didn’t catch much.”

“Nothing, not a scrap.”

“But you look so happy. Why?”

“Brody and I worked out a new campaign of action.”

“You’re supposed to be on vacation, not talking business.”

Taylor could see the subtle interaction between them both as their horses jostled with each other. Jake grinned at her, pulling on the reins of his horse to steady it. “I guess we’re just gluttons for punishment.”

“Guess you are.” Taylor couldn’t help but think how sexy Jake looked in his jeans and denim shirt. He wore a pair of leather gloves, and they rested on his strong thighs. To think that those same hands had been all over her body made a warm feeling spread inside her stomach.

Brody interrupted her thoughts. “Any messages from Head Office?”

“One or two. I’ve left them at your place. They just need a couple of signatures, and I’ll fax them off tomorrow.”

“That’s great.” Brody lifted his hat and rubbed a hand into his hair. He smiled at her. “Say, Taylor, would you like to come over this evening? We’re gonna watch a movie. I’ve quite a selection. I’m sure there’s something you’d like to watch.”

She chewed on her bottom lip. “I’m really not sure.” Would she be asking for trouble by spending more time with them? She liked them both immensely but worried where an evening alone with them might lead. She’d already told them she wanted their relationship to be strictly platonic. Perhaps if she requested a movie she felt sure they wouldn’t have, then that would make the decision for her. “If you have *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, then I’d love to come.” She waited for a puzzled expression to form on Brody’s face.

It didn’t materialize.

“Done. That’s one of my favorite movies,” he said.

“It is?” she asked incredulously.

“Of course it is, honey. I’ve seen it no end of times already.”

“You have? But what about Jake? Maybe you’d rather not watch a girly movie.”

“Little darlin’, if it’s your choice, then I know I’ll like it as much as you do.”

“Oh?”

“Come over at nine. There’ll be popcorn, too,” Brody promised her.

“Okay,” she said. She watched them ride over to the corral and dismount. They really looked pleased with themselves, and yet they hadn’t caught a thing. Taylor shrugged. Maybe it was a guy thing.

Still, the evening would be interesting if nothing else. She couldn’t imagine two alpha males enjoying her choice of movie one little bit.

Chapter Ten

“What the fuck is the—um—*Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*?” Jake asked as they entered the tack room. Brody placed his saddle on the hook, and Jake followed suit.

“I’ve no idea, but we’re about to find out.”

“You mean you made it all up?”

“Of course I did, but a little white lie never hurt anyone. If that’s the movie she wants to watch, then who am I to say I haven’t got it?”

“So how do you figure on getting a copy this late in the day?”

“By Internet.”

Jake placed a hand on his arm, stopping him dead in his tracks. “You’ve got a computer?” Brody almost laughed at the look on his best friend’s face. Anyone would think he’d made a deal with the devil. It made him feel rather defensive.

“Yes, you never know when you may need one.”

Jake followed him back outside. “You wily old dog, and I thought you liked to rough it out in the wilderness. No frills, just back to nature.”

“I’m just a regular guy, Jake.” He led Pharaoh into the corral and then removed the bridle. The horse took off at a fast gallop. He looked at his friend. “I had it installed last year. It’s just another form of communications. If I’d told Head Office, they’d have been contacting us nonstop.”

Jake squeezed his shoulder. “A very wise decision, Brody. I couldn’t agree more. Now I feel a lot happier about those bear tracks we found a mile or so from here. It’s certainly another way of getting help should we need it.” He motioned with a thumb over his shoulder.

“That clever mutt, Molly, can sense their presence. Last night, she did nothing but bark.”

“I know. If a grizzly has any sense, it’ll stay well away from here. They don’t like Karakachan dogs. It’s a well-known fact.”

As they made their way to the main house, Jake asked, “So where do you keep your computer?”

“It’s in the den.” Brody led the way into an annex attached to the side of the cabin. He switched on the lights. A row of soft seating faced a large blank screen. At the back of the room stood a DVD projector. It was an ideal room for watching a movie. After opening a locked cupboard, he pulled out a trolley. It contained a keyboard and computer console. When he began booting it up, the screen came to life.

Jake chuckled. “How very clandestine. You’re not a secret agent working for the FBI, are you?”

It was Brody’s turn to laugh. “No chance. Here we are.” He brought up a browser and Googled the name of Taylor’s film. “Ah, here it is. Hmm, it won’t be to our taste, Jake. It’s a real girly film, but if she enjoys it, it’ll be worth it.” He reached for a blank disc. “I’ll just get it copied, and we’re done.”

“Good, I’ll go and get ready.”

“Jake?”

“Yes?”

“Let’s just get to know her tonight.”

Jake nodded. “You got it, pal.”

* * * *

Taylor dabbed her eyes with a tissue just as the end credits began to roll. “It’s so heartwarming. It’s a feel-good film.” She turned to both of them sitting either side of her. “I wouldn’t have thought it was a guy movie, though. After all, there’s no blood and guts and big explosions in it. Or Bruce Willis, for that matter.”

“Not at all. I love that movie, darlin’, just as much as you do,” Jake lied. He really admired the woman sitting next to him. This time she wore her hair down, and it flowed in glossy chestnut curls over her shoulders. A pair of jeans and a pretty red blouse made her look incredibly fragile and sexy.

Tonight had been a real eye-opener. Okay, so the film was not remotely his taste. In fact, he knew that both he and Brody hated it with a vengeance, but it had given him a clearer insight into what made Taylor tick. He realized she was a sensitive soul, someone who genuinely cared about other human beings. He knew that if he wasn’t careful, he could fall for her in a big way. Usually that thought would send him running for the hills, desperate to keep his independence. With Taylor, it just didn’t worry him. He really wanted to know her better, and he knew Brody did, too. His best friend looked like a man about to fall in love again.

He smiled as Brody pushed the bucket of popcorn toward her. “Go on, enjoy the moment. Worry about your figure tomorrow.”

Taylor clutched her stomach and breathed out. “Oh, no, I’ve already eaten far too much as it is.”

“So, Taylor, do you have any family?” Jake asked.

“Both my parents are still alive, and I have a younger sister, too. She’s nineteen. She still lives with them on the family ranch in Tuscola, near Abilene.”

“Really?” Jake turned to Brody. “You have family out in Abilene.”

“Sure do. Two cousins. Both girls, they never married. They run a mile when a man even comes near them.” He laughed.

“How about you, Jake?” Taylor touched his hand. “Do you have any family?”

“Nope, all gone.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“No need to be, darlin’. I’m fine as I am.”

Taylor turned her attention to Brody, who looked slightly sad. She took his hand in hers. It was at that moment that Jake knew that both he and Brody wanted this woman more than life itself. “Your parents, are they still alive, Brody?”

“Sadly, no. Though I do have a couple of brothers in Houston.”

Taylor nodded. “I’ve really enjoyed tonight. You’ve been wonderful company.” She kissed them both on the cheek. “Thank you, but I need my beauty sleep. It’s time I was going.”

“We’ll walk you back to your cabin,” Brody stated as he rose to his feet. He reached out his hand and pulled Taylor to a standing position.

“It’s no problem. I can easily find my way.”

“I’m sorry, but we insist. Don’t we, Jake? We didn’t want to worry you, but we found some bear tracks quite close to the ranch. Judging by his footprint, he’s a large one, too.”

Jake smiled and squeezed her shoulder. “Don’t look so worried. You’re perfectly safe. We’ll protect you. Just listen out for Molly. If you hear her barking, make sure you can see all around before coming outside.”

* * * *

Three days later

Taylor opened her eyes for the hundredth time that night. She looked at the clock on her bedside table. It was just past two in the morning. What was the matter with her? Try as she might, she just couldn’t get to sleep. In frustration, she turned over and stared out of the window. The drapes were open, and moonlight streamed in, casting a slash of silver across her bedspread. The last few days had been wonderful. Brody and Jake had been so attentive. They’d enjoyed each other’s company as often as they could. They had talked and played music until late at night. They’d discussed everything

from politics to the best way to cut a mango. It had been a real treat, getting to know them better. Brody and Jake were lovely men, and she knew she was falling for them both. They never once tried to make a pass at her, and she guessed that was the real reason for her lack of sleep. In all honesty, she knew they were waiting for her to make the first move. It was up to her, and that was the dilemma she faced. Did she want to open herself up to more hurt? Or should she take a chance and possibly discover a whole new way of living?

Something moved, casting a shadow across her line of vision. She held her breath, waiting for it to happen again.

Nothing.

She breathed out and then rose from the bed. Her red silk robe was on the chair beside her, and she pulled it quickly around her shoulders. When she moved into the living area, she could hear Molly barking. She sounded frantic.

When she heard the decking creak outside, her stomach churned. "Brody, Jake, is that you?" There was no answer, just the noise of wood moving. One of the chairs on the porch scraped loudly against the wooden floor. Jake had a habit of tucking them under the table whenever he came to her cabin. It had to be him.

Without thinking, she opened the door. Her heart sunk to her knees as she came face-to-face with a large brown bear. It seemed to loom over her as she froze, paralyzed with fear. God, what was that awful noise? It pierced her eardrums it was so loud. When she clamped her mouth shut, she knew she'd been screaming.

Her legs felt like jelly. Fight or flight pulsed through her veins. She knew she wouldn't stand a chance against such a huge bear. Self-preservation took over, and she slammed the cabin door shut. After dashing through the living area, she locked herself in the bedroom. Her breathing felt out of control. Her whole body shook as she leaned back against the door. Would the bear come after her?

She pulled the bed away from the wall and dragged it over to the door, wedging it in place. *Breathe, Taylor, breathe, and you'll be okay.*

A gunshot pierced the eerie silence of the night, and then another. She heard Brody shout out.

"That's one mean motherfucker. Watch out, Jake."

"I intend to. If it starts to attack, shoot the bastard."

"Back off, give it some space."

Another shot fired out. Taylor covered her head with her hands. Those men out there were in danger. She couldn't bear it if anything happened to them. Suddenly, a long rally of shots rang out, and then all went silent.

When she heard the unmistakable sound of booted feet outside her room, she yanked the bed away from the door.

"Brody, Jake." She flung the door wide open and ran straight into Brody's arms. Her whole body trembled uncontrollably as he held her close to his naked chest. Disturbed from sleep, she guessed he'd only managed to pull on a pair of jeans. "I'm so scared, Brody. I'm so scared. Hold me, please."

"Oh, honey. You're safe now." He stroked a hand into her hair, soothing her, calming her.

Jake walked through the door, his hunting rifle slung over his shoulder. He, too, wore just a pair of jeans, and she could see the hard contours and planes of his finely honed chest. He held out his hand. "I think the bear was after this." Taylor could just make out the half-finished bowl of cereal she'd been eating outside earlier. "Little darlin', you should know better than leave food around." She could hear the chastisement in his voice and see it in his eyes.

"It's my fault." Her lips quivered as she spoke. "You could have been hurt, and it's all my fault. It's my fault. My fault." She knew she was babbling, but she couldn't help it. The words just seemed to tumble from her lips.

“Jake, I think she’s in shock. Here take my gun.” Brody gave Jake his shotgun, and then he lifted her into his arms. “You can’t stay here. It’s not safe.” Nestled in his arms, Taylor gave into the desire to cry. Large tears rolled down her cheeks and flowed onto his naked chest.

“It’s all my fault, my fault.” The last thing she remembered was being carried outside, safe in Brody’s strong arms.

Chapter Eleven

Brody looked down at the beautiful woman he held in his arms, and his heart constricted. She looked so fragile. Her tears had run onto his chest, and the night air cooled where they touched. The possibility that the bear might still be there had made her faint. “She’s passed out. She’s scared to death.”

Jake opened the door to the main cabin. Brody brought her inside and laid her on the couch by the fire.

“I’ll go and make up a bed for her. She can have my room. You and I will just have to share,” Jake said matter-of-factly as he placed their guns on the gun rack.

“Do you snore?” Brody asked, none too happy at the prospect of sharing a bed with Jake.

Jake considered his question for a moment then said, “I’ve never had any complaints from the ladies.”

“Maybe they were just being polite. I’ll let you know in the morning.”

“I’m sure you will.” Jake smoothed a comforting hand over Taylor’s beautiful chestnut hair. “This bear, do you think it’ll come back?”

“It’s hard to say. He’s found food here once. He may well come back again. I guess I’ll have to install some sort of early warning system. Infrared or electric fencing might do it. Molly’s useful, but she still didn’t stop a big grizzly getting too close. Maybe I should have been better prepared.”

“Don’t sweat the small stuff. It’s not every day you get that close to a grizzly.” Jake thwacked him on the back. “Brody, you did well tonight.”

“You, too, Jake. That’s one scary tale we can tell our grandchildren.”

His friend nodded. “Yeah, I like the sound of that. It kinda makes it all worthwhile.”

“This is one lady who is worthwhile.”

“You’re right. It must have scared the hell out of her.”

They both stared at her. She looked deathly pale as she lay defenseless on the leather couch. Brody felt very protective of her now.

Once he was finally left alone, he gently stroked a hand against Taylor’s forehead, and she began to stir. “It’s okay, Taylor. You’re safe now.” He made a promise to himself. Nothing would ever harm a hair on her head.

He smiled at her when she opened her eyes. “Feeling better?”

She nodded and began to sit up. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to cause all this trouble.”

“It’s fine. We’re just glad you’re okay.”

“I should have realized leaving food outside would attract wildlife. I was just shocked when I saw how big it was. Was it a grizzly?”

“Sure was, honey, one of the biggest I’ve seen in some fifteen years.”

He could see the horror on her face as she recalled how close the bear had been. “Oh, my God. Don’t they eat people?”

“Sometimes, though that’s pretty rare. Mostly they’re just foraging.” Brody went over to the drink’s cabinet and poured three large bourbons. He handed one to Taylor just as Jake returned. “This will do you good. There’s one for you, too, Jake.” He lifted up his glass. “To us. What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.”

“Amen to that, Brody.” Jake downed his glass in one swallow.
“How you feeling, little darlin’?”

She sipped at her bourbon. “I’m okay, I guess.”

“Well, there’s no need to worry. You’re staying right here with us tonight. We’ve made up a bed for you. Brody and I are going to share.”

“All this trouble because of my stupid mistake.”

“We all make mistakes, darlin’. There’s not one of us in this room who can say otherwise.”

“Then I thank you both for being so understanding. Now if you show me to my room, maybe we can all get some sleep.”

* * * *

For the second time that night as she lay in bed, Taylor stared out the window. She could just see the full moon hanging low in the sky, and it bathed the whole room in an iridescent silver light. Pieces of furniture stood all around her. Some looked benign. Others looked just weird in the half light. In particular, the large wardrobe in the corner of the room looked very oppressive. It loomed over her, dark and brooding. It reminded her so much of the huge grizzly that she broke into a cold sweat every time she looked at it.

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t shake the fear from her body. Her breathing would increase, and her mind raced with terrible thoughts. What if the bear had attacked her? What if Brody or Jake had been hurt? Blind panic made her reach for the switch on the bedside table, and she gulped in a huge lung full of air, trying to quash her fears. The wardrobe looked ordinary once again with the light switched on.

Stop acting like a child, Taylor. You’re a grown woman. Act like one.

She rose from the bed and began pacing the floor. All Jake’s personal effects were scattered about. His aftershave and comb were

on the dresser, and a pair of jeans hung from a hanger hooked onto the back of the door. A large leather belt lay looped on a chair, and a pair of tan leather cowboy boots leaned against it.

Everything about the room was so personal to him she felt like she was invading his privacy. In the end, she walked out onto the landing and began pacing the hallway.

“Darlin’, is that you?” Jake’s voice called from the adjacent bedroom.

Taylor pushed open the door and peered into the room. A soft light shone from the bedside lamps, casting a reassuring glow. A huge bed dominated the room. Brody and Jake lay side by side, their muscular torsos bare. Every plane and contour of their taut bodies rippled in the lamplight as they stared at her. She licked her lips nervously.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“No need to worry. Jake and I were just talking. Come on in.” Brody motioned her toward the bed. “What’s wrong, honey?”

“I couldn’t sleep. I’m still a bit sensitized I guess.”

Jake held out his hand. “Do you want to come in here with us? We’ll protect you.”

Taylor took hold of his hand and felt a weight lift from her mind. Jake pulled the covers back. The hair on his legs rasped against her skin as he rolled her over his body into the middle of the bed. With a strong man lying either side of her, she felt cocooned and safe.

“I feel better already.”

“Nothing can get to you now.” Jake wrapped a protective arm around her waist as she lay on her side. His whole body spooned her from shoulder to thigh. His heat enveloped her, soothing her.

As she stared into Brody’s eyes, he smiled. He kissed her forehead, and then he, too, turned onto his side with his back to her.

“Hold on to me,” he said. “I’ll make sure you’re safe.”

Taylor rested her arm around his waist, and Brody took her hand in his, giving her the comfort and reassurance she craved. With their

large bodies so close and warm, she had never felt so protected. She sighed with utter contentment. Nothing had ever felt so right.

* * * *

The next morning

Jake stared at the woman lying asleep between himself and Brody. How beautiful she looked as the first rays of sunlight filtered through the windows. Her lips were slightly parted, her breathing even and calm. He could just make out a few freckles on the bridge of her nose. He thought they looked real cute. Her red silk baby doll nightie showed every swell and curve of her body. All the excitement of a huge grizzly, and then having Taylor share their bed, added up to one long, sleepless night. Ultimately, he knew it would be worth it. Taylor had needed reassurance and protection, and that's exactly what they'd both given her.

The fact that his dick had been hard and throbbed with need all night long was beside the point. He wasn't a teenager. He could control himself. He guessed Brody hadn't had any decent sleep, either. There was no point getting out of bed to go hunting today when the only thing they wanted to hunt was Taylor.

He groaned out loud thinking of his hard cock deep inside her.

A tiny hand touched his arm, and he looked down into Taylor's beautiful, soft green eyes. "What's wrong, Jake?"

He touched her nose playfully and smiled at her. "You wouldn't want to know."

Her lips pouted. "Try me."

He winked across at Brody, who was now fully awake. His best friend's gaze devoured Taylor like she was breakfast in bed.

"Take a guess. I've had this sexy woman lying next to me all night long. She's been wearing just a tiny scrap of silk, which leaves nothing to the imagination. What do you think?"

“Oh. Did either of you get any sleep?”

“No,” they both answered simultaneously.

Taylor giggled and looked at them in turn. “I had the most wonderful sleep ever.”

“We know. You had a good six hours at least,” Brody stated grumpily.

“Then one good turn deserves another.” She took hold of their hands with her own and kissed the palms, one at a time. “Thank you,” she said, placing them against her breasts.

The flimsy material of her nightie meant he could feel her nipple swell and harden beneath his hand. He looked at Brody. He had one big, I-told-you-so grin on his face. He cupped Taylor’s chin and stared into her eyes. “The two of us come as a package. We share everything. Is that what you want?”

“I wasn’t sure before, but it just feels so natural being with you both. Just being in your bed makes me feel so happy.”

He kissed her lips. “Good. Now we understand one another.” He nodded to Brody. “You got any condoms?”

His friend reached over to his nightstand and opened a drawer. “A few.” He tossed one to him.

Brody stroked a hand into Taylor’s hair. “Don’t look so worried. We’ll take extra special care of you.” He then reached down and began to pull the silk nightie from her body. Completely submissive, Taylor offered no resistance. She held her hands above her head, and he whisked it away. “God, you’re beautiful.” As Jake rolled the condom down his shaft, he watched his friend feast on her breasts. Brody’s tongue lapped at her nipples until she arched her back. This was what he loved about sharing a woman. He received double the pleasure, firstly from just looking and secondly from experiencing all she had to offer for himself.

When Brody moved Taylor onto her side, Jake rubbed his hand into her buttock cleft. He touched her puckered hole, and she immediately froze. He chuckled. “Darlin’, we’re gonna have to get

you used to being touched there, because one day soon, Brody and I will want to fuck both your holes at the same time.”

“Not now,” she whispered, clearly worried by the prospect.

He nuzzled her neck, breathing in her soft, feminine scent. “No, not now. We need to prepare you first, and that takes time and patience on our part.”

“But worth it,” Brody added, kissing her lips.

Jake moved his hand to her pussy. The folds of her sex were so wet. “Mmm, Taylor, I can tell you’re really turned on by the idea of two men fucking you. I just love the spoons position, darlin’. The whole of last night, I’ve thought of doing nothing else.” From behind, he slipped his hard length inside her cunt. He closed his eyes, feeling her tight sheath clench deliciously around his shaft. He then rolled onto his back, taking her with him. Her whimpers of pleasure made his cock hardened steel.

He spoke against her ear as she lay on top of him. “Now Brody and I never slept one wink last night. Don’t you think it was naughty of you, coming into our bed in that scrap of silk?” He cupped her breasts, tweaking her nipples. Her whole body responded, writhing on top of him.

“I never thought,” she said breathlessly.

“She’s definitely a naughty girl doing that to us.” Brody added, smiling.

With the help of Brody, Jake hooked his legs around hers, pinning her fast against his body. “Naughty girls get to be disciplined, and Brody’s in the mood to administer swift justice.”

“Jake, Brody, what are you going to do?”

“Brody loves eating pussy, darlin’. It’s his favorite meal.”

When he heard her whimper with pleasure, he knew Brody had hit the right spot. He watched his friend lap his tongue into her pussy over and over again. Then he sucked on her clitoris. God, how he loved ménages. It was a real turn-on just watching. “Hey, Brody. Just keep that tongue away from my cock.”

“I’ve every intention, Jake. Your cock doesn’t remotely interest me, but this pussy is something else. She tastes so sweet. Open her legs wider. I’m gonna lick her slit until she screams.” Jake widened his legs further, spreading hers even more. He knew by Taylor’s increased heart rate and her cries of ecstasy that she was enjoying the sensation of being pleased by two men. He put his fingers in her mouth, and she sucked hungrily on them. He enjoyed her sexual moans as he relentlessly impaled her with his prick.

When her pussy tightened around his shaft, he knew she was close. “She’s almost there,” he called to Brody.

Brody immediately slowed down and lapped gently at her cunt. Her skin felt soft and warm as Jake wrapped his arms possessively around her. He felt very attached to her now. Taylor held on to his forearms. Her grip tightened, and she writhed on top of his body as her pussy clamped around his cock, spasm after delicious spasm. Her mewls of pleasure filled the bedroom until she squealed out in ecstasy. “Oh, my God.”

Chapter Twelve

Taylor's breathing was out of control as Jake moved her to a kneeling position. Her orgasm had blown her away. She'd never known anything so explosive before. He grabbed hold of her hips and sunk his cock deeper inside her pussy. Nerve endings already sensitized from her climax rippled with pleasure, and she cried out.

"That feels so good, Jake."

"You bet, honey." She stared into Brody's light gray eyes as he knelt in front of her. "Now take my cock into your mouth. We're just getting started."

He held his hard-ridged prick in his hand and guided it toward her lips. Taylor ravenously licked the head of his penis, swirling her tongue around the sensitive tip of his swollen member. The small bead of pre-cum on the tip tasted salty. When she wrapped her lips around his shaft and began taking him inside her mouth, she reveled in the groan that tore from him. She had never felt more powerful. She had never felt more like a woman.

Skewered between the two sexiest men alive, she gave into the sublime pleasure. She clasped her hands around Brody's butt and pulled him closer. Her fingers kneaded into the soft skin of his ass as she bobbed her head up and down over his penis. She breathed in, experiencing the musky male smell that assaulted her senses. This felt so right, so real.

Jake's hands gripped her hips more tightly as he continued pumping inside her. His large cock repeatedly withdrawing and impaling her cunt over and over again. It filled her so exquisitely. Her

pussy seemed to pulse around the shaft as he entered her mercilessly, time after time. Moans of pleasure reverberated in her throat.

“Fuck, girl, you make all the noise you want,” Brody assured her as he cupped her head gently in his hands. “Every sound you make vibrates against my dick. Fuck, it turns me on.” She stared into his eyes, mesmerized by his sheer masculine presence towering over her. His strong chest had a slight smattering of hair, and she longed to run her hands over the hard contours. He continued to thrust inside her mouth, keeping in perfect time with Jake.

Jake moved a hand to her pussy and pleasured her clit with his fingers. His strokes became more urgent, heightening the enjoyment he gave her. “She’s so tight, Brody. Careful she doesn’t bite your dick off when she comes.”

Brody lifted her chin so she could look at him. “You’ll be gentle with me, won’t you, honey?” Taylor didn’t want to hurt a hair on his head, and she nodded her agreement.

When her orgasm came, it rolled out in one delicious spasm after another. Her stomach muscles contracted and quivered. Her pussy clamped Jake’s dick repeatedly. Her cries of ecstasy wrapped around Brody’s cock deep inside her mouth. Careful not to bite down, she watched in awe as his face fractured in the throes of orgasm as he, too, succumbed to pleasure. A sensation of warm cum flooded the back of her throat, and she swallowed hard as her moans of satisfaction continued unabated.

Jake grabbed both her hips and made two long, deep thrusts inside her pussy. When his hands gripped her more tightly and she heard an intense groan shatter from his lips, she knew he had reached the pinnacle of sexual ecstasy, too.

When they both withdrew from her, she felt lost, until Brody pulled her into his arms and nestled her head on his shoulder. “Now how did that compare to regular sex?”

Jake rose from the bed and began walking toward the bathroom. “Careful how you answer that, darlin’.” He reappeared moments later

and lay down on the bed beside her. He kissed her shoulder and wrapped an arm around her waist. "Well?"

Taylor sighed as utter contentment flooded her body. Lying between these two sexy men felt the most natural thing in the world to do. "I thought it would feel wrong having sex with two men, but it didn't. It was just wonderful and so beautiful. The feelings running through me were so intense every sensation seemed magnified."

"Exactly," Brody stated. "When Jake and I first experienced a ménage, we were just two young bucks out for some fun. What we found changed our lives forever. Regular sex just can't compare for sheer enjoyment."

Taylor thought for a moment, puzzled by what Jake and Brody had told her over the last few weeks. "But Paige. Did you have that sort of relationship with her?"

"Sadly, no. Paige never quite plucked up the courage to try it. Even though the idea intrigued her."

"Oh?"

Jake continued where Brody left off. "You see, Paige flirted with the idea several times, but she saw me as a friend and not a lover. We were never able to make that connection. Not every woman is able to open themselves up to the possibilities of a ménage. It takes a lot of courage and trust." He cupped her chin. "You had difficulties getting your head around it, too, but you were brave enough to experience the ultimate in sexual satisfaction."

Taylor smiled. "You both make me feel really confident. It's been a long time since I felt this good. I had a relationship that lasted for four years, and I'm ashamed to say I rather let him take over my life. So much so that I didn't make any decisions for myself."

She propped herself up against some pillows. Jake and Brody lay on their sides, stroking their hands occasionally over her body.

Brody circled her breast with his fingers. "Tell us what happened. We'd both like to know."

"I met Justin at a friend's birthday party."

Jake breathed out. “Justin? With a name like that, I dislike him already.”

Taylor giggled. “You don’t have to be jealous of him. He’s history.”

Jake stared into her eyes a smile on his lips. “Did I say I was jealous?”

She playfully ruffled his golden hair. “Yes, in so many words.”

He thought for a moment, his eyes twinkling mischievously. “Okay, I can’t deny it. So give us the lowdown on this jerk.”

“We got on great to begin with.”

“That’s not what we want to hear,” Brody murmured in irritation.

“You’ve no need to be jealous, either.” Taylor stroked her hand into his dark hair, too. They were both acting possessively, and she loved it.

“I didn’t notice at first, but occasionally he’d comment on what I was wearing. When you want someone to like you, well,” she shrugged, “I went along with his suggestions without realizing I was being controlled.

“Slowly over time, my whole wardrobe altered to his tastes. It was my friend, Sofia, who pointed it out to me. I confronted him about it. That’s what caused us to split up the first time.”

“I bet he didn’t like you wearing revealing clothes,” Jake stated. “I’ve met his type before.”

“No, he didn’t, although I refused to get rid of my sexy underwear, and that caused another major rift. I guess he was the jealous type. I’m positive now he wanted me to look as unattractive as possible so nobody else would want me.”

“I just knew I didn’t like him.” Jake snorted derisively. “What a prick.”

“The last time we split up, and I refused to go back out with him, he parked his car outside my apartment and just waited there, night after night, until I relented.”

“What an asshole. He sounds like a real weirdo.” Brody added, “Or even a stalker.”

“That’s what my friend Sofia said, but in the end I felt sorry for him, and because my confidence had hit rock bottom, I went back out with him. I didn’t know what else to do. He knows now that we’re finished for good. There was a time when I hated being with him, but was too frightened to be without him. That’s the control he had over me. Does that make any sense?”

“Well, you needn’t worry about him anymore,” Jake said. “If he comes hanging around your apartment, you let us know. We’ll get rid of him.”

“What will you do?”

Brody tapped his nose. “Don’t you worry about that. We’ll deal with him ourselves. He won’t come back after Jake and I have had a quiet word with him, if you know what I mean.”

Taylor laughed. “You two sound like you can look after yourselves.”

“Yeah, you bet,” Jake confirmed. They’d certainly proved that last night when they’d scared off the huge grizzly.

“I’m sorry about the bear coming for the food I left out. It was a big mistake on my part.”

Brody trailed his hand down to her stomach. “You’re fine, Taylor. We all make mistakes. It’s really not safe for you to wander around on your own, especially when it gets dark. We’ll help you move your things over to here later.”

“But what about the telephone? I thought you didn’t want to be disturbed?”

“Phone calls don’t worry us, honey. Besides, we need to keep you safe.” Brody moved his hand lower, skimming her clitoris with his fingers. Taylor immediately writhed beneath his touch. “We can think of another good reason to have you here. Isn’t that right, Jake?”

“Which is?” she asked breathlessly, already knowing the answer.

Brody smiled into her eyes. His index finger slipped inside her pussy, and she rotated her hips into his hand. He brushed his mouth across hers. "Jake and I get to fuck you whenever we want."

* * * *

Later that morning, Jake and Brody finally cleared the last of Taylor's possessions from her cabin. "I'm sure you've got more things here than when you first arrived." Brody picked up the last of her cases and began carrying it over to the ranch house.

"Well, I'm a woman. I need everything I've brought with me. In any case, I haven't even left the ranch since I've been here." Taylor held a bundle of clothes in her hands as she walked alongside him.

Brody felt a pang of guilt that Taylor hadn't even visited the nearest town. She needed time away like everyone else did. He walked into her new bedroom and placed everything down on the bed. Jake was already there clearing space in the wardrobes. "We'll remedy that tomorrow, Taylor. How about we all go into Little Rock, shopping? It's only a half-hour drive. We could go on to a restaurant afterward."

Taylor smiled as she began removing her underwear from the case. She threw it into an open drawer. "I'd like that, but don't men hate shopping?"

"If you're happy, we're happy. Isn't that right, Jake?"

"Sure, anything to keep the lady happy. Besides, I owe her some new underwear."

Brody watched Taylor's beautiful face break into a smile. She seemed really relaxed around them both now. That had been his aim, to take things really slowly. Whereas Jake might go in all guns blazing, he found a more subtle approach often worked better. In Taylor's case, it had proved the right thing to do.

Taylor held a scrap of lace material in her hand. "Oh, yes." She came up to Jake and put her arms around his neck. "I'd forgotten you ruined my favorite pair of panties by ripping them from my body."

"Like I said, I'll buy you some new ones." Jake grinned at her as he held her in his arms. With Jake's hands splayed on her delicious butt, Brody could see him squeeze her luscious rump several times. Taylor had a really ripe, peachy ass that he couldn't wait to own, too. The sooner they began preparing her, the sooner they could both enjoy her together. The idea of Taylor sandwiched between himself and his best friend made his cock rock hard.

"Just the one pair will do fine," she said, bringing him back from his adoration of her body.

"I'll buy you plenty. It's a habit of mine."

Brody chuckled. "He's right. Jake gets turned on by the sound of ripping lace."

"Mmm, I might have known you've done it before." She playfully tapped him on the nose, admonishing him. "You naughty boy."

Brody reached into her case and pulled out the vibrator, still in its box. He winked at Jake as he held it up. "Talking of being naughty. The seal's been broken on this box, buddy."

Taylor whirled around. Her cheeks immediately flushed a very sexy pink when she saw what he was holding. "I was just seeing how it worked. I haven't used it."

"A likely story." Jake chuckled.

She held out her hands and beckoned with her fingers. "Give it here. I'll get rid of it once and for all."

Brody asked, "What are you going to do with it?"

"Throw it away."

As she began to reach out, he lifted it high above her head. "Not so fast, honey." He glanced at Jake. "We might need it for distraction purposes."

Jake nodded and took it from his grasp. He then placed it on top of the wardrobe, out of her reach. "We'll look after it for you, darlin'."

“It’s not coming anywhere near me.” With her eyes all defiant, she placed her hands on her hips. “I mean it. It’s huge.”

“Whatever you say, Taylor.”

“Good.” She stared at him. Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. He had to fight the sudden urge to laugh. “Anyway, what do you mean by distraction purposes?”

Brody chuckled. “Now that’s for us to know and for you to find out, honey.”

Chapter Thirteen

The next day

As they all piled into the boutique, Taylor decided shopping with Jake and Brody was a whole lot of fun. They'd bought items from several shops already. The shopkeepers of Little Rock had instantly eyed the three of them with suspicion, but when they'd seen that they were serious about purchasing, they'd been more than happy to accept their patronage. Taylor guessed that the small town didn't serve many visitors from outside the local area.

Jake went straight over to a rack of panties and began sampling the texture of the material between his fingertips. Unlike most men, he didn't seem to be embarrassed by the display of sexy underwear. A huge grin spread onto his mouth as he evidently found what he was looking for. He unhooked a pair and held them up. They were the tiniest, skimpiest panties Taylor had ever seen.

"They're not panties. They're just a string of lace," she pointed out. She took them from him and looked at the price tag. "What are they made of? Gold?"

Jake chuckled. "These are so sexy." He removed several more pairs from the rack in different colors. "We'll take them all." She started to protest, but he would have none of it. "I insist." He walked over to the counter and without lowering his voice said, "You can try these on for Brody and me tonight."

Taylor could feel her cheeks blush a deep scarlet as the shop assistant looked at the three of them. The woman's mouth firmed into

a thin line of disapproval as she placed the expensive scraps of lingerie into a designer bag.

Brody walked across and casually laid a red silk corset on the counter. "We'll take this, too, Jake. Taylor will look real sexy in this."

"You bet." Jake picked it up and held it against her. He seemed to take great pleasure in her embarrassment and grinned at her in that sexy way she had come to love so much. Her stomach muscles contracted with intense desire. She felt her panties moisten in anticipation of another night filled with their undivided attention.

He cupped her chin with his finger and thumb and kissed her possessively on the lips while Brody held her around the waist. Taylor could see the shopkeeper look embarrassed. She knew they enjoyed marking her as theirs in front of the staid assistant.

"We're not from round here," she said as if to justify why two men had their hands all over her. However, at that moment, Taylor really couldn't care less what the shopkeeper thought of her. She felt euphoric. It had been a long time since she'd felt so good about herself.

"We're family," Brody said, making it far worse, and they all burst out laughing. "We're from the South," he said as if that would explain everything, and everyone except the assistant laughed again. He gently tapped the shopkeeper's hand as if to reassure her. "Don't worry, honey. I'm only kidding."

They paid for their purchases, and with her arms linked through theirs, they made their way down the main street. To Taylor, walking with the two sexiest men on either side of her was just wonderful. It made her feel so happy and relaxed. She felt sure she had the silliest grin plastered to her face.

Brody and Jake stopped suddenly as they passed a high-class jewelry store. They both stared through the plate glass window at the impressive display, and then Jake whispered, "Now that's just perfect." Without another word, Brody went inside, leaving Jake with Taylor.

Several minutes later, he emerged back outside and handed her a small gift-wrapped box. "This is for you, honey. It's from both of us."

"For me?" Her hand trembled as she took the package and began opening it. "It's a shame to ruin such pretty gift wrap." Inside was an exquisite blue velvet case, which she eagerly snapped open. She gasped. "Oh, Brody, Jake, it's so beautiful." Her heart somersaulted in her chest as she looked at the expensive, handcrafted hairpin they'd given her. Made of solid platinum, a beautiful butterfly dripping with amethysts and emeralds adorned the one end.

Immediately, she wound her hair up and secured it with the new pin. They both looked very pleased with their purchase.

"It matches the color of your eyes perfectly," Brody remarked.

In all her life, she had never received such a wonderful present. "You're so thoughtful." She kissed their cheeks, one at a time. "Thank you both so very much."

They smiled at her, and Jake said, "You're welcome, darlin'. It's worth it just to see you smile."

Taylor felt as though they'd reached a crossroads. Was it a goodbye gift? In a week's time, they'd all return to Dallas. What future could there possibly be between them? After all, the relationship the three of them shared was hardly mainstream. Taylor felt her happiness drain away. This couldn't last. Instinctively, she knew it would end in tears. "This is much too expensive," she blurted out.

"Oh, honey, don't look so sad." Brody put an arm around her shoulder. "We love buying you gifts, don't we, Jake?"

"We sure do. Now we're gonna buy you the best meal in town. Then we're gonna take you back home and love you like you've never been loved before," Jake insisted.

Taylor blinked back the tears that had threatened to spill. "Oh?"

"We're going to make love to you, all, night, long." Brody spaced each word with a kiss.

Taylor smiled. "Promise?"

“You bet,” they said together.

* * * *

When they arrived back at the ranch, it was just past seven and had already gotten dark. Brody parked the SUV outside the entrance, and they all climbed out. Jake couldn't wait to get Taylor inside the cabin. He had a hard-on that just wouldn't quit. By the pained expression on Brody's face, he guessed his best friend had, too.

As soon as he could, he lifted Taylor into his arms. Her squeals of delight were music to his ears. “You're coming with us,” he growled against her ear. “We've a promise to keep.”

He realized he'd become really attached to Taylor. Her happiness was the most important thing in the world to him now. She'd looked sad in Little Rock. He guessed she'd been thinking about what would happen when they all returned to Dallas. Out here, they could act out the fantasy, but back in the public arena, convention would insist they conform to what was socially acceptable.

Since when have I stuck to convention?

Jake knew that if he wanted something badly, there was not a law in the land that could stop him from achieving that goal. He stared down into Taylor's beautiful face. Maybe he had everything right here in his arms? Tonight he would certainly enjoy all she had to offer.

They all raced into the bedroom. Jake placed Taylor on the floor, giving her one last kiss, and then began shedding his clothes, desperate to be inside her. Brody followed suit. She giggled and ran to the bathroom. “I'm having a shower first,” she called to them before closing the door behind her.

“I hope she hasn't locked that,” Brody said, hopping on one leg as he tried to remove a sock.

“Me, too. I think we need to start preparing her for having her ass fucked. She's used to us both now.”

“We’ve gotta go careful, Jake. You saw how upset she became in Little Rock. She’s worried that the fantasy involving the three of us will soon be over. I guess she wants to know what happens afterward. She’s a woman, and she needs to feel safe and secure.”

Jake removed the last of his clothes. “Personally, I’d like it to continue. Taylor is one hell of a woman, and she fits our requirements perfectly. And we all get on so well together. When we were students, we always said that the ideal marriage would have three people in it.”

Brody laughed. “Can you hear yourself, Jake? Are you talking marriage? What’s happened to the love ’em and leave ’em guy?” His friend looked incredulous.

Jake could hardly believe he’d uttered the words himself. He shrugged. “Guess I need to think some more about it, but it doesn’t seem like such a bad idea for me now. I’m thirty-seven for fuck sake, Brody.”

Brody placed a hand on Jake’s shoulder. “Taylor’s a lovely lady. If we were to continue in the outside world, you do realize that society may have something to say.”

“I don’t give a fuck what society thinks, Brody. I’m sure there’ll be talk, but we’ve had that before. People move on and focus on someone else eventually.”

“Yeah, guess you’re right there, Jake. If you want to move things on, then I suggest we tell Taylor our thoughts. I think it will put her mind at ease.”

* * * *

As soon as the bathroom door opened, Taylor smiled at her two men. They both looked incredibly sexy. Their strong erections stood proud against their taut stomachs. By the look on their faces, she knew she was in for some hot loving. Just the thought of it made her pussy even wetter.

As they both stepped into the large shower stall, Jake took the body wash from her. "We'll do that for you." He squeezed some onto his hands and began rubbing it over her breasts.

Brody came behind her, and he too began massaging her with shower gel. She closed her eyes as she gave into the incredible feeling. He worked his fingers into the groove of her spine and began gently caressing her shoulders. "Taylor, Jake and I have been thinking."

"Yes?"

"When we get back to Dallas. We'd like you to move in with us."

Immediately, her eyes flew wide open, and she stared into Jake's beautiful blue gaze. "You do? I didn't know you even lived together."

"Darlin', for the most part, we don't. Brody and I own several houses of our own, but we also share a penthouse in uptown Dallas. It's ideal for getting to and from work during the week. It would be an ideal place to get to know one another."

"Are you serious?" Surely this was more than she could have hoped for.

Jake nodded, his hands teasing down her belly until he reached her clit. His fingers smoothed the shower gel into her neatly trimmed pussy, and she gasped with pleasure as he expertly caressed her nub.

Brody's fingers worked down her back until he reached her butt. He stopped the movement of his hand and then reached for some more shower gel. It felt cold as he rubbed it into the cleft of her ass. "We thought you'd feel more secure, knowing that we respect you so much that we want to continue seeing you. We both really like you, Taylor." He hesitated for a moment. "Well, truth be known, we more than like you."

She beamed at Jake. "I really like you both, too." It was more than like for her, too, she realized, but she wasn't about to confess to anything more just yet. As she looked at Jake, she sensed a but. "Go on. What else do you want to say?"

Jake continued to pleasure her clit. “We want to move to the next stage, Taylor. We want to start preparing you for the ultimate sexual experience. Both Brody and I want to fuck you together. You know how much threesomes turn us on.”

As soon as Jake uttered the words, Brody’s finger rested against her anus. Immediately, she could feel herself tense. “Easy, honey, we’re not going to do that tonight. We just want to play a little. Get you used to the idea.”

“I don’t know.” Her voice sounded weak, and she was sure she looked scared. She bit on her bottom lip, wondering what she’d let herself in for.

As she looked into Jake’s eyes, she could feel herself falling under his control. He kissed her lips as the water cascaded over them. His fingers circled her clit again until she gasped with pleasure. When Brody pushed a finger into her anus, Jake dropped to his knees in front of her. He held her by the hips and began licking her slit. She fisted her hands into his wet hair, aware of the fragile balance between pleasure and pain. The sharpness as Brody inserted his finger further inside her butt contrasted with the pleasure of Jake’s tongue on her pussy.

“Relax, honey. It won’t hurt if you just relax and let it happen.”

“That’s easy for you to say.” Taylor closed her eyes and thought beautiful thoughts in an attempt to ease her anal muscles. Jake’s magic tongue certainly helped as Brody pushed a finger past her sphincter with the aid of shower gel acting as lube. An unusual feeling of fullness invaded her thoughts. It wasn’t unpleasant. She felt Brody move his fingers deeper inside her ass, working on the muscles.

“Good girl,” he praised as he held her more firmly around the waist. Using more lube, he inserted two fingers further into her puckered hole. This time, there was little or no pain, and the sensation as he worked his fingers inside her butt was far more erotic than she could ever have imagined. Although the idea of Jake’s and Brody’s

huge cocks filling the same space worried her a little. “You’re doing really well, honey. I think Jake’s going to reward you now.”

Almost instantly, Jake speared two fingers deep inside her wet cunt. He lowered his head and feverishly licked her slit. His tongue lapped at her feminine flesh, drawing her clit against his teeth. Her fingers twisted into his hair, an automatic response to such unbridled pleasure. The combination of Jake tonguing her pussy and clit and Brody filling her ass with his fingers proved irresistible. An incredible spasm began in her stomach. It twisted its way down to her womb where it convulsed against their fingers deep inside her cunt and ass.

Her screams of pleasure filled the bathroom.

Chapter Fourteen

Taylor knew she was about to buckle at the knees, but thankfully Brody lifted her and carried her dripping wet to the bed. He flipped her onto her back and leaned over her. His eyes held her captive as his hips rocked against hers. When she looked down between their bodies, she could see his hard cock nestling in the V of her pussy. He smiled as she tried to rotate her hips. She craved his hard prick deep inside her, and she gripped his shoulders tightly, trying to pull him closer. In all her life, she had never acted so wantonly, but these beautiful guys made it impossible for her to act any other way.

“Brody, please,” she begged, lifting her hips to force their union.

“We’ve got a wild one here,” he said, turning to Jake as he came through from the bathroom. Water still dripped from his perfectly toned body onto the floor. “The orgasm she just had didn’t satisfy her. She wants more. Look what she’s just done to my arm.” Brody pointed to a large scratch.

“I didn’t do it,” she tried to explain.

Jake chuckled and then sat on the bed next to her. “You’ve been a naughty girl, haven’t you, Taylor?” He placed a hand possessively on her breast. She moaned from the exquisite sensation as he squeezed her nipple tightly between his finger and thumb. Her whole body arched, wanting more. What was happening to her? “Looks like you’re right, Brody. We need to put her in line.”

“Pass me a condom from the drawer, Jake. This woman needs servicing properly.”

Jake tossed him a condom, and she watched, transfixed as he rolled it down his thick shaft. When he was fully sheathed, he looked

at Jake. “Hold her arms above her head. I aim to get real deep, and I don’t want her scratching me with those long talons of hers again.”

Her heart began to beat into overdrive as Jake roughly held her arms above her head. A moan escaped her lips as Brody settled his weight between her legs. His hard cock pressed deliciously against her cunt, and she purred her appreciation. “Please, Brody.”

Brody rocked his hips against hers, tantalizing her, making her moan in frustration. “Ask me again in that sexy way of yours, Taylor.”

“Brody, please.” Kneeling between her legs, his eyes burned into hers. He draped her legs over his shoulders, lifting her butt and cunt from the bed. He had a serious expression on his face. Intent showed in his eyes, and she swallowed hard. Completely open to his will, her back arched from the bed as he sunk his dick inside her.

She screamed her appreciation. “Fuck, that feels so good.” He was so deep she felt like he was in her womb.

Like a man possessed, he began pumping inside her. “A good seeing to is what she needs, Jake, or we’re likely to end up with a hell cat.”

Jake knelt over her, and she gripped him around the thighs. He smiled down at her. “Brody can keep it up for hours until you’re delirious with sexual pleasure.” As she writhed on the bed, her whole body arched until just her shoulders and head remained in contact with the mattress.

Jake guided his thick cock to her waiting lips. She looked up at his strong virile body towering above her. Her gaze connected with his as she licked the head, swiping away the remaining droplets of water from their recent shower. He groaned and closed his eyes as she sucked him slowly into her mouth, swirling her tongue over and over the engorged peak.

Jake’s face showed the signs of intense concentration as she relentlessly pleased his prick, bobbing her head slowly down the shaft. “That’s it, baby, take it right back. Suck it real deep.”

When Jake took the weight from her shoulders with his hands, she lay suspended between them. Nerve endings she never knew existed, popped and detonated inside her. On the crest of sexual ecstasy, she cupped Jake's balls as she took his thick length further inside her mouth. She wanted all of him to fill her. Breathing through her nose, she relaxed, enjoying the feeling as his huge cock touched the back of her throat.

"Fuck," Jake ground out.

"Bad luck," Brody murmured. "You're not gonna last with her hands squeezing your balls."

"Fuck, no, but have you ever seen anything as beautiful and sexy as Taylor?"

"She's a natural all right. Come on, baby, we're gonna fuck you all night long. I want you begging for more."

The combination of Brody fucking her cunt and Jake filling her mouth with his dick proved almost unbearable.

Her whole body writhed and arched as satisfaction built inside her. When her climax began to roll from her stomach in an intense spasm, she marveled at the beautiful feelings flowing through her. Her moans of pleasure drummed against Jake's cock. After ten minutes, she lost count of how many orgasms she'd had. She was with the two sexiest men in the world, who at that precise moment worshipped her mind, body, and soul.

* * * *

Brody lay awake, listening to the sound of Molly barking outside. For fuck sake, that Goddamn bear must be on the prowl again. It certainly wasn't safe moving around the ranch with it in the vicinity. He vowed to do something about it when dawn broke. He rubbed a hand over his face and turned to look at Taylor. She was sleeping. She looked like a picture of contentment. A smile formed on his face as he stared at her. He'd fucked her good and proper, that was for sure. Her

whimpers of pleasure had continued until she'd been intoxicated by him. In the end, she'd fallen into a deep trance, totally drunk on ecstasy.

He'd needed that, too. That all-out feeling of letting go entirely. He'd driven his cock into her body relentlessly. He guessed he was making up for lost time. Ever since Paige had died, he'd held himself in check. Well, not anymore. Life was definitely for the living, and he fully intended to grasp it with both hands.

Jake stirred, and he watched him wrap an arm possessively around Taylor's naked waist. Most men would get jealous, sharing a woman, but not him. He realized that this was why he and Jake got on so well together. They could share a woman equally without a hint of jealousy passing between them. He could truly say that Jake was his best friend. He loved him as one would a brother.

He'd been pleasantly surprised that Jake wanted them to become more seriously involved with Taylor. He guessed Jake was falling in love. And who wouldn't want to fall in love with this lovely lady? Taylor, after all, was perfect for them. Intelligent and sexy, she was also very beautiful. There was just a nagging doubt that he was rushing headlong into another relationship. Was he on the rebound after Paige's death? Taylor was the first woman he'd become sexually intimate with since Paige. He'd loved Paige deeply, and now he guessed he was falling in love with Taylor, too. Could life really be that simple?

When the first rays of light began filtering through the drapes, he rose from the bed. He needed to find out if the grizzly was getting too close again. He pulled on a T-shirt and a pair of jeans. After tiptoeing from the bedroom so as not to wake Jake and Taylor, he made his way into the main living area. His boots were by the door, and he pulled them on. It looked cold outside, so he shrugged on a sheepskin jacket and then went over to the gun rack. He took a shotgun, along with some cartridges, and then headed outside.

The golden glow of dawn was creeping up the walls of the ranch house. In the distance, a light mist drifted over the forested hills. He breathed in. The air smelled sweet with the scent of pine and damp earth. He filled his lungs again, enjoying the silence all around him. Molly sniffed the air at the edge of the clearing, and he wondered if she would start barking again. As he strode up, her tail wagged, but she didn't make a sound. That made him all the more confident when it came to scouting around the perimeter fence.

When he reached the corral, Pharaoh trotted across to him, and he patted the old stallion's nose. He went into the tack room and took a handful of horse biscuits from the sack. He held them out for him. "Here you go, boy." He stroked his muzzle as the horse munched them down. Pharaoh didn't look remotely nervous. He guessed if there'd been any grizzlies about, they were long gone.

Slowly, he began working his way around the edge of the clearing. Every so often, he would glance back at the log ranch house, thinking how settled and cozy it looked, nestled in the forest. A trace of smoke still came from the giant stone chimney at its center.

Almost imperceptibly, a feeling that he was not alone crept into his body. He raised the shotgun and felt himself stiffen. He spun around, turning the full three-sixty, looking in every direction, adrenaline pulsing through his veins. He held his breath. If there was a grizzly about, then he might be dead meat. The sound of a twig breaking nearby caught him off guard, and he turned quickly in the direction of the noise.

* * * *

A gunshot rang out, breaking into Jake's dream. Immediately, his eyes flew wide open. Taylor still lay next to him, fast asleep, her breathing calm and relaxed. Brody was nowhere to be seen. As soon as he heard a second shot, he jumped from the bed in search of some clothes. Had Brody come across the grizzly again? And if he had, was

he in danger? Quickly, he shrugged on a pair of jeans and then pulled a T-shirt over his head as he strode to the living area. After finding his boots and a sheepskin jacket, he finished dressing. He picked a shotgun off the rack and stuffed several cartridges into his pockets. He'd make sure he finished whatever Brody had started.

With not a moment to lose, he headed outside. He looked all around. It was still early. Just peace and quiet filtered through from the mountains and forests that surrounded him. The air felt cool, and a slight haze hung low in the sky. He had no idea which direction Brody had taken. If he had to step into his shoes, which way would he go? He decided to walk clockwise around the clearing. That way, if Brody was hurt, he knew he'd eventually find him. There was no point in running around like a headless chicken.

He took two cartridges from his pocket. The shotgun made a loud click as he pushed them home. This time, he was walking with it fully cocked. If there was a grizzly on the rampage, he aimed to shoot it dead.

Jake climbed into the paddock and began walking along the perimeter fence. All he heard was silence save for the horses snorting in the corral. As the minutes ticked by, he became increasingly worried for Brody's well-being. Surely he should have made contact with him by now? When he reached the end of the paddock, he leapt over the fence and began walking on the other side. In the distance, he could just make out a bundle of cloth on the ground. That seemed odd. A chill ran down his spine as he drew closer. Fuck, it was Brody. His whole life flashed before him. Brody was his lifelong friend, his buddy. With a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, he ran as fast as he could toward him.

Brody lay motionless on the ground. A large gash scarred the back of his head, and blood oozed into his hair. He sunk to his knees and leaned over his best friend. He prayed with all his heart that he wasn't dead. It looked like the grizzly had mauled him good and proper. Jake pressed his fingers into Brody's neck, trying to feel a pulse. There

wasn't one. Brody's body felt limp as he cradled him in his arms. There was no use denying it. He loved Brody like a brother. He was his best friend. They'd known each other for years and had shared every emotion and experience together. As his vision began to blur, he spoke out loud. "Goddamn it, Brody, why'd you have to go and leave me all on my own?"

He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. It was almost too much to bear. It was his entire fucking fault. Why had he insisted on dragging Brody on this damned vacation anyway? He clearly hadn't wanted to come. If he hadn't interfered, his best friend would still be alive.

Suddenly Brody's body convulsed in a series of hacking coughs. A hoarse whisper muffled discontentedly against his chest. "What the hell's got into you, Jake? You're gonna suffocate me if you keep squeezing me like that. Give me some air, for fuck sake."

When Jake looked down, he couldn't believe his eyes. Even though Brody was clearly annoyed with him, he wanted to jump for joy. He was alive. The grizzly bear hadn't killed him after all. He patted Brody's cheek. "Fucking hell, Brody, don't you ever do that to me again. Or I'll kick your fucking ass for you. Say, are you feeling all right, buddy?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. You're like an old woman, Jake. Quit fussing."

Jake took a deep breath then said, "The wound looks pretty nasty. That old grizzly sure had it in for you."

Brody put a hand to the back of his head. When he looked at Jake a puzzled expression formed on his face. "It was no fucking grizzly that did this. I remember now. I heard a twig break, and next thing I know, some motherfucker tried to cave my skull in."

Jake stared at Brody, wondering if he was suffering from concussion. "Are you sure? We're right off the beaten track here."

"I swear it, Jake. Just look around, will you? Where's my gun? Have you ever known a grizzly take a shotgun, huh?"

Jake had to admit it all seemed rather strange. He got his friend into a sitting position and stared at his wound. "You'll live." He shook his head. "This just doesn't make any sense. Who is this fucking guy? What does he want? We're in the middle of nowhere." No sooner had he uttered the words than realization dawned. "Taylor, she's on her own. We'd better get back to the ranch real quick. Can you stand?"

"I'll give it a go."

He helped Brody to his feet. His friend doubled up as painful coughs wracked through his body. "Fuck, I guess the asshole kicked the shit out of me when I was unconscious, too."

"We need to get out of the open and into the woods. He sounds like a crazy guy to me."

Jake stared into the distance at the group of log buildings. Taylor was there all alone. Even though it was still early in the morning, he knew today was fast turning into a nightmare.

There was no time to lose. Taylor needed them.

Chapter Fifteen

Taylor took a long luxurious shower, letting the hot water soothe her aching body. My God, those boys sure knew how to love a woman. With their undivided attention hour after hour, her whole being felt aglow. She smiled to herself. In all her life, she had never felt so contented and satisfied.

The smile never left her face the entire time she dressed and wound her hair up in front of the large cheval mirror. Taylor stared at the woman in blue jeans and a pretty, white top. She hardly recognized herself. “Mmm, you look like the cat that’s got the cream, girl,” she purred.

After securing her hair with the beautiful new pin Brody and Jake had bought for her, she went to prepare breakfast. Trust the men to go out hunting at the crack of dawn. Still, she couldn’t be angry with them for leaving her all alone so early in the morning. Not when they obviously had caveman blood running through their veins.

In the refrigerator, she found ham and eggs. She’d cook them all a hearty breakfast when they returned. As she closed the refrigerator door, she noticed a shadow move across her peripheral vision. The boys had returned.

“It’s about time, too,” she quipped, turning quickly, but there was no one there. That was odd. “Brody, Jake, is that you?” Without an answer, she shrugged and continued to the sink. She filled the coffeepot with water and placed it on the stove. When she heard the unmistakable sound of a shotgun being loaded, her head moved sharply in the direction of the noise. “Hi, boys, I’m in the kitchen.” It

had to be them. With a carton of milk in her hands, she walked across to the living area.

As soon as she saw him, the milk fell from her grasp. In slow motion, it crashed to the floor, spilling its contents. Instinctively, she stepped back. Oh, my God, this can't be real. Why was he dressed in army fatigues and pointing a gun at her? Had he gone completely crazy?

"Justin, what are you doing here?" He didn't quite look the same as the Justin she remembered. Her ex-boyfriend had a strange look in his eyes. A quiet determination masked his face. He'd also completely shaved his head. He kept walking toward her, and eventually, she found herself backed up against one of the work counters in the kitchen. "How did you find me, Justin? I didn't tell you where I was going."

A creepy smile settled on his mouth. "I had a word with Joan from the office. I told her I was planning a surprise wedding proposal and could she help. Lovely lady Joan, she was only too happy to oblige. I've been staying in Little Rock for a few days. Imagine my surprise when I happened to see you and two strange men go into a lingerie boutique. What I overheard...well," he sucked the air through his teeth and looked derisively over her from head to toe, "let's just say it's lucky for you I turned up when I did. You and I were always meant to be together, Taylor."

A sinking feeling slowly washed over her. Justin had been following her every move. Stalking her. He probably guessed she was having a relationship with both Jake and Brody. She swallowed hard. What the hell was he going to do to her now? With her hands clasped tightly on the edge of the work surface, her whole body arched away from him as he pressed the gun barrel directly against her chest.

"Since when did I ever allow you to wear such revealing clothing, Taylor?" His eyes burned into hers. "When I get you back home, I'll find you something sensible to wear."

Even though she knew him, her lips trembled when she spoke. He'd completely flipped. "Please, Justin, what you're doing just isn't right. You need help. We're finished."

He smiled and pushed the gun even harder into her chest. "Wrong answer, sweet thing. You and I are never finished. We'll always be together. You should know that by now."

"You can't mean that, Justin. We're not together anymore. It's all over. You have to accept that."

"But I'm here to save you. I'm here to stop you from going off the rails. You need me, Taylor, to keep you on the straight and narrow." He shook his head and let his gaze wander contemptuously over her. "In the few months we've been apart, you've fallen so easily back into your whoring ways."

Taylor bristled at his comments and pushed the gun away from her chest. "How dare you come here and try and pick up where we left off. I'm not coming back to you, ever."

Without warning, he slammed her hard against the worktop. He grabbed her by the chin, squeezing her until her mouth puckered. He forced her to look at him. A cold, clammy feeling settled in the pit of her stomach as she stared back. His pale blue eyes were totally devoid of any emotion. She hated him now with a vengeance. He spoke again, "Now you listen, and listen good. Either way, you're coming with me. I don't care if it's dead or alive. You're not staying here with those two guys. I don't approve of them. I've watched you with them, and believe me, I'm disgusted."

Taylor raised her head defiantly. "You better watch out because they'll be back any minute now. They won't take kindly to you being here."

He laughed. "Oh, I don't think they'll be back for a while. In fact, the dark-haired one won't be coming back at all. I smashed the back of his head in."

Her heart lurched. "What have you done to them, you sick bastard?" Her voice rose higher with each word, and her stomach

churned. She loved Brody and Jake dearly. If anything happened to them, she wouldn't want to live anymore.

He looked at her long and hard and then pushed her away. She fell to the floor, landing heavily on her knees. "Sweet thing, don't be like that. You gotta know I'm doing this for your own good. You're gonna thank me for showing you the light. The voices have been telling me over and over that you need saving from yourself." He grabbed hold of her arm and began pulling her along the floor to the door.

"Justin, let me go!" she screamed. "You're hurting me."

He hauled her upright and pushed her against the cabin with such force that the air was literally knocked from her lungs. The uneven wall of logs dug mercilessly into her back. "Don't you go pining for them. It's all for the best."

Taylor realized that Justin had completely lost the plot. If she went with him, then she probably wouldn't survive. The guy seemed intent on hurting everything and everyone. He was completely psychotic.

"I'm not coming with you, Justin."

"Sweet thing, once you're away from here, we can put this all behind us." He caressed her cheek with his hand. Tears sprang in her eyes and ran unchecked down her face. Her lips quivered as he brushed the moisture away. There didn't seem a way out. She held her breath, not knowing what to do.

Where the hell were Jake and Brody? Was Brody still alive? And what would happen if they turned up? Would Justin kill them? She realized now that she loved them with all her heart. Now it looked like they would never be together again.

* * * *

Brody stared into the distance. They'd finally gotten to within two hundred yards of the cabin. His friend turned to him. "I guess we'll

just have to take a chance and get closer. Do you feel up to it, buddy?" he asked.

"You bet. If he's hurt Taylor in any way, he's a fucking dead man." His hands clenched into fists as he thought what he would do to the crazy cunt. He prodded Jake in the back. "Come on, let's get there before he does any damage."

Jake ran out into the clearing and ducked down just behind the tack room. He motioned for Brody to follow. With only one gun between them, they had to be careful. When he reached his friend, his lungs screamed painfully with the increased breathing. He was sure one or more of his ribs were busted. He held a hand to his chest. "When I get hold of this motherfucker, he's gonna wish he'd never been born."

"You and me both." Jake looked around the wooden shed then ducked back almost immediately. "Fuck, he's just coming out the cabin with Taylor. She looks shit scared." He turned and looked at Brody. "Just who do you think this guy is? His head's all shaved, and he's dressed like a military man."

Hunkered down behind the small building, Brody shrugged. "He could be setting up a blackmail attempt by abducting Taylor, or he could be that fucking asshole she mentioned going out with. Some prick in Dallas who acted really weird." He snapped his fingers. "His name was Jason or something like that."

Jake nodded. "Yeah, I remember now. Justin, that was it. I knew I didn't like the guy. Look, Brody, this guy left you for dead. I even thought you were dead myself when I first saw you. He won't be expecting you back here. So at least we have the element of surprise on our side." Jake stood to his full height and aimed the shotgun. "Stop right there, asshole," he called out. "Just a squeeze of this here trigger, and you're a dead man. Let the woman go."

Careful not to be seen, Brody craned his neck to see what was happening. Some guy in fatigues had his arm around Taylor's neck, a large hunting knife in his hand. She looked terrified. His heart went

out to her. At that moment, he knew he loved her without question. His hands clenched into fists. Damn it to hell and back. The crazy cunt had his shotgun, too. If that bastard hurt a hair on her head, he'd kill him without a second thought.

The intruder smiled back. A smile that showed he had nothing to lose. He waved the shotgun. "Now listen up, and listen good. I intend to leave here with this woman, and if that means we both leave in a wooden box, then so be it. Shoot me, and I'll make sure the whore's dead before I hit the ground." Brody felt the color drain from his body as the man held the hunting knife firmly against Taylor's throat. A trickle of blood ran down the blade. He felt sick to his stomach listening to her terrified whimpers.

He ducked out of sight. "Jake," he whispered. "We gotta handle this carefully. Let's not push him into doing anything stupid. This guy's not normal. He's not playing with a full deck. I'm gonna slip around behind him. You try and distract him. We have to disarm him before he hurts Taylor real bad. When I'm in position, I'll nod. I'll go for the knife. You go for the gun."

Jake nodded his acceptance to show he understood and then pointed the gun barrel into the air. "It seems we have a standoff, my friend," he said calmly to the man holding Taylor captive. "How are we all going to make it out of here safely?"

"Well, it starts by you coming out into the open with that shotgun of yours held high above your head. Then you gently place it at my feet. Understand?"

With no time to lose, Brody started out, holding a hand to his busted ribs. He hoped Jake could keep the nutcase occupied long enough for him to get into position.

* * * *

Jake nodded and eased himself into the open. He certainly didn't want to make any quick moves in front of this asshole. He felt sure the guy would shoot him without a second thought.

Taylor stared at him, her eyes wide and terrified. He guessed she thought he would be killed as soon as he laid the gun on the ground. He had to admit that thought had crossed his mind, too, but it was the only way of giving Brody time to get into position. Brody had to circle around the guest buildings before coming up behind the sick fuck.

Once in full view, he began walking slowly toward Taylor and her captor. "Where's Brody?" she whispered. "Please tell me he's all right." She was barely able to speak, the result of undiluted fear and the hunting knife pressed firmly to her throat.

Jake briefly closed his eyes. He had to lie to her. This was going to be the hardest thing he'd ever done. "I'm sorry, darlin'. Brody's dead." Taylor's lips trembled, and a pained expression appeared in her eyes. Tears flowed freely down her cheeks, and she let out the most piercing shriek he'd ever heard. He felt guilty as hell, but there was no other way it could be done. He had to convince this crazy fucker that he was on his own.

"Don't cry over him, sweet thing. It's God's will. If he hadn't wanted us to be together, then he would have struck me down before I could kill him." He motioned for Jake to walk closer. "Hold that gun of yours nice and high, mister, and remember no false moves or the whore dies before I get to redeem her."

Jake stood right in front of him now, his gun held high above his head. He could just see Brody edging closer. Another fifty feet and he'd be right behind the crazy fuck. Jake knew that he had to keep the guy's attention focused on him, at all cost. He couldn't screw up. Far too much was at stake.

Taylor looked at him, almost pleading with her eyes. He knew she didn't want him to hand over the gun.

Brody was almost in place. He was hunkered low, ready to spring into action at any moment.

“Jake, please don’t give him the gun. He’s crazy. He’ll kill us both,” she sobbed. “I’m begging you, don’t give him the gun.”

“I have to, darlin’. It’s the only way.” Jake held his breath as he leaned down to place the gun at the stranger’s feet.

Justin smiled. “The Lord sure does move in mysterious ways. What did I tell you, sweet thing? He’s been guiding me, showing me the error of my ways. He helped me disarm him, and now he’s telling me to kill him. It’s God’s will.” The guy’s chilling words held very little emotion. They were said so matter-of-factly that Jake had difficulty understanding they were aimed at him.

His eyes connected with Brody’s. Time was running out for them all. His best friend, the only man he could rely on one hundred and ten percent, gave him the nod.

Jake knew it was now or never.

Chapter Sixteen

Taylor looked at Jake one last time. She'd never forget his smile and the way his blond hair fell disheveled about his face. The way he stood strong and defiant. He was so beautiful and so heroically brave. She wanted to wrap her arms around him and hold him tight. To tell him how much she loved and needed him. Instead, she had to watch some crazy bastard execute the man she loved right in front of her.

Knowing Brody was already dead made the life force drain from her. How could she continue without either of them?

"No, Justin," Taylor pleaded. "I'll willingly come with you. Just let him live, please." The sick feeling inside her stomach intensified as Jake set the gun down.

With the weapon now on the ground, Justin briefly loosened his hold around her neck. She prayed for a miracle. All of a sudden, Jake moved, twisting upward. She heard the air rush from Justin's lungs as Jake head butted him full in the stomach. Justin's arm was wrenched from around her neck, and she turned to see a miracle in the making. Brody went for the knife as Jake grabbed at Justin's shotgun. As if in slow motion, she watched the three men crash to the ground. Dust billowed up around them as they became a tangle of arms and legs. Justin wasn't giving up without a fight. Brody struggled, trying to break his grip on the knife. His hand was covered in blood as he fought to disarm him. Working purely on instinct, Taylor pulled the pin from her hair and raised it high in the air.

"Bastard!" she screamed, bringing it down to make contact with Justin's arm. It pierced through his clothing, and she felt it drive through flesh and bone. He cried out in pain and immediately let go of

the knife, and she watched in satisfaction as Brody kicked it out of his reach. With Justin's attention now on his arm, Jake managed to free the shotgun and disarm him entirely.

Taylor sagged to her knees as exhaustion threatened to overwhelm her. She looked at Brody as he began removing his own belt. "I thought you were dead," she whispered, barely able to believe that he was still alive. Unable to comprehend that this man with his knee in Justin's back was not an apparition, a figment of her imagination. "I thought you were dead," she said again. She felt nothing at all. She felt empty.

Jake roughly secured Justin's feet together with his own leather belt, and she watched as though in a trance until Brody finally tied his hands together, too. "Watch my arm. That ungrateful fucking bitch tried to kill me."

Brody grabbed Justin by the collar. He held his face mere inches from his. "Don't push me, you sick, sick, fucker because I'm this close," he held his finger and thumb a fraction apart, "to sending you into the next world." Clearly angry, he kneed him in the groin and dropped him to the ground.

Taylor stood on wobbly, adrenaline-charged legs. "I thought you were dead," she said for the third time, looking directly at Brody.

"She's in shock, Jake. Look after her while I see to this asshole. Make sure her neck's not bleeding too much."

Jake came up to her and tenderly put his arm around her shoulder. "I'm sorry, darlin', it was the only way we could work it. I didn't mean to upset you." He began leading her toward the ranch house.

"But you said," her lips quivered, "he was dead. I thought you were going to be killed, too." It was then that it hit her. Hit her hard. Her guts twisted as she finally gave in to the raw emotion. She wretched uncontrollably, vomiting the entire contents of her stomach. Jake caressed her back lovingly with his hands as she spewed up every last bit. When she was finally finished, he picked her up and carried her inside. He laid her on the couch and then disappeared for a

few moments. When he returned, he pressed a damp towel to her forehead and lips.

He squinted at her neck as he ran his fingers over it. "It's not too bad, but you need to see a doctor, darlin'." He stroked a hand into her hair. "He didn't do anything else, did he, Taylor?"

"No." She shook her head, aware that she'd escaped very lightly. "He never touched me sexually. I would have rather died than let him do that to me."

"Thank Christ for that." Jake let out a slow breath, and he wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight against his warm, strong body. "I've called the cops. They'll be here soon."

Brody walked through the door. "I've secured him to the porch. He's not such a big man now. How's Taylor doing?"

"She'll be all right. Kinda knocked her for a loop, thinking you were dead."

"Brody." She held out her hand as he hunkered down beside her. He stared into her eyes and then kissed her fingers one by one.

"This is why we have to cherish one another. Each day could easily be the last because we never know what the future may hold," he said quietly.

Taylor caressed his face with her fingertips. "But I thought you were dead. But you're not. You're here." He had a five o'clock shadow, and she could feel the stubble on his jaw. She ran her hands into his dark locks and felt the sticky matte of hair on the back of his scalp. Her eyes widened as she looked at her bloodied hands. "You've been hurt, Brody, real bad." She could feel panic rising in her throat.

"Look at me." Brody clasped her hands in his. "Deep breaths. That's it." She stared into his eyes, finding safety and security within them. Her breathing began to return to normal as he said, "I'm fine, Taylor. Just a few scratches, that's all."

Taylor felt incredibly guilty. Both men had been put through so much, and it was all because of her. "I was so scared. I didn't know Justin would act like this. I'm so sorry. When he came back from

Afghanistan, he'd changed. I knew he'd taken drugs, but I didn't think he'd turn into a psycho."

"Hush, it's not your fault, honey. He obviously needs help. Now, Taylor, in a moment there's going to be cops crawling all over the place. They're going to be asking all sorts of questions. We need to get our stories straight."

"I don't understand, Brody."

"What do you want to tell them about us? Whatever you want to say, it's fine with us, isn't it, Jake?"

In that instant, Taylor knew. "I'm going to tell them the truth. I'm not ashamed of anything we've shared together. I thought I'd lost you both. I'm not going to deny any of it."

Jake smiled and kissed her cheek. "That's our girl."

Brody beamed, just as the sound of sirens began wailing in the distance. "She sure is. I just wanted to know. There's going to be a media storm over this. The papers will seize on the three of us having a relationship together. They'll call it a love triangle, or some such shit. They'll try to paint us all as degenerates. But we know the truth. We'll just have to ride it out. Eventually, it'll all die down. Within a week or two, people will have forgotten and moved on."

* * * *

Two hours later

There was a blaze of flash photography as Brody was stretchered from the ambulance. He squinted, shielding his eyes from the fierce glare. The media had arrived at the hospital before they had. He knew they would show up, but he hadn't expected it to be quite so soon. He guessed one of the cops had tipped off the newspapers in return for a healthy payout. Brody realized it would be a story that would run and run. Both he and Jake had never been far from the press. Though usually it was for their business dealings and not their private lives.

There had been a kiss-and-tell story in the tabloids a few years ago when a former girlfriend had revealed all. No doubt she had received a five-figure payment for such lurid information. Now, their relationship with Taylor would only add fuel to the fire.

He watched Taylor being wheeled into the emergency entrance. She looked dazed by the whole event, and he knew she was being traumatized even more by the frenzied attention she was now receiving. He had hoped the story would break once they were home. That way they could control matters better.

Jake walked alongside Taylor and Brody as they were wheeled into the hospital. Brody's ribs hurt as he spoke. "You gotta look after her, Jake. Don't worry about me. Just make sure she's okay. This media attention is gonna break her."

Jake squeezed his shoulder. "Okay, buddy. I'm not gonna let her out of my sight. This is tough for anybody, let alone someone who's almost had their throat cut by a psycho."

* * * *

Jake paced the floor one more time outside the medical room. Just when would they give him some information about Taylor? He'd already learned they were keeping Brody in overnight for concussion and two busted ribs. A nurse came out of Taylor's room, and he cornered her and asked, "How is she?"

"We're running some tests at this very moment, Mr. McKenna. Please bear with us. Ms. Matthews needs complete rest. She's very traumatized by the whole incident."

"Can I see her?"

"As I just said, Mr. McKenna, she's very traumatized. Now is not the right time."

"Goddamn it, woman, I was there. I know exactly what happened to her." When the nurse narrowed her eyes on him, he breathed deeply, trying to rein in his emotions. "I just need to see her," he said

quietly. The thought of Taylor in the next room all alone just made his heart break. She needed reassurance. She needed him to be strong for her.

“Sir, this is exactly why we’re keeping her isolated. She has to keep calm. Raised voices won’t do her any good.”

“I know, and I’m sorry. This has been hard on all of us. Please forgive my outburst.”

Before the nurse could reply, a scream he recognized as Taylor’s erupted from the medical room, and a man with a camera immediately emerged.

“Hey!” the nurse shouted as the man began walking hurriedly away. “Who are you? You don’t have permission to be in there. Security! Someone get security.” The nurse then gave chase. “Stop that man.” A scuffle ensued as the intruder ran for the stairs.

The door had been left wide open. Jake took the opportunity and went straight in. Taylor lay on a bed, her head in her hands. She was sobbing uncontrollably. He went over to her and stroked his hand into her hair. She looked so small and vulnerable. Dried blood still coated her neck, and he could see several fresh stitches. Fuck, she’d had a lucky escape.

“I’m so sorry, Taylor.”

“Who was that man? He took a picture of me,” she said as she sobbed.

Jake’s hands fisted into tight balls, and his mouth compressed in anger. How low could the press get? “It’s something you’re gonna have to get used to, darlin’. I’m afraid these parasites are gonna be interested in us for a while now.”

Taylor shook her head. “I don’t think I can do this, Jake.” She clung to him, pressing her face against his stomach. “I love you so much, but I can’t possibly cope with this, too.” She shook her head as sobs began to wrack through her body. “I’m so sorry.”

Jake closed his eyes. He needed Taylor. He needed her as much as the air he breathed. She brought love and meaning to his life. Without her he was just an empty shell. “Darlin’, I’m sure in time—”

“No,” she cried, barely able to breathe with the emotion she was feeling. “I can’t do it.”

He gently raised her chin with his fingers. “Look at me, Taylor.” She lifted her tear-stained eyes to his, and his heart broke. This woman seemed bereft as though everything had been taken from her. Maybe she couldn’t cope now, but he had to give her hope that she would be strong enough in the future. He smiled and gently stroked his hands down her face, wiping away her tears with his thumbs. “We’ll wait for you, Taylor. However long it takes, we’ll be waiting for you. Brody and I love you so very much. When you’re ready, come to us.”

The nurse returned with a security guard. “Don’t let anyone in here. This woman needs complete rest.” She came up to him and calmly placed her hand on his shoulder. “We need to let her rest, Mr. McKenna. I promise the press won’t be able to get in here now.”

Jake stroked Taylor’s hand and then kissed her forehead. “We’ll be waiting for you, however long it takes. Please don’t forget us.”

“I’ll never forget you,” she quietly sobbed. “Never. Not for as long as I live.” It sounded to Jake as though she were saying goodbye. Her beautiful green eyes looked huge and charged with emotion.

It was the hardest thing Jake had ever done. He let the woman he loved go. Then strode from the room.

Chapter Seventeen

Four weeks later

Taylor tossed the newspaper aside. “They’ll never let this story drop.” It had been a whole month since Justin had tried to kill them all, and the papers were still talking about it.

Sofia stretched out on the couch and muted the sound on the TV with the remote. “What are they saying today?” she asked, turning toward her.

Taylor had to admit her friend had been incredibly supportive. When she’d first arrived home after the terrible incident, she’d been a complete nervous wreck. With Sofia’s coaxing and cajoling, she felt finally able to return to the land of the living. She’d needed the time to rebuild her shattered nerves. At the time, she didn’t feel able to cope with the media scrutiny. Her emotions were shot, and she felt empty and devoid of joy. The constant attention from the press was driving her nuts. Intense speculation centered on the relationship she’d had with the two famous billionaire oil men. Misinformation, rumor, and downright lies were rife. Taylor hated the press with a vengeance.

She raised her hands in the air with exasperation. “The headlines say, and I quote, ‘Taylor Matthews, the woman at the center of the McKenna Quinn love triangle, intends to sue her former bosses for damages.’ I mean, how dare they print that? Brody and Jake saved my life. Why on earth would I do that? They’re making me out to be a gold digger.”

Sofia placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Because there's a vacuum of information, Taylor. With the three of you apart from each other, the media has just filled in all the blank spaces. In the world of journalism, two and two make five. I really feel for you, sweetie. Some of these reporters are the lowest forms of life."

Taylor stared at her friend "Then what do you suggest I do?"

"I thought that would be obvious, Taylor. Do you love them?"

"Yes, of course I do. More than life itself."

"Then what are you waiting for, girl? You have two sexy, rich guys who adore you. I bet they're climbing the walls at this very minute, wondering when you're going to show up."

"Why haven't you said anything like this before?"

"Because you haven't been well. You've just had a traumatic experience. You needed time to heal yourself. I think you're ready to move on now."

"You've been in contact with them, haven't you?" she said accusingly.

When Sofia didn't answer, Taylor continued, "I knew it. Late at night when I've heard you on the telephone, it wasn't Steve you were talking to. It was Brody and Jake."

Her friend shrugged. "I just kept them informed as to your progress. They've been very concerned about your welfare."

It felt like a lightbulb had switched on in her head. Taylor jumped up and rushed to her bedroom. "I need to be with them. I'm wasting time waiting for the media to lose interest. They never will. Thanks to you, I feel able to cope with anything."

Her friend followed her. "I'll call them, tell them you're on your way."

Taylor grabbed Sofia by her shoulders. "No way. I want it to be a surprise."

Her friend wrapped her arms around her and held her close. "Okay." She laughed. "I'm so happy for you, Taylor. You deserve happiness more than anyone I know. You're a lovely woman, and

you've always been a wonderful friend to me." She squeezed her hands and smiled at her. "I'll book you a cab."

Taylor stared at her reflection in the mirror. The dark circles under her eyes were starting to diminish, and color was returning to her pasty complexion. She leaned closer. The scar on her neck had faded considerably in the last few weeks, and the tiny stitch marks were barely visible. They had all had a lucky escape.

Taylor knew that by going to the men she loved most in the world, she had nothing to lose and everything to gain. And she would go to them with her head held high.

During the cab ride to their penthouse apartment in uptown Dallas, she pondered the different scenarios. Would they still want her? Perhaps by staying away so long, Brody and Jake had already moved on to new pastures. They were the two most beautiful men in the world. There was absolutely no need for them to be short of female company.

When she arrived outside Sky Towers, the select and very elegant building they lived in, she could see several reporters loitering outside. With a deep breath, she stepped into full view.

Taylor dodged the young woman who stood in her way. "Ms. Matthews, have you anything to add about Jake McKenna and Brody Quinn?"

A mike was thrust in her face as another reporter invaded her space. "Taylor, talk to us, Taylor. Give us your side of the story."

She brushed past them without comment, seeing them as little more than vermin. She walked straight into the building with her head held high. She wasn't going to spend the rest of her life in hiding.

Whatever the future had in store, she had declared her love for them for the whole world to see.

* * * *

Brody flicked through the channels once more and then finally switched the TV off. Nothing seemed to remotely interest him anymore. He glanced at Jake sitting outside on the decking. He'd been there for over an hour. He guessed he was thinking about Taylor just like himself. They'd made a deal with each other that they would let her come to them, but it was getting to the point where he would take matters into his own hands soon. Obviously, they didn't want to push her in any way, so they had backed off completely. Far too much, by his reckoning. What was the point in loving someone when you couldn't be with them? He knew they had to give her time to come to terms with everything that had happened. But how much time could they give?

When the intercom buzzed, Brody distractedly went to answer it. His heart leapt as soon as he saw the screen. He called to Jake, "You better come here." Jake didn't respond. "Like right, now, buddy." He raised his voice, and Jake strode moodily over to him.

"What is it?" he murmured irritably.

"Take a look at the visitor we've got waiting for us downstairs."

When Jake stared at the intercom screen, he whistled long and low. "Now there's a sight for sore eyes." He grinned. "What are you waiting for? Get her up here double quick. We've gotta lot of catching up to do."

Brody smiled and slapped his best friend on the back. "That's more like it. Some feminine company is exactly what we need around here. I haven't mentioned it before, but you've been getting right on my nerves." He flicked the switch on the intercom. "Baby, there are two horny guys up here desperate to show you how much they missed you. Are you sure you want to come up? That pretty little red dress you're wearing could be ripped right off your trembling body."

Taylor's face broke into a beaming smile. "You bet. I'm wearing the underwear you guys bought me in Little Rock, too. How else are you going to see it?"

"Come right up, honey. We're on the twenty-first floor."

Brody felt his cock turn to hardened steel at the very thought of her in the red corset, and he eagerly directed Taylor to their private elevator. Both Jake and himself were waiting impatiently when the elevator doors parted.

Taylor squealed, "I've missed you both so much." She then launched herself into their arms.

Jake twirled her around, holding her tight against his body. Her legs wrapped around him and her hands fisted into his hair as they both ground their hips together. "Oh, Jake," she whispered. "I've missed you. God, how I've missed you. I'm really sorry I kept you waiting for so long." Her eyes were bright, and he marveled at how much better she seemed. The last time they'd been together was at the hospital.

"Both of us missed you, too, Taylor," Jake replied. He kissed her passionately on the lips. "You really have no idea how much we missed you, lady." He was clearly enjoying the sensation of being between Taylor's legs, but he lifted her into Brody's arms.

She feverishly kissed his face and lips. "You, too, Brody. Kiss me, please." She slid into his arms, wrapping herself around him. He smiled into her eyes. They reminded him of the cool forests of Montana when he'd finally been able to let go of the past and fall in love again. He owed her everything. He loved this woman.

He touched his mouth to hers, reveling in the softness of her lips against his. He speared his tongue into her warmth as he pressed her firmly against the wall. A moan escaped her lips as he rocked his hips so his cock pressed deliciously against her pussy. He pinned her in place, watching her pupils dilate with desire. He eased her up and down, allowing her to feel the hard swelling of his penis through her clothing, showing her how much he needed her.

"There's nothing we'd rather do than take you to bed, but we've got a lot of catching up to do." Brody set her on the floor and took hold of her hand. "Come into the living area. I'll fix you a drink. What would you like? Coffee? Bourbon?"

* * * *

Completely happy to be in their company, Taylor followed them. “Coffee, please.” She stopped talking and stared in amazement at the beautiful penthouse apartment. “Wow, this place is simply stunning.” The room opened out into a large open-plan space containing designer pieces of furniture made from chrome and glass. The floors were solid hardwood and gave a feeling of depth and luxury. Beautiful paintings and works of art adorned the opulent interior. A whole wall of floor-to-ceiling glass had been opened and pulled back, allowing access to a rooftop garden. Lush green plants shielded the outside space from prying eyes. At its center, a huge oval pool glistened like topaz, reflecting the sun’s rays all around in pretty, undulating patterns.

“Come onto the terrace. It’s cooler out here,” Jake said as he walked out onto the wooden decking.

A warm breeze blew through her hair as she sat down.

“So how are you?” Jake asked.

“Okay, I guess.”

He reached across and held her hand. “This is me you’re talking to, darlin’. You don’t need to hide anything.”

Taylor smiled. “I suppose Sofia filled you in on everything.”

“We only know what she’s told us. Why don’t you tell us how you’ve really been?”

Taylor shrugged as Brody brought a tray of drinks to a nearby table and sat down. He placed a coffee in front of her. “We need to hear it from your own lips, baby.”

Taylor breathed in deeply. She had no difficulty remembering the incident. It had been so horrific it was burned indelibly into her memory. She spooned sugar into her coffee and stirred. “Very well. I’ve been seeing a psychiatrist for the past month. Dr. Kendrick encouraged me to relive the events of that dreadful day. I regressed to when I first met Justin. You see, I felt incredibly guilty for the way

Justin acted. You might have both been killed, and it would have been all my fault.” She grimaced slightly as she turned to them both. They looked concerned, and she wanted to explain further. “Guilt has featured a lot in my life recently.”

“Darlin’, you’ve got nothing to feel guilty about. You didn’t do anything wrong.” Jake stroked the side of her face.

“I realize that now. I know I couldn’t do anything about Justin, but—” She shrugged. “I’m sorry I couldn’t cope with the media attention. I feel guilty for not being strong enough, too.”

“But you’re strong now, Taylor.” Brody squeezed her hand.

She smiled. “Yes, I feel I’m getting back to my old self.”

Jake laughed. “That’s our girl.”

She took their hands in hers. “Do you really mean that? I’m your girl? I just wish I’d been stronger, that’s all. I feel like I let you both down.”

“Honey, you’ll always be our girl. No matter what happens. Now the whole world knows it, too,” Brody announced with a smile on his face.

“Yeah, she’s forgetting how heroic she was with that hairpin of hers,” Jake added. “If she hadn’t stabbed that head case with it, we’d probably not be alive to tell the tale. Believe me, both Brody and I are real proud of you.”

Taylor giggled. “I sure made him drop the knife, didn’t I?” She squeezed their hands. Just being with these two men made her feel complete. “I’m really proud of you both, too. You saved my life in more ways than you can imagine. I owe you everything.”

Jake reflected. “Justin may well be institutionalized for a long time for what he did. In some ways, I feel sorry for him. The man is clearly emotionally unstable, but his crazy behavior made us appreciate each other all the more.”

“You guys are the best. You showed true courage that day, and I can’t thank you enough for all you did. Rest assured, I’ll always be your girl.”

Brody cupped her face in his hands and kissed her lips. His silver gaze was mesmerizing as he spoke. "We both want you to come and live here permanently with us. We want you to become our wife."

Taylor laughed nervously. This was more than she could ever have hoped for. "I think you'll find they arrest you in the state of Texas when you do something like that."

Brody smiled benignly. "We've no intention of adding bigamy to our list of misdemeanors. You'll marry me, Taylor, but in mine and Jake's eyes, you'll be married to us both." He held his hand to his heart. "I love you, Taylor. Marry me, please."

She stared at Jake and Brody, aware that big teardrops were starting to trickle down her cheeks. "I love you both so very much," she choked out, feeling her lips tremble with emotion.

Jake turned her to face him. "You're supposed to say, 'I do.'" He sunk to his knees. "Marry me, Taylor. Do me the honor of becoming my wife."

Taylor flung herself into his arms. "Yes, yes, yes." She kissed his lips as he wrapped his arms protectively around her. He felt warm and strong as she nestled against his chest. When Brody brushed a hand into her hair, she pulled him closer, too. "I want both of you to love me like you've always wanted to love me." Taylor held Brody's beautiful face between her hands and smiled into his eyes, and then she looked at Jake. "I love you both. I know it will be wonderful."

"It will," Jake added.

"Enough talking for now." Brody groaned. "Now, let's get our girl to the bedroom, Jake. We need to see this sexy underwear she's been teasing us with."

Chapter Eighteen

Once in the bedroom, Taylor's heart beat so fast her breasts heaved with excitement. When she looked at the two men in her life, her soul soared with joy. They had been through so much together, and yet they had lived to tell the tale. Jake removed his sweatshirt and tossed it aside. The light from the window cast shadows across his chest, highlighting the deep ridges of his muscles that flexed as he moved.

He then pulled her into his arms and began slowly removing the dress from her shoulders, peeling it down to reveal the red corset that lay beneath. She stared, mesmerized, into his bright blue eyes as the dress finally slipped to the floor.

"This is definitely worth waiting for," Jake murmured, leaning down to capture her mouth with his.

Brody removed his shirt and then came up behind her and circled her with his arms. The feel of their naked torsos enveloping her with their heat made her purr her appreciation. "Oh, I've missed this, you, so very much."

Brody kissed her neck with tiny brushes of his lips, making her weak with sexual desire. "Let me look at you." He breathed against her neck.

With her heart rate beating into overdrive, she watched him devour her with his gaze. The corset accentuated her slender waist and pushed her breasts upward, producing the most womanly cleavage she'd ever had. It made her feel so fucking sexy, especially the way Jake and Brody looked at her now.

“Perfect, she’s just perfect. Lie on the bed, honey, face down,” Brody ordered.

When she lay on the bed, Brody threaded his fingers into her panties and pulled them down, gently kissing her buttocks in the process. The mattress moved as she felt his weight lean over her. He trailed tiny kisses down her back, sending nerve endings tingling in every direction. His hand trailed between her legs, and he rubbed his fingers into her cunt. He whispered against her ear, “You’ve got the cutest and most fuckable little ass I’ve ever seen. I’m gonna enjoy breaking you in.” Her stomach clenched in anticipation, sending a delicious spasm down to her vagina. Brody chuckled as her body clenched around his fingers. “Mmm, the idea turns me on, too, baby.”

When Brody playfully bit her ass cheeks, she laughed. “Hey, that hurts.”

“Then I’ll kiss it better. That reminds me. We need some lube.” He tenderly slapped her butt and then stood and went into the bathroom.

Her curiosity piqued, and she swallowed hard. One of them was going to fuck her ass. Would it be a pleasant experience?

Concern must have shown on her face because Jake grinned and kissed her lips. “Don’t you worry, darlin’. I’ve got the perfect distraction for what Brody’s about to do to you.”

Taylor wondered what it could be. She watched Jake shed the remainder of his clothes. He was so beautiful. His huge cock stood to attention. She just hoped she could relax enough to accommodate them both at the same time. Jake and Brody were well endowed. She wanted the first time they all made love together to be just perfect.

When Brody returned, he placed the lube on the bed, and then he, too, removed the rest of his clothes. He was a powerful man. His muscles bunched and flexed as he took several condoms from the drawer and handed them to her. The idea of being sandwiched between them both turned her on even more.

Jake rolled a condom down his potent shaft. When he lay on the bed, he pulled her on top of him. His heat surrounded her, making her feel safe and very protected. She stared into his blue gaze as his fingers sought her pussy. A whimper escaped her lips as he touched her aching clitoris, and she automatically ground her hips down onto his hand. "That feels so good, Jake. It's been so long."

"I've got exactly what you need, Taylor." He reached across to the bedside drawer and pulled out a sex toy. She couldn't help but smile when she realized it was the very same vibrator she'd taken with her to the ranch in Montana. The one secretly placed in her luggage by her friend, Sofia. "You kept it, you naughty boys," she said, a smile on her face. "I don't need it." She laughed.

"I assure you it'll take your mind off things, little darlin'. Don't be shy. Kneel on all fours over the top of me." He had a devilish grin, that Jake grin, the one she'd come to love so much. Taylor could barely breathe as she stared into his eyes. He placed the massive sex toy against her pussy and switched it on. The vibrations against her clitoris made her moan out loud.

"Dear God."

Immediately, Brody spread the lube into her anus, working it around the entrance. When he speared a finger into her butt, she froze in place, apprehensive that it may be painful. "Relax," Brody coaxed from behind her. "It won't hurt if you relax."

"She'll be fine in a minute." Jake pushed the vibrator deep inside her pussy and then pulled it back to rub over her clitoris. He did it several times as he stared into her eyes.

"Oh, that feels so good, but I need the real thing."

"No, it's no use, Brody. I guess she's just a real cock woman. No artificial stimulation for our girl." He removed the vibrating sex toy from her cunt and discarded it.

Brody chuckled. "Guess you'll have to do it the old-fashioned way, buddy."

Jake held his cock in his hand and guided it to her aching pussy. “I know this is what you want. Take what you need, Taylor.”

“Oh, Jake,” she whispered as she lowered herself over his huge prick. Her pussy was soaking wet. This was exactly what she needed. Her man inside her, filling her cunt completely. She ran her hands over his chest, feeling the hard contours and slight smattering of masculine hair. Jake held her by the waist, his fingers gripping into the red corset as he pulled her relentlessly down onto his hard cock. Each stroke as she rode his prick slammed against her clitoris. The pressure built, and she didn’t object when Brody began working two or three fingers into her ass. She actually enjoyed the sensation of him fingering her puckered hole from behind. This was what she needed. Her two men, loving her together.

Jake lifted his hips to meet her downward thrusts. Her pussy slid over and around him, clamping his shaft until her orgasm crashed through, and she lay breathless against his chest. He stroked his fingers through her hair. “You’re a beautiful woman, Taylor, in every sense of the word.”

* * * *

Jake stared, transfixed at the woman he loved. Taylor looked stunning in her corset. She was a real woman with the perfect hourglass figure. The way her breasts spilled over the top of her lacy lingerie as he slid in and out of her wet cunt turned him on enormously. Taylor’s eyes looked soft and loving as she smiled at him. Brody gave the sign that he was ready. He took a condom from Taylor’s grasp and rolled it down his engorged prick.

Brody gave instruction then. “Taylor, when I start to push, breathe in and hold steady. You’ll find once I’m inside you, it won’t hurt.”

“Meaning it will to begin with.”

Brody pecked her cheek. “It may just sting slightly.”

Taylor nodded. He could see she was worried. Jake kissed her lips. This was the ultimate sexual experience. Just knowing they were both inside her at the same time would be a big turn-on. With Taylor sandwiched between them, they could watch the ecstasy reflected in each other's faces.

Brody clasped her hips authoritatively, his fingers splaying over the red silk material of her tight corset. It was so sexy and pushed her breasts into impossible mounds for the most delectable cleavage ever. He raised his head from the pillow and buried his face in the soft, creamy flesh, reveling in her feminine scent. He sensed her stiffen, and he cupped her face, kissing her lips. He held her gaze, knowing Brody was about to fuck her ass. He could see the intense concentration on his face. Taylor gasped.

"Deep breath, honey."

She breathed in just as Brody seated himself to the hilt. With Brody inside her ass, Jake could feel every movement he made.

"I knew she'd be tight, but this is unbelievable." Brody began thrusting, choosing a rhythm that Jake could replicate.

"How do you feel, darlin'?" Jake asked as she stared into his eyes.

"Wonderfully full."

He smiled.

Brody clasped her breasts through the red silk material. "This sure is sexy, Taylor, but it's getting in the way. I know from experience that Jake likes big, hard nipples in his face." He reached around and began undoing the hooks that held the corset together. Her full breasts spilled from the sexy lace, and Jake eagerly cupped them in his hands, pushing them together before burying his head between them once more.

Taylor arched back as Brody rode her from behind. His best friend squeezed her nipples, making her moan with intense satisfaction. Her face was a picture of sublime contentment as she ground her pussy along the length of his cock. Over and over she slid down his shaft, building momentum with each stroke.

From Jake's position underneath her, he could see his prick spearing her pussy. He loved the way her feminine juices coated his shaft as he relentlessly drove in until his balls stopped him going deeper. She closed her eyes and licked her lips. Sweet whimpers tore from her mouth as she gave into the feeling. She was the most beautiful woman he'd ever known, and she gave him something that most women couldn't. She gave him hope and understanding and a sense of love that he'd never been able to find before.

"Darlin', you were made to be fucked by us."

He watched Brody nip at her neck with his teeth. Seeing another man enjoy his woman while he was inside her made his cock harder still. The pressure built, and his balls tightened. Her pussy clamped around his prick, and he knew she was close. He widened her legs further apart with his own. The action made her clitoris grind hard against him, and she bucked and shuddered under Brody's masculine torso as she came. Moans of sexual pleasure rippled from her. The muscles of her cunny tightened around Jake's shaft as an unstoppable force surged from his balls, and he filled her with his cum.

Brody's face fractured with his own release as he, too, spurted deep inside her virgin ass. They lay breathless and contented in each other's arms.

Epilogue

Two years later

Taylor steered the car down the now familiar track, a smile on her face. She loved this part of the day, bringing lunch to the men she adored. Jake and Brody were on-site, supervising a drilling operation in New Mexico, and she had insisted on going with them.

She parked the SUV and grabbed the bag from the passenger seat. As she stepped from the car, she could see her two men standing by the rig. She waved to them, and they immediately waved back. Jake, with his blond hair highlighted by the summer sun, made her heart leap with joy. And Brody, her sensitive, dark-haired Brody, brought such happiness to each and every day. She knew her face beamed with satisfaction and contentment as she walked across to them.

“How’s our girl?” Brody asked, shielding his eyes from the intense glare of the sun.

“I’m fine,” she answered, smiling.

Jake grinned at her. “What he should have said is, ‘how are both our girls?’”

Taylor touched a hand to her stomach. “We’re doing fine.” It had been a wonderful moment when she’d found out she was pregnant with a daughter. She hadn’t a clue if the father was Jake or Brody. To her, it didn’t matter in the least. She loved them both equally with all her heart, and their new baby daughter would always have the benefit of two dads.

Taylor breathed in, savoring the warm air. She had the love and respect of the most beautiful men in the whole state of Texas, the world even.

Everything was just perfect.

“Darlin’, that’s too heavy for you.” Taylor giggled as Jake took the packed lunch from her.

“It’s just a few sandwiches and some fresh fruit.”

Brody put his arm around her shoulder. “It doesn’t matter. You’re very precious to us both, Taylor. We love you very, very much.”

She smiled into his eyes. “Aw, I love you, too.”

Jake pulled out a chair for her. “And we love you more than life itself.”

A warm feeling ran through. With everything that had happened, she knew it to be true.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kayla Knight enjoys writing erotic romantic fiction and hopes to bring believable characters, with emotional depth, to the pages of her books. And of course some very hot love scenes, too.

Married to her own Mr. Right for many years, Kayla believes that there's the perfect soul mate for everyone. That special someone who will see you through the bad times as well as the good.

Her love of animals, especially horses, can be seen in many of her books. With their own unique names, they add that extra layer to enhance a story.

The name Kayla means "keeper of the keys." Kayla hopes she can unlock your deepest fantasies and transport you to a warm, romantic place with her writing.



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