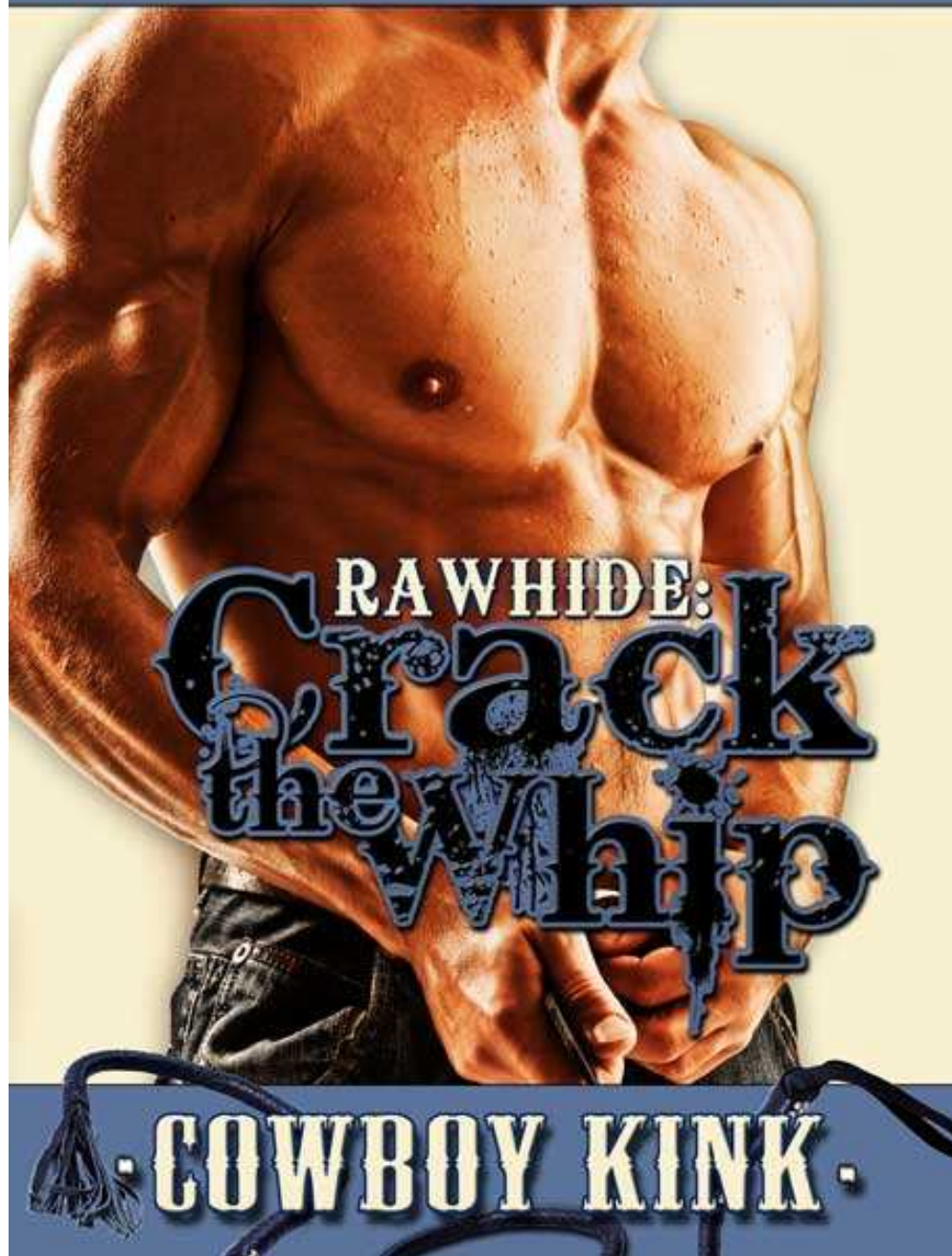


DESIREE HOLT



· COWBOY KINK ·

Rawhide: Crack The Whip

by

Desiree Holt

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Rawhide: Crack The Whip

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Contact Information: info@thewildrosepress.com

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Dedication

As always, for David,
who will forever be my love
whether here or in heaven.
You always rocked my world.

PRAISE FOR AUTHOR

Desiree Holt

AND HER BOOKS

“Desiree Holt is the most amazing erotic romance author of our time and each story is more fulfilling than the last. If you're new to erotica, please check out this wickedly talented author.”

~Romance Junkies

BACK IN THE SADDLE

“...quick as lightning setting the tone for a wild ride...the way Desiree Holt wrote Chance's character and the strong desire to have Molly accept him really made this story one of a kind.”

~Sensual Reads

“...a deeply sensual and emotionally satisfying short story. Molly and Chance are multi-faceted, well-developed characters...the perfect book for readers who prefer their cowboys with a little extra kink.”

~Whipped Cream

EIGHT SECOND RIDE

“These two characters each have a need and they were able to find someone who not only shared their desires but someone who they truly liked. Another good story from this author.”

~Seriously Reviewed

“Kick up your feet and make time to read Eight Second Ride, a grab you buy the seat of your pants roller coaster ride until the very end. I enjoyed reading how Kyle tries to breach Jessie's armor by romancing her, it added another element to an already exciting story.”

~Sensual Reads

Chapter One

The day had been a scorcher, hot enough to blister skin. Unrelenting sun without a cloud to filter it. Reece Halliday left his dusty boots in the laundry room, stripped off his clothes in his bedroom, and then turned on the shower full blast. Running a ranch the size of the Golden Spur took a lot of hard work and sweat, from him as well as his brothers. Today they'd been cutting calves from their mothers. It was tiring, dusty work, parching the skin and the mouth. They'd managed to get all of the calves into the south pasture. Tomorrow would come the bitch work—branding.

But tonight he was going to relax and give himself a treat. Tuesday nights for some reason were wild and busy at Rawhide. He had already scheduled a session with one of his favorite playmates. With what he had in mind for her, he could more than work out some of the kinks from sitting in the saddle all day.

Kinks. He loved a different meaning of that word. He laughed, wondering what the very conservative ranching community would say if they knew he, the eldest Halliday brother, was the silent owner of a fetish club. And that he indulged in many of the fetish practices himself.

During his senior year in college his roommate's brother, who lived the lifestyle, had taken the two of them to a very private club and introduced them to the world of bondage and fetishism. Reece had been shocked at the lust roaring through him at the various acts he witnessed. Their host had gotten him

a guest card as a pre-graduation present, and it had been the most sexually exciting period of his life.

But once he was back at home, running the ranch with his brothers, without access to the sexual games he liked to play, he found himself irritated and frustrated. And taking a lot of “business” trips to cities where there were clubs open to the public. But those trips only partially satisfied him. And his brothers began to question all those travels.

He wondered what they’d say if they knew he used his portion of the inheritance from their parents to invest in a club where he could satisfy his sexual appetites. He had done some very careful due diligence to find the right location, the right partner, and the right manager. Rawhide was about to celebrate its second anniversary, and the result, both financial and personal, had exceeded his expectations.

Tonight one of his favorite subs would be there. As he stood in the shower, thinking ahead, his cock hardened and flexed as he anticipated the scenes they would play out in his private room. The ranch was flourishing, the club was thriving, and if he could ask for anything else in his life it would be to find a permanent relationship with a woman whose sexual desires and needs matched his own. A perfect sub with her own identity who could fit into the conservative ranching community here in the Texas Hill Country.

Yeah. Like that would really happen.

So he was...what? Doomed to satisfy his sexual needs in limited doses and marry a woman who thought being on top was the most kink she’d known? Reece sighed. No fucking way. He’d never be able to control himself that much in the bedroom.

Both of his brothers were married and living in their own houses on the ranch, but Reece still lived a bachelor’s life and fended off all their “helpful”

comments about settling down. Well-intentioned, but they irritated the hell out of him.

By the time he reached Rawhide he'd managed to tamp down his exasperation and looked forward to the night ahead. India, a sub he often played with, knew to come to his private room at exactly eight forty-five. She would strip and wait for him in the pose he preferred—on her knees, hands behind her back, waiting for her collar and handcuffs. Usually he began the session with strokes from his favorite single tail whip. The pattern it laid on bare buttocks was incredibly arousing.

But tonight he looked forward to trying out a new flogger he'd ordered, one with a thick braided handle and strips of the softest leather. Seeing what kind of welts it would leave on her golden skin. Maybe even slide the handle into her pussy and watch her wet, swollen folds close around it.

And then, just to ice the cake, he'd slide a new vibrating dildo into her, turn it on full, and watch her climax while she sucked his cock. Maybe he'd use the candles tonight, too. Wax always ramped up the arousal factor for both of them. Reece shifted uncomfortably in his seat, taking a hand off the wheel to adjust slacks suddenly too tight in the crotch.

But first he had business to take care of. Their manager was leaving due to a family emergency, and Clint Chavez, his partner, had searched for a replacement. After whittling down the possibilities to one, tonight Reece would put his stamp of approval on the applicant. Or not.

He knew nothing about the person except she was a female, not so strange for a fetish club. He knew women often made the best managers.

"She's waiting in my office," Clint told him when Reece came in through the back door. "She apparently got a job working in a club not too long

after she graduated college and has worked her way up through the system.”

Reece cocked an eyebrow. “Yeah? Wonder what she majored in to start working the fetish circuit.”

Clint laughed. “She’s got a college degree in business management, and I literally stole her from a top private club in Atlanta. You can ask her yourself why she’s doing this instead of working in the corporate world.”

“What would make her leave? Didn’t they pay her well?”

“More than well.” He shook his head. “She was very honest with me. Although she’s a very strong manager, by nature she is a sexual submissive. She’s just coming out of a long relationship that ended badly and needed a change.”

Reece grunted. “I hope she doesn’t intend to poach on the clients. Not good for our reputation.”

“Don’t worry. She knows the score. She comes highly, and grudgingly, recommended.”

“All right. Let me talk to her, but if you’re sold on her, I’m sure she’s fine. India knows she’s supposed to be waiting for me?”

Clint grinned. “Yeah. What a good little subbie she is, waiting on her knees for you for thirty minutes.”

Reece chuckled. “At least I told her she could use a kneeling pad.”

“Yeah. You’re a damn prince. Okay, let’s go talk to the other lady who’s waiting for you.”

Clint opened the door to his office and gestured to the woman sitting in a chair in front of his desk. Reece was halfway inside before her identity registered with his brain. When it did, he felt as if he’d just taken a hard punch to the gut.

Thick masses of auburn curls tumbling past her shoulders framed a heart-shaped face. Hazel eyes that seemed to change color even as he looked at her

stared back from beneath thick lashes. A very sedate, tailored navy sheath was little camouflage for lush curves. Slim legs were crossed at the knees. Feet encased in navy pumps.

His gaze was drawn again to her face and the full, sensuous lips painted with a soft peach lip gloss. He knew those lips, knew them nearly as well as his own. He'd tasted them often enough in years gone by. As well as the rest of her body. Only then it had belonged to a girl. Now, she was a woman and he couldn't seem to stop staring at her.

And the sudden explosion of emotion shook him to his core.

The first time he had seen Katie Warren she was the new girl at their high school, three years younger than he was. That hadn't stopped him from going after her like a rutting bull. And falling so in love with her he couldn't think of anything else.

The last time he saw her she was a senior in college and spitting fire, storming out of the motel room they'd rented. Shocked by the things he wanted her to do and enraged because he was angry with her for turning him down. All their plans up in flames.

Every time he thought about that that long ago night, which was far more frequently than he liked, he realized he could have handled things a lot differently. He'd let his ego and his dick knock his brain aside and regretted it ever since. Ten years without Katie had left a big hole in his heart and a burning lust that nothing at Rawhide could sate.

Obviously, her outlook had undergone a radical change since that disastrous night. The only thing unchanged was his cock getting hard as a rock the minute he laid eyes on her. His feet seemed glued to the floor. He thought someone was talking, but he couldn't be sure because there was a strange buzzing in his ears.

“Reece?” A hand on his shoulder. “Can you hear me, buddy?”

Clint’s voice. Okay.

“I think Mr. Halliday might be a trifle surprised to find me here.” Katie’s voice was low and musical and sounded faintly amused.

“You know each other?” Now Clint was the one who was shocked.

Reece shook himself and walked around the desk to sit in Clint’s chair, as much to hide the bulge in his crotch as to take control of the situation. This was a business meeting. Nothing more. Fine. Except for the tidal wave of lust washing through him. He’d been so sure he was well over Katie Warren. Done and finished. And here she was, in the most impossible of situations for him.

What the hell was he supposed to do so he didn’t look like an ass?

“Nice to see you again, Katie.” He made his voice as steady and uninflected as possible, even as he couldn’t stop remembering the perfection of her body naked in his bed and the warm, welcoming heat of her cunt. An image of her tied to his bed, gagged, nipples distended and clamped, nearly undid him, and he had to fist his hands to pull himself together. Now he knew how junkies felt when they couldn’t feed their cravings.

“Same here.”

“Although I have to say, seeing you here is a big surprise. Especially considering how you used to feel about this lifestyle.”

“Wait a minute.” Clint stood in front of the desk, glaring at him. “You *know* her?” He shifted his gaze to Katie. “How is it when I gave you the name of my partner you never mentioned your history with him?”

She shrugged delicately. “I was afraid Reece would reject me out of hand, and I really wanted this

job. It was the perfect opportunity to leave Atlanta.” She looked at Reece. “Is this a problem for you?”

She looked so poised, so self-assured, but something lurked in her eyes, something she tried to suppress. What was that all about?

He shook his head. “Not for me, but I seem to recall this scene being very distasteful to you. Call me curious, but how did you happen to get involved with it?”

Her smile, slow and hot, was sinful and knowing, whatever shadows she’d been chasing effectively hidden. “We all grow up, you know. And our tastes change.”

He lifted an eyebrow. “That’s a pretty drastic change. Is there someone who should get the credit?”

As soon as the words left his mouth he wanted to bite his tongue. Her personal life was none of his business. Damn it. But lust and anger were a boiling cauldron inside him.

Her smile disappeared. “How I got to this point isn’t important, nor is it any of your damn business. I’m damn good at what I do and I never bring my personal business to the club. I can provide all the references you want on that score and any others. But if this is going to be a problem for you...” She started to rise.

“No.” Reece hadn’t realized he shouted until the thunder of his voice boomed in the room and both Clint and Katie were staring at him. He cleared his throat. Jesus, he was making a mess of this. “Sorry. No, this won’t be a problem. And I guess we don’t need to bother with all the usual questions.”

There went that tempting smile again, as if she had a secret and she just might share it with him under the right circumstances.

“I’m happy to tell you anything you’d like to know.”

How did you get into this scene? How deep into

the lifestyle are you? Do you enjoy being a sub? Would you let me strip you naked and spank your sweet ass?

Again he had to shift in the chair, his bulging shaft doing its best to poke through the fabric of his slacks. "We're good. You're starting tonight, right?"

"Yes. Clint told me your current manager would like to leave by the end of the week. That only gives us three days together, but I'm a quick study."

How quick? How long would it take for you to call me Sir?

Jesus fucking Christ, Reece. Get your head together.

"Then I'd better let you get to it."

"I'm sure I'll enjoy working here." She stood and reached across the desk.

Reece took her small hand in his larger one, and the electricity sizzling up his arm and into his body nearly fried both his brain and his balls. The slight widening of her eyes told him she felt the same thing, but she took back her hand and moved toward the door.

"We'll catch up at the end of the evening for a debriefing," he told her.

"Sounds good." The professional face was in place now. "And thank you. Clint, I'll just go out to the front and get started." A brief, professional smile and she was gone.

Clint closed the door after her and turned to look at Reece.

"This better not be a goddamn problem, cowboy." His voice held a slight trace of irritation. "She's damn good. I don't want you screwing this up."

Reece held up his hands. "On my word, Clint. No playing in the company dungeon."

"Better not be."

But somehow he didn't look too convinced.

Chapter Two

Reece stood outside the door to his private room, struggling to pull himself together and control the raging hunger consuming him. Closing his eyes he tried to summon the image of India on her knees, waiting for him, but the only vision that came to him was of Katie in the same position.

Seeing her again stirred up desires and emotions he'd been sure he'd buried long and deep. One look at her and they'd exploded like dynamite, driving home with uneasy clarity the reason he never took a relationship outside the club. And why he never brought his vanilla dates to Rawhide. Katie Warren's ghost always hovered near, stealing his emotions.

Shit.

He pulled in a deep breath and let it out very slowly. He owed it to the delightful sub waiting for him not to take his frustration out on her. Not only wouldn't it be fair, but it also would take him dangerously close to breaking the club rules. Rules, as a matter of fact, he'd put in place himself. Still, tonight she'd be getting a workout he hoped would leave them both exhausted.

He stared at the door, not opening it. For a moment he almost felt as if he was about to cheat on Katie. Of course, that was ridiculous. Not even possible. They'd just reconnected after all these years and she was working for him. They no longer had a personal relationship.

Still, he felt like ten kinds of a shit. If he used common sense he'd walk in, tell his sub he

appreciated her commitment to the evening but something had come up—other than his cock—and tell her he'd be very happy to list her as a top sub at Rawhide.

Get over yourself, Halliday. She's probably in a relationship and has no place for you in her life.

Sliding the key card through the slot, he opened the door and stepped inside. Soft lighting glowed from the corners, but a spotlight shone directly over the spot where India knelt. Only she wasn't exactly kneeling in the proper position. Instead, she had half-risen to stretch her arms and upper body.

His first thought was, *Good! I can punish her!*

His second was, *But be sure you don't let things get out of hand.*

Another deep breath.

"You left the position I ordered you to maintain." Somehow he managed to pull out his Dom voice.

"I'm sorry, Sir." She bowed her head and clasped her hands behind her back again. "I apologize for that." Her thick curtain of dark hair fell forward, shielding her face.

Reece crouched beside her, trailing his fingers lightly down her arm from shoulder to elbow, enjoying the texture of her skin. Brushing her hair away from her face, he tucked it behind her ear.

"You know I'll have to punish you," he told her.

"Yes, Sir. I disobeyed an order. Please punish me."

"I think tonight we should use the cane. That way you'll remember for a long time what it means to disobey an order. Right?"

"Yes, Sir."

Her voice was soft. In other circumstances, he'd found it soothing, but tonight he wondered if anything could smooth the hard edge he was riding.

Katie, Katie, Katie.

Damn it. Again he reminded himself to be

careful he didn't let his frustration with an unexpected situation fray the threads of his control. And that Katie was out of his reach.

"Lean forward," he ordered. "You know how."

Reece had arranged for special modifications to his room and those included manacles in the floor so he could restrain his sub in various ways. One of those was to have them on their knees but prostrate, as if paying homage to him. He snorted. What a twisted bastard he was.

Still on her knees, India reached forward until her arms were stretched out and her forehead rested on the floor. Reece fastened the manacles around her wrists, locking her arms to the floor. Her ass poked up in the air in a very tempting position, and his cock, still aroused, swelled even more. On impulse, he leaned down and swiped his tongue across each of those mouth-watering globes. Her skin was like brushed satin, and it made his tongue tingle.

It reminded him of Katie's skin. Of the taste and texture and—

Fuck! He had to stop doing this. Why the fuck did she have to come back into his life now? Right now?

He wondered how much she'd immersed herself in the scene. Did she play when she wasn't working? What did she like? Wax play? Being tied up and whipped? Tormented with vibrators? Fucked in the ass?

Shit. Shit. Shit.

He was so damn hard he was afraid his dick would break off. He had to stop tormenting himself this way.

Stripping off his shirt, he placed it on a small table against one wall, toed off his boots, and stuffed his socks inside them. He preferred to wear as little as possible when delivering punishment. He liked to feel the swish of air against his skin as he wielded

the whip or flogger. Liked the feel of sweat beading on his skin as lust bloomed in his body and heated the blood in his veins.

Surveying the various toys and instruments in their racks against the wall, he bypassed the whip he favored. Distracted by thoughts of Katie and forgetting what he'd originally decide to use he chose the new flogger. One he knew would excite him. He'd enjoy running his tongue over every welt he laid on her beautiful ass. Ever since he opened the package, he'd been looking forward to this.

"Are you ready?" he asked, caressing the leather with his hand?

"Yes, Sir." Her voice was slightly muffled.

Reece bent down and ran his hand over the smooth skin of her ass, idly drawing his fingers through the cleft and pressing the tip of one finger against her tight little anus.

"Twenty strokes tonight, India. I want you aroused enough for what I have planned after this."

Just enough to take her to the sweet edge of pain, to stimulate her endorphins so she was high on the drugs her body produced. He needed to erase the effect of seeing Katie again after all these years. And under these circumstances.

"Thank you, Sir."

Her soft acquiescence stirred his blood and made his pulse race. The thrill of domination always brought him more pleasure than he could ever have imagined. And he had enjoyed many satisfying sessions with India. For one brief moment, he wondered what Katie would look like manacled for him, her ass presented for his punishment.

Better get that out of your head, asshole. Just seeing her got you riled up enough.

Focusing on the sub at his feet, he drew back his hand and applied the first stroke. The leather struck India's skin with a soft *thwack*, and he was

rewarded with the sight of the first red welts. She jerked slightly but otherwise held her position. Another stroke and another. Slap, slap, slap, leather kissed skin until each cheek of her ass was a bright red. Each time her body reacted to the smack of the flogger, but she never uttered a word, never cried out. He almost expected her to ask for more. Pain was India's aphrodisiac.

When he reached twenty he set the flogger aside and crouched down to run his fingers through her slit. Drenched. He smiled in satisfaction and sucked her juice from his fingers. Turning her face so he could see her, he was pleased at the glazed look in her eyes.

"You are such a good little sub, India. You always please me."

"Thank you, Sir."

He smoothed his palm over the heated skin of her ass, then dragged his tongue over it, feeling the warmth radiating from her. He loved a freshly whipped ass steaming beneath his touch. Her pussy had been just as hot, the warmth from her ass streaking to folds swollen with need.

Usually, after he flogged her, he would suck her nipples until they were full and distended and put a set of clamps on them. Then he'd bend her over the padded horse he'd had specially designed, fastening her wrists to the legs and spreading her thighs wide. By then he himself would be so hard he could barely walk. He'd make her take a plug in her ass so the channel of her cunt would be compressed. Or sometimes insert a length of anal beads he could pull out when he came. And then, when he was sure she was as aroused as he was, he'd fuck her blind.

But tonight the only cunt he wanted his cock in was Katie's and hers wasn't available. And he needed more than just fucking India with a vibrator to keep his mind from wandering.

“I think tonight we’ll play with the candles.” Now was something he could easily be aroused by. And after she left the room...well...“You always like the hot wax, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?” he prompted.

“Yes, Sir.”

“And we’ll add that little something special because you love taking your punishment and you did it so well.”

He stroked his thumb across her cheek. Slowly, he rubbed his hand over India’s reddened ass, pinching each of the welts, rewarded by her little whimpers of pleasure. He knew her ass was sore from the flogging, but he was also aware the pain drove her response so much higher.

India enjoyed receiving pain almost as much as he enjoyed giving it, but he was always careful to only reach the threshold where it blended into pleasure. She held herself still for his caress, knowing she could only respond if he commanded her to. He’d trained her well. Even when he probed the cleft between the rounded globes and rimmed her asshole with a finger, she lay still, although he watched the muscles in her body tighten.

Satisfied she was sufficiently prepared, he unlocked the cuffs from her wrists, turned her over and stepped on a button hidden in the floor. Another of his special gizmos. The section of floor she lay rose slowly on a metal cylinder until it reached his waist. He refastened the wrist cuffs then spread her legs wide. Carrying another set of leather cuffs to the table, he wrapped them around her thighs, buckled them closed and hooked them to the table with eye hooks. Then he stood and stared at her, his gaze sweeping over her body.

Her pussy glistened wet under the spotlight. She kept herself waxed because he liked a naked

pussy. Running his fingers over the bare skin, he was pleased to note there wasn't even the slightest hint of bristle or growth anywhere, and he could tell she'd had it done again recently. Her clit peeped out from her outer lips, dark rose now, stimulated by the punishment.

Sometimes, like tonight, he ignored the whip, using the flogger often enough to know how very, very hot it made her. Sliding two fingers into her cunt, he was rewarded with hot wetness and a slight flexing of her inner muscles. Yes, she was the perfect sub for him.

Idly, he wondered if Katie liked to be flogged. If she...

God damn it! He had to stop this.

Opening a drawer in the built-in chest, he took out several of the special candles he ordered, a book of matches, and one of his favorite toys. He carried them to where India was displayed for him and held the candles up for her to see.

"Blue tonight. Your favorite color."

She smiled at him, her brown eyes darkening to the color of rich coffee.

"Let's decorate you, shall we?"

He set everything to the side except for one fat candle, which he kept in his hand. Striking a match he lit the wick and held the candle over one of India's breasts. Her eyes were locked on the candle, watching as wax began to melt and drip down the side. Reece held it just above her nipple, a thick bubble of wax sliding down until it dropped onto the hardened tip. She flinched slightly, but the expression on her face wasn't one of pain.

Reece held the candle over her, dripping enough wax to form a foundation, and then setting the candle in the melted wax, holding it until he was sure it was firmly seated. Striking another match, he did the same thing with a second candle on the

other nipple. And again at her navel. Finally he held open the outer lips of her cunt, exposing her clit and pooling wax on that hot bundle of nerves. Sweat broke out on India's body as she steeled herself to remain completely still, even as each bead of hot wax settled and hardened.

When he was satisfied each candle was firmly in place, not in danger of toppling and harming his sub, Reece reached for the large dildo he'd taken from the drawer. Sometimes, after he inserted the toy and turned it on, he amused himself by seeing how long his sub could remain still while he teased her with a feather. Then he would order her to take him in her mouth and suck him to completion. Or, if she was very good, he'd fuck her blind. It all depended on how she obeyed him.

It was all about control for him. Always.

But tonight he couldn't bring himself to put his cock in any of India's orifices. Not when every time he looked at her, he saw Katie Warren's face. Katie's body as he'd last seen it, naked and flushed. Heard Katie's low, melodious voice. And not even the candle play could make them go away.

So tonight he'd see just how much control he could exert over his sub. Some of his women were excellent at this. Others not so much, and he frequently wondered if they broke deliberately so he would punish them afterwards. He often questioned who was more aroused, who got the most pleasure out of the flogging or caning—he or the unrepentant sub.

India's eyes widened as he slid the dildo into her soaked pussy. The last time he'd fucked her with a vibrator while the candles balanced on her, she'd barely been able to handle it. But tonight he wanted to push her limits, make her bend to his will. Punish her again just a little for disobeying him earlier. Something to show he was still in control of the

situation, despite the woman now greeting guests in the main part of the club and tending to everyone's needs.

She can tend to my needs.

He ground his teeth. Enough of that shit already.

"Do not move." He turned the base of the dildo so it began to pulsate.

The moment the vibrations shimmied through her body, her breathing hitched, became shallower as she struggled not to move. Reece stood ready to blow out the candles and snatch them from her body if she couldn't handle it. He watched her hands clench into fists and her teeth bite down on her lower lip, but she held still under the onslaught of the vibrator.

"Do you like what I'm doing, India?" he growled.

"Y-Yes, Sir. Thank you for giving me this pleasure."

Oh, he was giving her pleasure all right, her body strung so taut with the effort to remain immobile that it resembled the string on a finely crafted bow. Normally, he would leave the dildo at its lowest setting, prolonging this as much as possible, but suddenly he wanted to be done. The games he otherwise enjoyed gave him no pleasure tonight. His cock was so hard and swollen he wondered if it would ever go back to normal, but he knew it wasn't what he was doing with his sub making it that way.

He reached between India's legs to turn up the speed on the vibrator and then placed his large hands on her thighs, adding his strength to hold her in place as her body responded to the stimulation.

It didn't take long before the orgasm erupted, India's body shaking slightly despite her effort to hold the candles in place. Low moans and whimpers escaped her lips, and her head moved from side to

side as she rode out the climax.

Even before the last of the aftershocks had subsided, Reece blew out the candles and eased them from her body. He placed them on the table before sliding the vibrator from her cunt. He released all the bindings holding her in place and finally applied a soothing cream to the marks the wax had left on her skin.

“You have done well, tonight,” he told her, helping her from the table and pressing the button to lower it back to the floor. “We are finished now. Stop in the main lounge and have someone bring me a drink. My usual.”

India frowned, no doubt wondering why he was changing their customary routine. Not using her to achieve his own climax. But as a good sub, she knew better than to ask questions. She simply nodded and walked to the door, heading for the dressing room where she'd left her clothes. Another thing Reece liked was for his subs to parade naked through the club when he was finished with them so others could see his handiwork. The stripes from the flogger were still visible to admire, and when she walked through the lounge to order his drink, everyone would see them.

He placed all the toys and instruments he'd used back on the table. When he left the room, someone would collect everything he'd used, clean and sterilize them thoroughly and put them back. After a certain amount of use all of them were replaced, anyway.

His body vibrated with unreleased sexual tension, a fact that irritated him more than he wanted to admit. Maybe it was his punishment for playing sex games with India while the meeting with Katie was still so fresh in his mind. The memories she brought back were so vivid, the emotions he thought he'd buried all these years roiled to the

surface, bringing back their last scene together as if it had just happened. Trying to pass it off as nothing more than a casual situation was stupid. He'd have done a lot better to lock himself in a different room and jerk off. What an ass he was. He could hardly stand himself.

When a knock sounded on the door, he yanked it open, snatched the drink from the poor attendant and slammed the door shut again.

Fuck! How the hell had this happened to him?

Chapter Three

One of the things Reece had ordered for his private room was a leather lounge chair he could relax in after a session with one of his subs. Usually he just kicked back, had his first drink of the night, and let the memories of the evening replay in his mind. Tonight there was no relaxing. Katie Warren's reappearance in his life had seen to that.

He stripped off his slacks, retrieving the handkerchief from the back pocket, and kicked out of his boxers. Then he dropped naked into the chair and took a healthy swallow of his drink. He didn't remember being this aroused since his first session at a fetish club all those years ago. A wry smile twisted his lips as he recalled the long ago evening. He'd been like a kid in a candy store, realizing for the first time in his life what a sweet tooth he had.

But tonight...

Shit.

He looked down at his cock, so swollen the soft skin around the inner steel was stretched taut and the ropy vein twisted around it pulsed visibly. The broad head was darkened, its surface glistening from the pre-cum he'd inadvertently spread over it when he yanked off his boxers. Taking another large swallow of his drink, he leaned back, closed his eyes, and wrapped his fingers around the engorged shaft.

Ahh!

So good. The only thing better would be Katie's slim fingers instead of his. The memory imprinted in his brain leaped to the forefront and he swore he could actually feel her soft touch on his body. He

took a moment to open the handkerchief and drape it over his thighs before closing his eyes again and summoning up those old memories.

They were celebrating her last year in college, making plans for the future. The Golden Spur was thriving, even in a market where the price of beef was down. His brothers were married, living in their own houses they'd built on the vast acreage of the ranch. Now it was his turn, and it couldn't come soon enough for him.

Reece had taken a break from working on the ranch to spend the weekend with her, and they'd barely been able to keep their hands off each other. Now the weekend was almost over, and they'd fucked so many times Reece wondered if he'd ever get it up again.

"Do you know how much I love you, Katydid?" he asked, his lips barely a hair's breadth away from hers. That had been his personal nickname for her since the first time he met her.

"How much?" Her eyes were dark with rich emotion.

"You're my heart, Katie. My soul. Everything there is."

She ran her tongue over her bottom lip, her hand reaching up to stroke his stubbled cheek. "As you are for me."

"You sure you're good with spending your life on the ranch? With me? You'll have your shiny new degree. The world is full of opportunities, you know."

She smiled, a burst of sunshine bathing him in its warmth. "But there's only one you. It's what we've always wanted." She frowned. "You aren't changing your mind, are you?"

He laughed. "Hell, no. Just making sure this is what you want."

"I want *you*," she told him. "There are plenty of

jobs in Austin or San Antonio.”

“You could always put your degree to work running the business of the ranch.”

Her eyes widened. “Really? Your brothers would go for it?”

“Hell, yes. They like keeping things in the family.”

“Me, too.” She wriggled against him.

“I love your body,” he told her, idly running his fingers over her smooth skin.

“I hope so.” She smiled. “You certainly spend enough time looking at it.”

“And why not? You’re a feast I can’t get enough of.” He cupped one full breast in his palm. “Your breasts are so firm and warm. I love holding them.” A thumb brushed over a swollen nipple. “And your nipples. I think I could suck on them forever.”

Putting actions to words, he lowered his head and wrapped his lips around the nipple, pulling it into his mouth. He loved the feel of it as he swirled his tongue around it. When he gently closed his teeth over it, Katie moaned and arched into him. Her hands threaded into his hair and pulled his head closer to her. Moving his mouth to the other nipple, he rested his palm on her thigh and rubbed his thumb along the crease of her hip. Katie shifted under his touch, silently urging him to move his hand to the place she needed it most.

Reece chuckled against her breast. “Anxious, are we? I’m beginning to think I might never satisfy you.”

“Then I guess you’d better try harder,” she said breathlessly.

“I could suck your nipples endlessly,” he told her. “Firm little pebbles I love to roll around on my tongue and nip with my teeth. You like it when I bite them, sugar?”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I do.”

I wonder what else you'd like, you little minx.

His first trip to a fetish club flashed through his brain. A lark. A night out with an old college friend, his former roommate. He hadn't participated in the actions, just watched, astounded at how aroused he became at the things he'd seen. And felt somewhere in the back of his mind he was betraying Katie and their relationship. But a month later he'd let himself be convinced into going again. And again he was just an observer, but now he was becoming almost obsessed with the whole BDSM scene and wondering if he could talk Katie into a club visit.

At home he surfed the Internet, searching for BDSM sites, looking for answers to the questions racing around in his brain. Masturbating while he imagined Katie with him in the activities he'd seen and the ones he researched. He was sure restraining a sub, administering proper punishment, then fucking her senseless, both anally and vaginally, would drive him wild. Knowing he was at all times in control and the sub he was with received her pleasure from his control drove him even wilder.

No, not a sub, Katie. Just Katie.

He'd love to fill Katie's sweet ass with a proper butt plug then slide his cock into her compressed pussy, feeling her wet flesh drag along the length of his cock. Maybe pull her to her knees and bind her hands behind her while he...

He clamped down on his daydreams. She'd probably shoot him.

"Spread your legs and bend your knees," he told her in a husky voice. "Let me see your beautiful cunt."

She loved it when he talked dirty to her. Would she let him do anything else?

Obediently Katie widened her legs, bent her knees and placed her feet on the mattress. Reece shifted so he was kneeling between them, his eyes

fixed on her glistening folds. Lazily he drew one fingertip the length of her slit, down and back. Katie hitched her hips at him, but he shook his head.

“Don’t move. I want to play and I want you to keep perfectly still.”

“But—”

He looked up at her. “Can you do that for me, Katie? Lie perfectly still? I promise you it’ll be worth it.”

“I-I’ll try,” she breathed.

“Good girl.”

Okay, she responded to his order. How far could he push it?

“I love to run my fingers over your pussy, sugar. It feels so slick and wet. And your hot little clit just peeking out at me. Jesus, Katie. It’s beautiful.”

He rasped a fingertip over her clit. When she jerked in response, he shook his head.

“Uh uh. Remember. Perfectly still.”

“B-But—”

“No movement.” His voice was commanding. “Remember?”

“Okay. I’ll try.”

“Put your hands over your head and grab the pillow,” he told her. “Just hold onto the pillow.”

He watched while she did it, noting the flush of excitement on her face and the increased pace of her breathing. What limit could he take this to?

“I’m going to play with your clit, Katie. Just with the tip of one finger. And I don’t want you to move.”

He was in control and he knew it. And she was doing exactly as he asked. Jesus, she’d make a perfect sub. But would she do it? He could feel the tension radiate from her as he rubbed his finger back and forth, back and forth, watching more of her liquid seep from her hungry little cunt. When he gently pinched the bundle of nerves, she started to

respond but caught herself. He looked up again to see her watching him, heat blooming in her eyes.

So far so good.

"You're getting wetter," he told her. "I like that. The wetter the better. That way I can just slide my cock right into you. And god, do I love to feel my fingers inside you this way." He brushed his hand over her neatly trimmed pubic curls. "You do a nice job on your little bush, darlin', but one of these days I'm going to shave it clean. Would you let me make your sweet little cunt all nice and bare?"

"Yes." He could hear the strain in her voice from the effort to remain still. "I would."

"I think I'll put it on the menu for the next time we're together. Yeah, we'll attend to that first thing."

He went back to toying with her clit, fascinated with the way it swelled beneath his touch and the instant response it drew from Katie. Bending his head a little lower, he licked his tongue over it, then swirled around its base. Again Katie jerked beneath his touch. Placing his hands on her hips, he held her firmly in place as he licked and nipped at the bundle of nerves. Her moans and whimpers ramped up his arousal, his cock unbelievably hardening again.

"Reece," she moaned as he sucked on her clit.

"Don't come, Katie. Just let yourself feel every sensation. Every bit of pleasure."

"I want you."

"You've got me. But I've got you, too. Just the way I want you." He opened her labia and stared at the wet pink flesh, already salivating for its taste. "You still have your toys, Katie?"

"W-What?"

He looked up at her, saw the startled expression on her face. "Your toys. Remember? The ones we joked about?" He took a slow swipe with his tongue. "The ones we decided were supposed to keep you satisfied when we weren't together?"

“Oh, um, those toys.”

He laughed and rimmed her opening with the tip of his tongue. Jesus, she tasted so damn good. “Yes, *those* toys. Do you still use them?”

“Okay.” Her breathing hitched. “Of course the answer is yes.”

“Know what I want to do? Buy you a present. A brand new dildo, one with a lot of different vibrations speeds, slide it right into your cute little cunt, and drive you wild with it.”

“You mean *watch me?*” Despite the sexual tension in her voice, it was tinged with surprise. And something else he couldn’t identify.

“Well, of course. God, what a picture that would make. Your sweet little pussy sucking on the dildo, me holding you down so you couldn’t move. Oh, yeah. I think I could come just from looking at such a scene.”

He thrust his tongue inside her hot channel, his thumb back to brushing steadily across her clit.

“Reece,” she wailed as he pushed her higher.

The walls of her pussy clenched around his tongue, clamping more tightly as he moved his thumb faster and fucked her harder with his tongue. Oh, shit, she was ready to come. He could tell by the fresh releases of her cream and the tighter grasp of her vaginal walls. He had to see this. Had to imprint it in his brain.

“Reece,” she cried again, thrusting her hips at him.

He withdrew his tongue. “Come, darlin’. Let yourself go.”

As the first big spasm hit, he opened her cunt lips wider, exposing every inch of her to his gaze, her inner muscles clenching over and over, her juices flowing freely, sliding down into the crack of her ass.

She bucked and moaned and cried out, begged him to put his cock inside her, his fingers, anything.

But he held her wide, using his weight to keep her in place until he'd looked his fill and she begged and pleaded. Shifting on the bed, he grabbed a condom from the nightstand, rolled it on, and drove into her. The head of his cock bumped the mouth of her womb, and she screamed with pleasure.

"Ssh." He cupped a hand over her mouth. "The hotel will throw us out," he chuckled.

"Okay, okay, okay." Her head thrashed back and forth. Then her legs came up and wrapped around him, her heels digging into the small of his back. "Fuck me. Fuck me, hard."

"With pleasure."

His hips picked up speed, and he stroked into her with jackhammer forces, pushing her toward yet another orgasm. He was so hard, so aroused from playing with her, it didn't take long for either of them to explode with a fury that amazed him. He spurted again and again into the latex reservoir, Katie's sweet little cunt milking him.

Exhausted, he lay over her, their breath mingling, hearts hammering at a rapid pace, until he finally found the strength to get up and dispose of the condom. When he was back in bed next to her, he wrapped his arms around her, cradling her close. God, he wished the wedding was tomorrow. They'd have the mother of all honeymoons. And suddenly wild images danced across his brain. What if he told her what he really wanted? How would she react? He so desperately wanted for both of them to dip their toes into the BDSM lifestyle, sure it would enrich their relationship. If she'd just give it a chance. Let him talk her into it. *Coax* her into it.

"I love you, Katie," he said again.

"Love you, too," she told him, wriggling her bottom against him.

He took the plunge. "Enough to try some new things with me?"

She tensed. "Like what? We've done just about everything there is."

He chuckled. "Oh, darlin', we haven't even gotten started."

"What do you mean?" She turned in his arms, her forehead creased in a frown. "I think we've about exhausted our imaginations."

"Not even close." He trailed a finger down her arm, recalling the scenes in the club and the things he'd found on the Internet. "For example. Would you let me tie you up? Spank you? Paddle your sweet little ass with a flogger or a cane? Put you on your knees with your hands behind your back while I fucked you? Spread eagle you and play with you until you couldn't stand it?"

She shoved away from him and sat up, pushing her hair out of her face. "Are you crazy? Damn, Reece. You just said you love me. Now you want to tie me up and beat me?"

Reece fought for control. "Sugar, you misunderstand me. There's a fine edge of pain that makes the pleasure so much sweeter. I want to teach you about that. Share it with you."

But she was no longer listening, her mind closed to anything he might say. Anger twisted her face, but there was something else, too. Something in her eyes. The same fleeting look he'd seen before, and he had no idea what it was. What was really going on in her head? He tried to get her to listen, but she scrambled away from him, almost as if she was...afraid? No. Not possible. She knew him better than that.

"Katie," he began again. "Just give me a minute here."

"No." She shook her head. "No, no, no."

From there, it just went downhill. Finally Katie pulled on her clothes, grabbed her purse, and hightailed it out of their room. Afterwards he

thought of all the ways he could have worked into it, the better explanations he could have given her. But by then it was too late.

He stared at the door she'd slammed.

Well, I certainly fucked that up royally.

He hadn't seen her since then. Until tonight.

His cock throbbed against his fingers, and his balls felt as if they were on fire. Thinking of Katie, his Katydid, had driven him to a higher plane of need than he'd reached in a long time.

Remembering the vision of her pussy spread wide as it pulsed with her orgasm, he stroked the length of his shaft, first slow, then fast. His mouth watered for the taste of her sweet juices, and he inhaled the scent of her arousal.

Faster, faster.

He wanted her spread out on the table he'd just used for India, wrists and thighs and ankles cuffed and bound to the wood. Clamps on those lovely nipples. Maybe a ball gag in her mouth so he could torment her with a vibrator, the scene he'd asked her for when she blew a fuse. Oh, yeah. He wanted that. Bad.

Faster, faster, faster.

He closed his eyes and imagined it was Katie's sweet pussy he was fucking. His hips jerked and hitched as his cock rode through the grip of his fingers. Lightning shot along the length of his spine and down into his balls, and then...and then...

There. Oh, shit, yes.

He squeezed the head of his cock with his fingers as cum spilled out thick and hot, running over his fingers. His ass slapped into the leather of the chair as his orgasm took him and shook him like a wild wind. Spurt, throb, pulse. Again and again.

Finally, he leaned back in the chair, spent but not satisfied. It really hadn't been the same. And

nothing would be until he had her again. But just exactly how the hell was he supposed to accomplish that? Especially now that she was his employee? He'd have to figure something out.

Opening his eyes, he used the handkerchief to clean himself up. He finished his drink and rose from the chair. Maybe he'd take a look and see how his new manager was doing. And figure out how to get her into this room.

When Clint interviewed Katie, he'd shown her the monitoring panels set up for all the private rooms.

"We give people the privacy they want," he'd told her. "But it's also our responsibility to make sure whatever goes on is safe, sane, and consensual. A lot of people really like to push the boundaries, as I'm sure you know."

"Yes. The club in Atlanta had the same setup. It's important to a club's reputation for people to know they have a protected environment."

Tonight she'd been jittery following Dane, the current manager around, learning how Rawhide did things. Not so much for what she was seeing. After ten years she was used to anything. She swallowed a laugh, remembering the night she'd run out of the hotel room in Atlanta, leaving behind a furious and bewildered Reece Halliday. How life had changed.

No, the reason she was so edgy was because she was hyperaware that the very same Reece was in his own private room playing with one of his subs. Clint had explained he had a silent partner who had his own room no one else used. That the man was a very alpha Dom whose position in the community demanded he have someplace like Rawhide to satisfy his sexual needs. But when he told her his partner was Reece Halliday, she'd had to work hard to conceal her shock.

It was obvious to her that ten years hadn't taken the tiniest edge off her feelings for Reece Halliday. Despite the temper tantrum she'd thrown when she walked out on him, she was still—and probably always would be—desperately in love with him. Maybe if she hadn't been such an idiot and overreacted...Maybe if he'd taken the time to explain things to her a little better...Maybe if his total alpha personality hadn't overwhelmed her...

Now, she understood the lifestyle. Knew people lived it in varying degrees. Some twenty-four/seven, some only in the bedroom, some only outside their homes. And she was more than aware that it heightened the sexual awareness between two people. Ever since she'd started working at the clubs in Atlanta she'd had erotic fantasies about herself and Reece doing all the things she saw their clients do.

It's too late, idiot.

When Dane excused himself to take care of something with a member, she'd offered to monitor the rooms for him and he'd nodded, distracted by the man claiming his attention. Keeping herself honest, she did take a peek at the other occupied rooms to make sure all was well. From the monitors in the lounge and the front entrance, she knew Reece's sub had left. She saw her walking naked through the club, the marks of a fresh flogging bright on her ass. So what was he still doing in the room? When she slid back the panel and peered inside, what she saw immobilized her. She was unable to make herself move.

Directly in her line of sight was a big leather armchair and sprawled in it, completely nude, was a very mature Reece Halliday. Every inch of his body was well-toned, the muscles defined as if molded by a sculptor. His broad chest was covered with a rich pelt of black hair matching the thick silk on his

head. His eyes were closed, his head thrown back, every angle of his face thrown into stark relief.

But what really drew her was the sight of his fingers wrapped around his enormous cock, moving rapidly as he brought himself to orgasm.

Holy crap!

Hadn't his sub satisfied him? What had happened in there tonight?

She watched, fascinated, as his body jerked to the rhythm of his fist. She could actually hear the slap of his ass on the leather of the chair until, with a violent jerk, semen spurted from the head of his shaft, cascading over his fingers. His sweat-covered chest heaved as he drew air into his lungs, its movement slowing until finally he sat up and meticulously cleaned himself with the handkerchief spread over his thighs. Finishing his drink, he rose and left her line of sight, obviously to retrieve his clothes.

He still had the grace of an animal, and even at this distance, with her vision limited, she could still tell he had the sexual magnetism and raw power of a wild stallion. She wondered what his favorite activities were with his subs? Did he use the toys he'd asked her about so long ago? Did he remember their time together, try to imagine it was her he was savoring, just as she did? For ten years every time she'd been in bed with a man, or pleasuring herself at home, she'd closed her eyes and called up the image of Reece Halliday's face.

Stop it.

Katie slid the tiny panel shut and let herself quickly out of the narrow, enclosed hallway. Pausing in the darkened corner into which she emerged, she took a long, deep breath and let it out slowly. She needed to make sure she was fully composed before moving out into the public area again. Especially if she happened to run into the man.

Oh, lordy. What was she going to do?

She stepped out of the shadows into the lounge area, heading to where she'd last seen Dane, but suddenly something big and tall blocked her way. She looked up, into eyes blacker than the night but at the moment, blazing with something she didn't want to put a name to.

"Hello, Katie." His voice still sent shivers skittering down her spine.

"Reece." She nodded.

"How about having a cup of coffee with me? We have a lot to catch up on."

No. I can't do this. I need time to prepare myself. Time to...what? Still keep trying to get over him? Apparently that's not happening, but I can't let him know.

"I have things to do, Reece." She waved in the general direction of the entryway. "Dane's probably waiting for me."

His big hands rested lightly on her arms, the contact sending heat blazing through her. And something else. The urge to bow her head and acknowledge him as Sir. *No, damn it. Not with Reece.*

"I already told Dane you'd be occupied for a while." He smiled, and her heart kicked into triple drive. "You can't avoid me forever, darlin'. You work for me. Remember?"

How could she forget? Lord, what a mess she'd gotten herself into. At least it had been her ticket out of Atlanta.

"You're right. We probably have a lot of business to discuss." She wiped her palms against the skirt of her dress. She really needed to keep it together here. "Okay, then. Coffee sounds good."

And right now about all she could handle with him.

Chapter Four

Reece led her to a table in a corner tucked away from the main activity of the lounge. Katie had learned to accept whatever went on in the clubs where she worked without blinking. In ten years there wasn't much she hadn't seen. But she hadn't expected having to sit among naked people and demonstrations of flogging with Reece sitting barely two feet away from her. The low hum of conversation punctuated by cries of pleasure was playing havoc with her senses. Along with the very male scent of the man across from her.

Don't let him know. Do not let him know.

An attendant brought two china cups and a carafe of coffee, bowed and moved away. Reece filled both cups and took a sip from his, his eyes like twin telescopes watching her over the rim.

Katie lifted her own cup, grateful to see her hands weren't trembling. When she set it carefully back on the saucer, she gave Reece a direct look. "You said you wanted to talk to me?"

A slow smile crawled across his face, the same smile that had always made her heart skip a beat, her nipples harden into diamond points, and cream soak her panties. And it was happening again. Right now. Shit. She was in such trouble here.

I can do this. I can do this. I need this job.

"I'm curious how the same woman who ran out of my hotel room like her clothes were on fire because I suggested a little kink ended up working in the industry. Am I missing something here?"

She folded her hands in her lap, gripping them

to keep herself centered. Her heart was thudding and she wanted to knock the table aside and shout that she'd made a mistake and changed her mind. Anger bubbled up inside her. How was it that, after seeing her for the first time in years, he could still have gone into that room and had a session with the sub waiting for him?

Because it's just sex, you idiot. You should be used to it after ten years in the business.

And what makes you think he even cares after all this time? He's obviously moved on. You should too.

But the anger just wouldn't go away. She had to accept the fact this Reece Halliday was a lot different from the one she'd been so in love with.

Check that. Still was.

Don't let him see it, you fool.

"Things change in life, you know." She tilted her head. "You did."

"Yes," he agreed. "You're right."

"So maybe if you tell me how it happened, I'll answer your question about me."

"Fair enough." He set his cup back in the saucer. "Remember Chad Willoughby, my college roommate?"

Katie nodded.

"Chad's brother was into the life big time. When Chad graduated from law school, he got Chad a guest pass at the private fetish club he belonged to and said he could bring a friend." He looked down. "I'd...been to a club twice before when we were together. But never did any more than watch," he added quickly. "That's when I brought everything up to you. I was fascinated with the lifestyle and wanted us to try some of these things together." His grin was rueful. "My idea didn't work out so well, as I remember."

"No. It didn't." If only she hadn't reacted so badly. "So what happened at the club?"

"It seemed I was finally going to experience the things I'd only fantasized about. Chad's brother arranged for each of us to have a sub for the evening along with a trained instructor." He paused to sip more coffee.

"And?" she prompted.

"To be blunt about it, I discovered a desire for it I didn't even know I had. It was the most explosive night I'd ever had sexually. And that's taking nothing away from what you and I had together."

"But you wanted more." Oh, she was sure of that. She felt a trap opening, yawning like a big hole before her. "On a regular basis."

"I did. A lot more. And more often. I for sure couldn't look for action anywhere around the Hill Country. You know how conservative the ranching community is. Not even my brothers know about my...preferences."

Katie gave him a quizzical look. "So what did you do?"

"Joined the club in Tampa Chad's brother took us to. They have an arrangement for guest privileges in other clubs around the country. I...took a lot of business trips." He stopped to take another swallow of coffee.

"Your brothers didn't ask questions?"

He shook his head. "I timed my trips to coincide with legitimate business. Conventions. Meetings. Whatever." His eyes raked over her face possessively. "But here's the plain truth. I really wanted you, Katie. I wanted it all. You and the life."

"Which is what led to the scene in our hotel room." When she so childishly ran away. It wasn't just the things themselves he was proposing. It was the total implication, the fear that she could lose herself in him completely. A very dangerous edge.

He grinned. "Yeah. That was some scene. I still remember how you looked, spread out..."

"Stop." She held up her hand. "That's not what I meant. Can we stick to the conversation at hand?"

The look he gave her nearly incinerated her dress. "Afraid to talk about it, sugar?"

She shrugged. "There's nothing to talk about. At least not...that." *Breathe in. Breathe out. Don't give him any hint.* "Anyway, didn't you think maybe you should have actually discussed your needs with me before dropping your suggestions like lead pipes?"

"It just fell out of my mouth." Another grin. "Call it the spirit of the moment."

Yes, and that spirit had stayed with her all these years.

"Your turn," he reminded her. "How did you get into this business?"

Katie sighed. She'd look like a fool when she told him.

"Katie?"

"All right, all right. I didn't want to come home after graduation. I wanted to stay in Atlanta. But of course I needed a job. A friend of mine said someone she knew was looking for a bookkeeper for some private clubs they owned. Three of them, in fact. She got me an appointment for an interview."

Reece sat back in his chair, laughing softly. "I'll bet it was quite a shock when you walked into that meeting."

"Actually, I met with their vice president at their headquarters in a separate office building. I hadn't planned to use my degree to be a bookkeeper, but the salary they were offering was too good to bypass." She drained her coffee cup and poured fresh liquid from the carafe. "After the interview he told me what kind of clubs they were and said I'd need to see them before I could agree to take the job. If I turned it down, he'd completely understand."

"I'd give my best breeding bull to have been there when you got your first look at it," Reece said.

“Yes, well, it certainly was...mindboggling.” She gave him a tiny smile, remembering the first night she’d walked into one of those clubs and the instant turn-on she hadn’t expected. “But I was curious, too. I wanted to know what interested and excited you so much that you wanted to bring it into our relationship.”

He leaned forward, his eyes darkening. “And what did you find out?”

She shrugged, determined to be as casual as possible. Not to give any hint of her fascination—make that obsession—with D/s play. “I found out it didn’t offend me the way I thought it would. Especially after I started working for the business and met a lot of the people.”

“But you said the offices were in a different place.”

“Like I told you, those were the corporate offices. They owned a lot of properties and businesses besides the clubs they managed at their headquarters. I had a tiny office in each of the clubs where I split my time. The hours were weird because a lot of my work was done in the evenings, checking receipts and inventories, but the pay was outstanding.”

Silence lay between them like a living thing.

“And now?” Reece asked finally.

“And now I’ve seen pretty much everything and it doesn’t bother me. There are a lot of things I’d never want for myself, but I think it’s that way for everyone.”

His eyes glittered. “Do you mean there are things you *want*? Things you’ve done?”

She pushed away from the table, unable to take this discussion any further. She was already wet and throbbing, visualizing herself with Reece in his private room. She had to make an exit before she gave herself away. He’d obviously moved on with his

life. Well, so had she. Sort of.

"I don't think my private life is part of my business contract with you."

"Hands off?" He leaned even closer. "Is that what you're saying?"

"I think it's for the best. Don't you?"

God, could I sound any more priggish? I don't think I'm anything more than unfinished business to him anyway.

He studied her for a long time. Finally, he nodded. "Okay, fair enough. For now. I won't crowd you, Katie, but I'm not going away. Maybe things will just follow the natural course of events."

Katie stood up. "Thanks for the coffee, Reece. Be sure to let me know if you have any special needs." Before he could make a crack, she added, "Just as with any other member."

Reece refilled his coffee cup and leaned back in his chair, his eyes following Katie as she moved through the lounge. He was amazed at her matter-of-fact attitude when she passed clients in various stages of undress caressing each other. Even the threesome on the curved settee didn't seem to affect her, nor did the flogging demonstration being performed on stage in the big glass-enclosed area. Her head swiveled one way, then the other, but it was no more than an efficient manager checking the club activities. He watched Dane flag her down at the hallway to the private rooms. She paused for a moment of conversation, and then the two of them headed off to the big locked supply area.

He still couldn't quite get his mind around Katie Warren managing a fetish club. *His* fetish club. And that in itself presented a big problem. No fraternizing with the employees. He and Clint had established the hard and fast rule when they opened Rawhide. If a relationship ended badly, it could create a sticky situation in the club and a headache

they didn't want or need. But hell! He wanted Katie more than he wanted his next breath. He needed to find out if they could pick up the pieces of what they'd had and take it from there.

Because, if he was truthful with himself, he'd have to admit he had never stopped loving her. Really loving her. And that had his gut twisted in too many knots to count.

Watching her while they talked, he was struck by her reaction to certain tones of his voice, certain things he said. It could have been his imagination, wishful thinking, but his instinct reared up and told him Katie Warren was a true submissive. Jealousy twisted a knife in him at the thought someone else had trained her. Taught her the rules and the behavior. He wanted to kill the son of a bitch, and he didn't even know who it was. He really wanted Katie to be his sub. Permanently.

What a fucking mess.

"Is there a problem we need to talk about?"

Reece looked up as Clint Chavez dropped into the chair Katie had just vacated. He frowned. "Problem?"

"Yeah. You know what I mean." Clint signaled for a clean cup. "I asked you earlier if having Katie working here as the manager would be a problem for you and you said no. But the two of you looked like you were having a pretty intense conversation."

Reece blew out a breath. "I know the rules we set up. Don't worry. I'll handle it."

"Yeah?" Clint studied him for an extended moment. "Reece, we've been partners for a long time and friends for a lot longer. I know how badly you want to settle down with someone and how hard it is for you to find someone who fits into all aspects of your life. I don't want the decision you make to screw things up for you either personally or professionally."

Reece thought before answering. "I don't have a decision to make. To tell you the truth, I don't even know how Katie feels anymore. Or how I do, either. Ten years is a long time."

His partner poured coffee from the carafe into his cup and took a sip, watching Reece over the rim of the cup. "I'd say there's a lot of unfinished business between the two of you that needs attending to. I'll trust you to know what you're doing."

"I'm glad one of us does."

"Just remember what I said earlier."

"I know, I know. And I remember what I said, too. Damn it." Reece pushed back his chair and stood up.

"If you see a problem coming, I want advance notice from you before you start waving your dick at our manager. Okay?"

"Fair enough."

But Reece had an itch on the back of his neck telling him he might be giving notice sooner rather than later.

"You sure have a burr up your ass today." Mark Halliday reined his horse up next to Reece's, lifted his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his forearm.

All three brothers, along with some of the ranch hands, had been riding fence since early in the morning. Forty thousand acres was a lot of land to patrol and moving the cattle from pasture to pasture to rotate grazing meant fences needed to be maintained. Reece had been in a foul mood since he rolled out of bed, and the heat and dust hadn't improved it one bit.

"Sorry." But he knew there wasn't any note of apology in his voice. He lifted his canteen, unscrewed the cap, and took a long drink.

“Yeah, well, care to let us in on what’s eating at you?” Vince, the third Halliday brother pulled up to join them.

“Nothing.” Reece shoved the canteen back in place. “Can’t a person have a bad day?”

Mark grinned. “Seems to me, big brother, you’ve had a lot of those lately. Maybe you need to get laid.”

Vince laughed. “Always works for me.”

“Maybe he’s just jealous we’re getting steady sex,” Mark pointed out with a grin.

“Will you both just shut up?” Reece snapped. “My sex life is just fine.”

“Couldn’t prove it by us,” Vince said. “We never see you in female company. You’re about to win the award for Hermit of the Year.”

Reece ground his teeth. “If you bothered to check, you’d know I’m seldom home at night. I just don’t do my prowling where you and all the other gossips like your wives can chew it over.”

“Hey.” Mark punched his arm lightly. “Leave our wives out of it.”

“Are we gonna sit around here all day and jaw about my sex life? We have work to do.”

He clicked his tongue and urged his horse forward, first into a walk then a trot, and moved down the next line of fence.

His brothers were right, but not in the way they thought. He was getting plenty of sex. It just happened to be with the wrong woman. And he had no idea what to do about it.

Going to the club was a double edged sword these days. On the one hand, he was working off his frustration on his favorite subs. On the other, seeing Katie move gracefully through the crowds, doing her job, drove him nuts. For ten years he’d regretted what happened, how he’d approached her about his desires. Now he was caught in a trap where he had no idea how to rectify that or even if she was

interested.

Last night he'd been in agony. One of the Doms with the best reputation, Logan Meranda, was training a new sub and the couple had agreed to do it in the viewing room. Word had spread, so the club was packed. Reece knew he should have stayed away or at the very least hung out in the background. Instead, when he saw Katie watching with the Dungeon Master, he'd moved up to stand on the other side of her.

Big mistake.

Watching the Dom shackle his sub to a spanking bench and describe and demonstrate the proper technique for using a flogger, a paddle and a cane, with Katie just a breath away, made Reece's cock so hard and his balls so tight he was in actual physical pain. But when Logan had the sub kneel on a padded table, wrists shackled to the side, vibrators in both her ass and cunt while she sucked his dick, Reece nearly lost it. Closing his eyes, imagining Katie in that position sent him running to his private room to once again jack off as frustration, both physical and emotional, racked him.

So today he'd been doing his damndest to work it out of his system, pushing himself, his brothers, and the hands. But hard work apparently wasn't the answer, and he'd been taking everyone's head off since early that morning. He'd have to face this situation sooner rather than later. The problem was he had no idea if Katie would cut him any slack.

Rawhide was jammed. Reece was glad he had a designated parking space or he'd probably be leaving his vehicle blocks away. The moment he let himself in through the back door, the sounds and scents of the club washed over him. The low hum of conversation was overlaid with groans and screams of pleasure, the air carrying the scent of arousal,

reminding him there was another demonstration going on tonight.

Katie had been with them for three weeks now and doing an outstanding job. Her warm personality, low key approach to situations, and sharp business mind drew raves both from the members and from Clint. On the one hand, he was proud of her, but on the other, the more she excelled at her job, the harder it was going to be to approach her. Oh well, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Standing at edge of the crowd he scanned the room, spotting her near the glass enclosure, monitoring the activity. When he didn't see Clint, he assumed his partner was in his office. Good. That gave him a chance to have a talk he hoped wouldn't put a crimp in either their friendship or partnership.

She'd certainly been Miss Prim the night they had coffee, despite the signs his sub radar picked up. He'd been curious to see if there were traces left of what they'd had between them. For him, the answer came in an instant. Yes. No doubt. The heat blazed even hotter and higher. Did she still burn for him? Had her attitude just been her safeguard in case he no longer cared? They had unfinished business, for damn sure.

But how to proceed? She'd be worried about anything affecting her job, and Clint would be spastic he'd screw up the club. For three weeks, he'd been telling himself it was over and done, but it was nothing more than words. The pressure of his cock in his slacks and the heat surging through him whenever he laid eyes on her told him differently.

Well, first things first. That meant a down and dirty discussion with Clint. He found his partner in the office they shared, studying something on his computer screen. Sometimes Reece felt guilty leaving the bulk of the corporate work to the other man, but Clint had been adamant when they signed

the partnership agreement.

"You've put up most of the money," he'd pointed out. "Plus you have a ranch to run. With a good manager I barely break a sweat here."

Reece knew it was a lot more but he was also aware the man wouldn't budge.

Clint looked, at him as he dropped into a chair in front of the desk.

"Should I assume from the expression on your face we're about to have the discussion we talked about?"

Reece dragged his fingers through his hair. "I guess. Shit, I don't know what the hell to do."

Clint's mouth curved in a half-smile. "The old heat's still there, isn't it?"

"Is it that obvious?"

"Pretty much, although you keep it under control. But I know you well enough to be able to sense it." He leaned forward, elbows on the desk, fingers tented in a steeple. "So let's look at this from all sides. What if you approach her and she turns you down flat?"

Reece snorted. "Do you have to be such a pessimist?"

The other man laughed. "It's certainly a possibility. Can you handle it?"

"Do I have a choice? I'll just manage to avoid her whenever I'm here and let you handle all contact with her. Sooner or later, I'll get over it."

"What if she's receptive, Reece? How do we all handle that?"

Reece blew out a breath. "Whatever happens, she needs to know her job is safe. If we get together and something comes of it, well, then we can look at all our options." He looked over at his partner. "I just know if I don't find out, I won't have a decent night's sleep."

"You two must have had some relationship is all

I can say.”

“You have no idea.” All these years he’d carried the image of Katie, naked in his bed, spread wide for him, pussy glistening, and nipples hardened as she writhed in the throes of an orgasm. Damn. Just remembering it now made him shift in his chair to ease the discomfort in his slacks.

“All right.” Clint leaned back. “We’ve been friends for a long time and in business almost as long. I’m going to trust you to handle this appropriately.”

“Good enough.” He pushed himself out of the chair. “Is India here tonight? And is she busy?”

India had gained great popularity as a sub who liked different Masters, liked the variety they offered, and had very few restrictions, which made her high on everyone’s list.

Clint punched some keys on his computer and brought up the evening’s schedule. “Actually, she’s free. Grant Mullens had asked for her but he had to go out of town unexpectedly.”

“Find her and send her to my room. If I’m going to talk to Katie, I need to take the edge off first.”

“Done.” Clint rose also. “I just hope to hell you know what you’re doing.”

“That makes two of us.”

Chapter Five

Reece was having a heated conversation with himself.

I shouldn't be doing this. I don't want India. I want Katie.

She doesn't want you. Haven't you gotten the message?

Then why do I feel like I'm cheating on her?

You can't cheat on someone you don't have a relationship with. That's dead and buried.

Even if he didn't want it to be. And there was the sticking point.

He sighed, knowing once again he should tell India he'd find her another Dom for the night and knowing again it wasn't what he was going to do.

She's moved on. Do the same.

He avoided Katie as he made his way to his private room. He hadn't lied to Clint when he told him he needed to satisfy the lust raging through him before he could hold a decent conversation. Start slow, he told himself. Don't even bring up sex this time.

And that was his excuse for playing with India tonight. To take the edge off so he could have a decent conversation with Katie and not shred her clothes when he laid eyes on her again. He hoped India was up for a good session, because working with her was the only way he was going to be able to handle himself.

A light pressure of his toe and the table rose from the floor again. He stripped off everything but his boxer briefs and laid out the toys and

instruments he would use during the evening. He'd developed a fascination for wax play, always being careful to control how much wax dripped onto his sub's skin. But he loved the tension, the anticipation each drop created in his subs. He seldom fucked them when he used wax play, but he always finished by having them suck his cock, on their knees, hands bound behind their backs. Already he anticipated India's very educated mouth wrapped around his dick, her tongue expertly swirling his shaft and licking the head.

Reece clenched his jaw and drew in a deep breath. He was already so hot just from thinking about Katie, and it was important he not reach his limit too soon. He'd never needed control this badly. The soft tap at the door drew his attention and helped him to focus on the evening's play.

"Good evening, Sir." India stood in the doorway, naked as ordered, awaiting his bidding.

"Come in." He stared at her for a long moment.

I can't do this.

But as he was searching for words to send India away, he happened to glance at the peephole in the wall. He and Clint had installed one in every private room so they could monitor activities for safety's sake. Even though all the clients were thoroughly vetted, once in a while a situation required a little extra supervision. Then, of course, there were the voyeurs, who paid a hefty fee to observe. Always with the permission of the players, of course, those with an exhibitionist fetish. It was open now, so someone was watching him.

Just for an instant irritation gripped him. No one observed the owners. Clint would never spy on him and no one else had the balls. Besides, watching either of the owners was strictly forbidden. Then he realized it had to be Katie.

It's still there. The incredible chemistry. She feels

it, too.

The surge of lust racing through Reece was stronger than ever. She wanted to watch? To see what he was all about? All right, damn it. He'd give her a show she'd never forget. And maybe, just maybe, make the connection he was fumbling for so badly.

Knowing her eyes were on him, he licked his lips and nodded to India. "Climb up onto the table and lay face down, arms at your sides."

"Yes, sir." She almost, but not quite, hid her smile.

He knew she was anticipating anal play, something that always strengthened her climax. Tonight she'd definitely get her wish. He'd show Katie exactly what he wanted to do to her. *With* her. Oh god, definitely with her.

Watch, Katie. See how good I am at this.

When India was properly arranged, he placed a small pillow beneath her head, then began attaching the sets of leather cuffs to her—a set for her thighs he could fasten to the special hooks at the edge of the table, smaller ones for her arms and wrists. Finally, he threaded slim strands of leather through the buckles of the cuffs and anchored them so her arms were effectively bound to her thighs, immobilizing her.

"Tonight I am giving you my cock," he told her, raising his voice enough to make sure Katie could hear him. And if he worked hard enough at it, he could actually pretend she was the one in the room with him.

Is that what you want, Katie? Do you know how horny it makes me knowing you're watching?

"I want to make sure your mouth is ready," he said to India.

Taking the lifelike penis from the toys he'd set to the side, he slid it into her mouth, pressing her

jaw open and inserting it as far as possible.

“Breathe,” he ordered. “And concentrate on not biting it.”

This also effectively gagged her, which meant the only sounds she could make were the tiny little whimpers that always made his balls tighten. Trailing his fingers down the length of her spine, he traced them into the crevice of her ass then smoothed his palm over the globes so temptingly presented.

“Tonight, I think we’ll heat this sweet little ass with the single tail whip.” He watched her muscles tighten with satisfaction. She knew it was his favorite, the instrument he loved most to flog her with. Every time he used it, he got so hard he was almost in pain. Maybe it reminded him of roundup at the ranch, when he cracked his long tail whip at the cattle to help herd them. Only now he was using it to tame his sub.

“Mmm,” was all she said but heat blazed in her eyes. The whip always made her hot as hell.

“Yes, I know you like that. And I love to make your globes fiery hot with it.”

He picked up the whip and drew the thin strip through his fingers, almost like a caress. He trailed it across her ass, drawing an imaginary line along the crease where her ass met her thighs. Touching her pussy, he smiled at the moisture he found already gathered there. Oh, yes, he was sure his little sub was ready to beg for the first kiss of the lash.

Suddenly, even his boxer briefs were too constricting. He tugged them off one-handed and tossed them to the side. Positioning himself at the foot of the table, Reece stood far enough away to allow the tail of the whip to strike properly. He wrapped his fingers around his aching cock, raised his other hand and snapped the thin whip.

Crack!

The sound echoed in the room. India jerked even though he hadn't touched her yet, simply cracked the whip in the air. But the sound was arousing to her. And to him.

Crack!

This time he applied it to her flesh and the tail left a satisfyingly red stripe on India's ass. One of those delicious little sounds he loved rolled from her throat, diffused by the fake cock in her mouth.

"Twenty again tonight," he told her and chuckled. "I will count for you since your mouth is full."

With each stroke her skin turned redder, her body twitched, and the little whimpers became one long moan. And Reece's cock became so hard and engorged he wondered if he'd be able to hold off until he was ready for her to take him in her mouth.

When he reached twenty, he tossed the whip to the side and bent over to run his tongue along the heated flesh, stroking himself with the lightest touch. Already his balls felt as if bolts of lightning had struck them.

Katie, Katie, Katie. Keep watching.

Katie stood in the narrow passageway, staring through the tiny opening in the wall, her panties so wet she could actually catch the scent of her own arousal. She could hardly take her eyes away from Reece's tall, lean body. Somehow, it looked even better than it had the first night she spied on him, each muscle clearly defined beneath the taut layer of skin.

She had such a strong sense that he knew she was watching. When his glance had swept over the spyhole, she'd felt the snap of the invisible connection they used to have.

He knows. He knows I'm here, and he's showing

me what he wants to do to me.

Yes, Reece, I'm watching. And so hot I can hardly stand it.

He was using the single tail whip tonight, each *crack* reverberating through her body. She'd overheard him tell Clint one night that it was one of his favorites to use on his subs. That it had an earthiness about it that made him so hot and horny he was lucky he didn't fuck himself blind. Each time he lifted his hand and smacked the tail of the whip across the buttocks of his sub, Katie jerked as if feeling it herself. She wished she was on that table. Wished she was the sub he was using the whip on.

Moisture soaked her panties and her nipples swelled almost to bursting. If only he knew.

From the first moment she'd walked into the clubs in Atlanta, the very eroticism of the BDSM had drawn her in a way she'd never thought possible. Over the years, she had given into the fascination and experimented, but never with clients of the clubs where she worked. She met people at munches she attended, but then on her computer researched and vetted them before allowing herself to be drawn into a relationship.

Her research had paid off, the information drawing her like a moth to a flame. She often worried that she was becoming a BDSM junkie. That it would interfere with her public persona, which was strong and self-assured. But that had never happened. The one time she'd sensed it creeping in, she was smart enough to walk away from the relationship. She'd been with a total of four Doms, three of them very skilled. Her first master had trained her in the ways of a submissive, and she'd soaked it all up like a sponge. Most of her subsequent relationships had been fulfilling and emotionally satisfying.

Only the last one...he'd reminded her so much of

Reece. More than any of the others. So much so that she'd been fooled, finally wrenching herself away from the relationship with her inner self in shreds and tatters. She had never felt for any of them what she still felt for Reece Halliday, but deep inside she began to wonder if Reece would be that kind of Dom, so controlling that she became nothing but an extension of him. That fear hung around the edges of her mind, like a bee buzzing at a honeysuckle bush.

Still, watching him tonight, she knew she was willing to risk it because even after all this time and all that had happened, *he* was the one she wanted.

Whip me, Reece. Strap me to that table.

She watched him kiss the reddened skin, and she wanted it to be her skin his mouth was on. When he squeezed lube onto his forefinger, spread his sub's buttocks and worked his way into her ass, she clenched her own cheeks, hungry for the feel of his finger there. One hand stole beneath the hem of her short dress and into her wet panties, seeking her aching clit.

Her fingers stroked her hot nub slowly as she watched Reece light a long red taper and hold it over India until the wax began to trickle down the sides. Then, like an artist painting on a canvas, he dripped it onto her back in lines matching the stripes on her buttocks, a careful zigzag. Katie was fascinated. None of her Masters had been into wax play, but she'd heard many subs rave about the sensation of the warm wax on their bodies and the heat it generated in their cunts.

She stopped caressing her body as Reece finished creating his design. She watched as his hand slipped between India's thighs to her pussy. When he withdrew his fingers, they must have been wet because he took his time licking them, his swollen cock flexing in response. What he did next had Katie's fingers moving again, faster, faster,

stroking, pulling. Separating the cheeks of India's ass, he settled the candle in her anus, balancing it so it didn't topple and burn her.

And then, and then...

And then he removed the fake penis from her mouth and slid his own between her lips. Restrained as she was, India didn't have much room for movement, so Reece held her head between his large palms and fucked her mouth while the flame of the candle danced in the air.

Oh, my god!

Reece's big body tensed, then jerked again and again as he spurted into his sub's mouth. At that moment, Katie raked her nail across her clit and shoved two fingers into her wet channel as she brought herself to climax. When she was finished, she closed the privacy panel and leaned against the wall, breathing heavily, feeling the heat on her face.

I have to pull myself together.

Easier said than done. She needed a quick trip to her office right now to check herself, freshen her makeup...and maybe change into a dry pair of panties from the supply she always kept on hand. Carefully, she eased open the narrow door and covered the few steps to her office without encountering anyone. Locking herself in, she let out the breath she'd been holding.

She couldn't keep spying on Reece, no matter how much of an obsession it was. She just couldn't seem to stop herself. If she didn't pull herself together she might have to quit this job before she got fired.

Ever since her first foray into D/s Katie had wondered what things would have been like if she hadn't run from the hotel room that day as if the demons of hell were chasing her. But she'd known nothing about the scene except for rumors, and the things Reece wanted to do had frightened her.

Big mistake.

She'd been able to keep her feelings at bay as long as so many miles separated them. Now she wanted him with an unaccustomed fierceness. Could she trust him not to swallow her up? Would she even have the chance? It was obvious he'd moved on with his life.

Only...why hadn't he actually fucked his sub tonight? Maybe he was still in the room with her, stimulating both of them, and he'd get around to it later. She tried to block the images out of her mind.

Get it together, Katie girl. He's no longer available.

Giving herself ten minutes, she changed panties, checked her makeup, and ran a brush through her hair. Putting her public face in place, she opened the door, let out her breath...

And came face to face with Reece.

Having India suck him off had relieved the physical tension in Reece's body but did nothing for the emotional strain. The only reason he'd been able to go through with the session at all as because he knew Katie was watching and he was performing for her. The entire time he'd been playing with his sub, he kept imagining Katie on the table. Her ass being whipped. Her back covered with the design in wax. And her pussy that he stroked and teased to bring her to climax. Usually he used a selection of different toys, even applied the flogger after wielding the single tail whip to excite both himself and his sub again.

Tonight he did neither because, idiot that he was, he kept seeing Katie's face. Felt her eyes on him. Did she know that she was the one he wanted? Was she still out there watching? But a glance at the spy-hole showed him it was closed. Was she pleased with what she'd seen? Did it turn her on?

Damn.

If he didn't cut this out he'd drive himself nuts. When he was dressed, he stood in the center of the room, trying to figure out what to do next. He could get a drink at the bar, as alcohol was allowed if a member wasn't playing and he was definitely through for the night. But wherever he went he was sure to run into Katie. And then what?

Acknowledge he knew she'd watched? Pretend he didn't know? Ignore it?

He'd told Clint he planned to make his move, see if they could recapture what they once had, but he was much more nervous about that than he wanted to admit. Even to himself. Especially after knowing Katie had seen everything he did with India. Maybe he'd hide in Clint's office for a while so he could put an acceptable plan together. Checking the room and himself one last time, he left and headed down the hallway to check on the lounge, first. He couldn't have said what made him detour to the area where the offices were, but before he could reverse course, one of the doors opened and Katie stepped into his path.

He hadn't felt this tongue-tied since he was a kid in high school asking her out for the first time. They stared at each other, tension crackling in the air, and the heat factor so high he wasn't sure even air conditioning would be much help.

She recovered first. "Were you looking for me?"

Was that a hint of laughter in her eyes? A knowing look?

He cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I was. Do you have time for a cup of coffee? Maybe things will be a little easier between us this time."

Smooth, Halliday. Real smooth.

But he looked in her eyes again and what he saw encouraged him. That *was* interest, right?

"Coffee would be nice. Just let me check on a few

things first, and I'll meet you in the lounge."

By the time she joined him at the table, he'd rehearsed what he wanted to say at least ten times and forgotten everything. He rose when she approached, sitting when she did and pouring coffee for her. Silence descended while they stared at each other.

Get moving, asshole.

"I think maybe we got off on the wrong foot the other night," he said, watching her reaction. "I want to apologize for my attitude."

Her eyes widened. "Apologize? Reece Halliday apologizing?" A smile played at the corner of her lips.

"Okay, okay." His voice was gruff. "So maybe I could have been a little less..." He searched for a word. "Arrogant?" Yes. It was a smile. "Conceited? Egotistical?"

The smile widened. Maybe this wouldn't be quite as impossible as he thought. God, he hoped not.

He nodded solemnly. "All that. So should I get on my knees?"

Now she actually laughed, and it seemed to break the tension between them. "I think this is the wrong place to ask me that. Let's just talk and see how it goes."

"Fair enough." He swallowed his sigh of relief. He wanted to tell her he knew she'd been at the spyhole, but the words just wouldn't come. "Clint tells me you're doing a great job," he said at last, a lame opening gambit.

She smiled. "Thank you. He makes it very easy for me. And the club is set up to exclude troublemakers."

Reece nodded. "Before we opened Rawhide we designed the process for memberships and guest passes to eliminate the very possibility."

"It's a nice club, Reece." She sipped her coffee. "I enjoy working here."

Silence hovered between them.

"How have you..."

"Have you..."

They both spoke at once, grinned half-embarrassed.

"You first," he told her.

"I just wanted to ask how you've been all these years," she said. "You look well."

I've been missing you like crazy and not even realizing it.

He studied her for a long moment. "And you look more gorgeous than ever."

He was rewarded by the blush that crept up her cheeks. Then her lips curved into a tiny smile and her teeth caught at her lower lip in a gesture all too familiar. Despite the fact he'd ejaculated copious amounts less than fifteen minutes earlier, his cock hardened at once and strained against his fly.

"Thank you." She picked up her cup again.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

"Katie," he said. "I'd like it if we could get past this awkwardness. I know it's there. So do you. When we...broke up...there were a lot of bad feelings between us." He held up his hand when she opened her mouth to object. "All on me. I freely admit it. But I'd like to correct that." *Would she tell him now that she'd been watching him? No, that wasn't her style. Or was it? God, he was so fucking confused.*

She set her cup down carefully in the saucer and looked directly at him. "Exactly how do you plan to go about it?"

Until that moment he hadn't been sure but an idea popped into his brain. Now he just had to sell her on it.

"Rawhide is closed on Sundays. How about coming out to the ranch? I'll get Josefina to pack us a

basket. We can take a ride, have a little picnic.”

Katie slid her delicate finger around the rim of the cup. And around again. Not looking at him. “Oh, Reece. So much time has passed and I’m...”

“You’re what, Katydid?”

He watched her blush again at his use of the nickname.

“I just don’t think we can recapture what we had.”

His gut tightened. He didn’t want what they’d had. He wanted what she’d seen him do with India when she watched tonight. He wanted her to know that he really wished he’d been with her. “I agree with you. I thought maybe we could go forward.” He leaned toward her, forcing her to meet his gaze. “Just a picnic, Katie. You haven’t been out to the ranch in a long time. And you’ll come in your own car. Leave any time you want to. We have to start somewhere.”

“I don’t want to do anything to jeopardize my job here. I really like it. If Sunday, or whatever, doesn’t work out, I don’t want to be in the position of having to leave.”

Reece reached across the table and captured her free hand. “I can promise you that won’t happen. You absolutely have my word.”

She frowned. “And exactly how would that work? We’d...what...just avoid each other?”

He dropped his voice even lower. “We’re two intelligent adults, Katie, and we’ve known each other a long time. If there’s nothing left between us but friendship, then we’ll make that the best friendship we can. I promise.”

Round and round the rim of the cup the finger journeyed again. Reece found himself holding his breath.

“All right,” she said at last. “But if things get too...difficult Sunday...I’ll leave and we’ll still be

okay. Right?”

He nodded, trying not to let his relief show. “You call all the shots.”

Was that a wicked gleam suddenly sparkling in her eyes? “Really? I thought that was the role you liked to play.”

Now it was his turn to use coffee as a distraction. He took a healthy swallow, making a face at the now cool liquid.

“I think we’ll just call it a level playing field on Sunday. How’s that?”

Her eyes still held that mischievous light. “Sounds good to me. What time?”

“Noon okay?” He could hardly believe she said yes. He was afraid to hope for anything other than the picnic, but he was going to try his damndest for more.

“Noon it is.” She looked around, obviously checking the activity in the lounge.

In one corner, Reece noticed two men slowly undressing a sub they shared. They’d been coming to Rawhide since it opened and brought their beautiful sub when they wanted to show her off to others. Or sometimes, if she’d been particularly bad, when they wanted to punish her in front of others.

In another corner, a male sub sat at the feet of his Mistress, stroking her cunt beneath her skirt while she carried on a conversation with another client. Near them, another couple was in the first getting-acquainted stages.

Every couch, chair, and table was completely filled. A good night at Rawhide.

Katie finished her coffee and checked her watch. “We have a demonstration with the St. Andrews Cross starting in twenty minutes. I need to make sure all the equipment is ready and the sub properly oiled.” She stood up. “I...This was nice. I’ll see you Sunday.”

Desiree Holt

He dipped his head once. "Sunday. I look forward to it."

And that was certainly an understatement.

Chapter Six

Katie changed clothes five times Sunday morning before eventually settling on a pair of jeans and a tank top in a shade of emerald that turned her eyes green. It was a warm, sunny day. Maybe she'd get a little tan on her arms and face. Finally, she dug her old boots out of the closet. She couldn't remember the last time she'd worn them. Certainly not in Atlanta. But they felt like old friends when she shoved her feet into them.

She took a last look in the mirror. Hair pulled back in a ponytail to keep it out of her face. Minimum of makeup, as much to open her skin to the sun as to keep Reece from thinking she wanted to impress him.

Who am I kidding? Of course I want to impress him. What will I do if he makes a move? What will I do if he doesn't?

Mentally smacking herself, she picked up her keys and purse and headed out to her car.

The Golden Spur looked almost exactly as it had the last time she'd seen it ten years ago. The shutters on the big limestone house wore a fresh coat of paint, as did the comfortable wooden furniture on the porch. Her stomach did a little flip when she noticed the swing still hanging from its hooks. As kids she and Reece had done a lot of necking there with his parents keeping a discreet eye on them. Their fatal car crash had devastated her as much as it had their sons.

The barns sparkled in the sunlight and the breeze carried the scent of fresh air with it. Katie

inhaled, realizing just how much she missed the mingled aroma of hay, animal, and earth.

She saw one of the big Golden Spur double cab pickups parked in the gravel area, but there also was another truck, one with no logo on it. Reece was sitting on the front steps. Next to him was one of the sexiest women Katie had ever seen. Lithe, tanned, and blonde, the stranger's jeans and shirt couldn't disguise the lush curves of her body. Jealousy instantly reared up and gave Katie a hard bite.

Reece stood as she climbed out of her car, heading toward her with a warm smile. The woman walked right beside him. It had taken a lot of courage for Katie to come here today, knowing how things would probably turn out. She didn't need another woman clouding the picture.

"Hey, sugar." Reece wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "Meet Elizabeth Gillibrand. She owns the Lucky L horse farm a couple of miles from here. Liz, this is Katie Warren. She used to live around here."

"Hello." Her body tense in Reece's casual embrace, Katie gave the woman a sharp nod.

Liz smiled and held out her hand. "Nice to meet you." She gave Katie a curious look. "It must have been a long time since you've been here. I don't remember seeing you around."

"I left when I went to college, and shortly after that my folks moved to New Mexico."

"Aha." She looked from one to the other. "Well, I guess I'll be running along. I have two more stops to make. Thanks for the check, Reece." She focused her gaze on Katie. "I just came by to collect a check for the Cattleman's Association scholarship fund. Reece has been very generous with us every year."

Katie relaxed fractionally. So this wasn't a social visit. "I'm glad to hear that."

"We've been neighbors for the past five years and served on some committees together." Liz leaned

a little closer to her. "I can see now why he never gives any of the women around here the time of day. Where's he been hiding you?"

Reece's laugh was self-conscious. "No interrogation, Liz. You know how I am about my privacy. Just like you."

"Harmless teasing, Reece. That's all. Well, see you at the meeting Wednesday night."

"You got it."

Liz climbed into her truck, and they watched her head off down the long driveway.

"Do you know her well?" Katie asked.

Reece shrugged. "We're friendly, but no more so than I am with anyone else. Anyway, Liz is a very outgoing person, but she seems to keep an invisible wall around herself. I don't think she has many friends."

"She seems nice," Katie told him almost primly.

He burst out laughing. "Nice, huh? Katydid, rest assured she's no competition."

"I didn't mean—"

"It's okay." His face sobered. "I was afraid you'd change your mind about today and not show up."

"And give you something to rag on me about? Not likely."

"No ragging today. Come on. Josefina packed us a feast before she left for church."

His hand closed over her upper arm and electricity singed every one of her nerve endings. Oh, god. How was she going to do this?

Reece led her through the house to the sparkling kitchen, picked up a canvas bag sitting on the counter, then strolled out the back door toward the barn. One of the hands was just leading two horses into the yard. She recognized Windsurfer at once, Reece's Appaloosa, much older now but still huge and majestic. The other horse was smaller, a sorrel, with a friendly look in her eyes.

Reece hooked the canvas bag onto his saddle then took the sorrel's reins from the man holding them. "Thanks, Randy. I'll take it from here."

Randy smiled, touched his hat and moved back into the barn.

"We only run a small crew on the weekends," Reece said. "Just enough to check the pastures. I rotate them so no one has to work every Sunday."

"I remember your dad used to do that, too." When she saw sadness wash briefly across his face she was sorry she'd mentioned his father. But then a smile brushed it away.

"He taught us a lot of good habits. Well." He patted the sorrel. "This is Miss Daisy. She's a good ride."

"Miss Daisy?" Katie cocked an eyebrow.

"Vince, the idiot, and his wife had just watched *Driving Miss Daisy* the night before she was born. My sister-in-law insisted that had to be her name."

Katie laughed. "Well, I expect Miss Daisy and I will get along just fine."

They rode out of the yard slowly, crossing the nearest pasture. Reece bent low in his saddle to open the gate in the furthest fence and closed it after they made their way through. The land opened to them, and he nudged his horse into a brisk canter. Katie easily kept up on the willing sorrel, laughing joyously as the wind caught a few strands of her hair and brushed against her skin. Her blood was racing in her veins and she had a sense of freedom she hadn't felt in years. Ten years to be exact.

Eventually Reece pulled up his mount at a spot very familiar to Katie—a creek that meandered through the ranch. Three huge oak trees clustered in one spot, offering the perfect place for a picnic. She should know. She and Reece had picnicked often in this very spot. And had a lot of very hot sex.

She reined in her horse, shifting uncomfortably

in her saddle. This place was so full of memories. Surely Reece knew that. And just as certainly, he'd deliberately chosen it. A nervous flutter danced through her stomach. And if he made a move on her, then what? Where did they go from here?

"Are you going to sit on that horse all day?" he teased, swinging easily to the ground and unhooking the canvas bag.

"Um, no. Just...looking around."

"We used to spend a lot of time riding these pastures, Katydid. Remember?"

More than she wanted to.

She dismounted easily and tied the reins on the saddle. Reece hadn't hitched his horse to any of the trees so she didn't, either, assuming they were both well-trained enough to just hang out.

"Come help me here," he called, unrolling the blanket that had been tucked at the back of his saddle.

Together, they spread it on the ground, and Katie dropped onto it cross-legged while Reece unpacked their picnic and spread it out on a smaller checkered cloth.

"I'm surprised Josefina is still working for you," she commented. "I thought she was ancient when I was a kid."

Reece chuckled. "Not quite that ancient. But she's not at the house full time anymore. Her daughter cleans once a week and irons. Josefina cooks for me every Monday and puts the stuff in the freezer. Microwaves are a wonderful invention."

The picnic was delicious—cold fried chicken, potato salad, and brownies, along with a bottle of excellent wine. It reminded Katie of all the other picnics she and Reece had shared years ago. They chatted easily as they ate—about the ranch, movies they liked, surface topics. Everything but the elephant in the room. With the combination of good

food, wine, and the ambience, she relaxed, enjoying the day. By the time they'd polished everything off, Katie was beginning to think this was exactly what Reece had told her it would be—two people renewing their friendship.

But was that what she really wanted? Or had she secretly hoped for a lot more?

She stretched out her legs and leaned back on her hands. "You've certainly managed to get your life under control."

His face sobered. "Not nearly enough, darlin'. At least not since you walked back into it."

She sat up straight. "Listen, Reece..."

He grabbed the cloth to slide the food out of the way and stretched out beside her, gently easing her back down to the blanket. His fingers brushed a strand of hair from her cheek. His touch almost singed her skin.

"I can listen to whatever you want to say, Katydid, but sometimes words just get in the way."

I should move. I should push him away.

Instead, she watched as his face moved closer to hers and his mouth touched hers like the kiss of a butterfly's wings. Instant heat flashed through her, intensified as Reece trailed the outline of her lips with the tip of his tongue. He traced them over and over, like a kid licking an ice cream cone, until she wanted to grab his hair and pull him in tight.

"Don't move a muscle," he said, obviously sensing her intentions, maybe from the look in her eyes. "Just. Stay. Right. There."

Katie lay still, immobilized by his Dom voice and his expression, as his tongue did incredible things to her mouth. His scent filled her nostrils, a wonderful mixture of spice and pasture and horse and soap. And man. Reece. It was so familiar to her that her womb contracted instantly in response.

"You taste just like you always did," he

murmured and thrust his tongue into her mouth.

It was like swallowing a live flame. Fire raced everywhere, dancing across her tongue, the roof of her mouth, inside her lips. Her breathing hitched, and she reached up to thread her fingers through his hair.

“No.” The single word was simple, but commanding

One of his large hands closed over her wrists and stretched her arms over her head. His long fingers were like manacles binding her, but at that moment, she couldn’t have moved anyway. Just the sound of his voice had triggered the switch that tumbled her into subspace.

Oh, shit, was her last thought before everything disappeared except the two of them on the blanket. Reece’s control thrilled her, made her breasts ache, her nipples harden and liquid soak the crotch of her pants. She squeezed her thighs together, trying to contain the thudding of her pulse inside her cunt.

“Don’t move,” he said again, breathing the words into her mouth. “If you disobey I might have to spank you.”

Yes, yes! Spank me! Spank me!

Ohmigod! What’s happening here?

“This is what I wanted all those years ago, Katydid.” His voice was rough with need. “All the things you see in the club. That you saw in Atlanta. I tried them with others, but it’s never been enough.”

“May I speak freely?” She was well into sub mode and couldn’t pull herself out of it, mostly because she wanted all the things she knew he could do to her.

She felt his lips turn up into a grin. “Of course.”

The truth. That’s what she needed to tell him. The real reason why everything he wanted had scared her so very, very much, despite how she loved him. “Two things I need to get out here.” She

swallowed. "You scare me, Reece. You're such a strong personality, I was afraid I'd lose myself in you. It was enough of a battle just to maintain my individuality without adding anything else to the situation." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I was afraid I wouldn't be me anymore."

Reece stilled, his lips barely touching hers now, one hand still wrapped around both wrists, the other flat on her stomach. His face was completely unreadable, but something sad lurked in his eyes.

"That would never happen, Katie. Never. Didn't you know that? Didn't you trust me?"

Frustration scored his face. He looked as if he didn't know whether to be angry with himself or her.

"I didn't know what to think, Reece. All of a sudden you wanted to change things. You were always such a dominant personality, right from the beginning. I didn't know how much of me you wanted."

"All of you. Every last bit. But only as long you as you kept on being yourself. A really good D/s relationship is a lot of give and take, compromise, each one finding out what the other can and will tolerate. What works for them. What makes them feel good. What makes them connect."

They stared at each other for a long time.

"I know that. I do." She exhaled, only then realizing she'd barely been breathing. "I've learned a lot since that...episode, Reece. A whole lot."

"About?"

"About the D/s life. About relationships. About what's real and what isn't."

"And what's your conclusion?"

Reece waited, tense, on edge, to see what her answer would be. When he told her to lie still, she hadn't argued with him, hadn't given him the guff she would have years ago. He'd agonized over this visit for the past two days, wondering if he should

play it casual. Or be more aggressive. If so, how aggressive? Last night, he'd barely slept a wink. But from Katie's responses to him today when he gave her the first command, used his Dom voice, he had a sense she'd moved at once into submissive head space. How far could he push this?

"Katie?" he prompted. "I'm waiting for an answer. Now."

"This is hard for me," she told him, her gaze still locked with his. "I don't know if what I want is good for either of us. Or if it will work." She sighed. "You heard what I said earlier. But I will tell you how much it shocked me to learn I apparently was born to be the perfect sub. It...That is...I mean..."

"It arouses you," he finished for her. "Enhances the sexual experience."

She nodded and inside him something eased.

"You like being dominated. Told how to behave sexually."

Again she nodded.

"Did you hear what I said before, Katydid? I don't want a sub who needs the lifestyle twenty/four seven. I want some grit and sass. Interacting as equals in many things. And you have a streak of independence a mile wide that I always loved. But..."

"But?"

"But I'd damn sure give anything to have you be my submissive in the bedroom." He licked the edges of her lips again. "To be your Sir, to have you willing to do whatever I command. You don't know how badly I wanted it all those years ago, sugar. And the hunger hasn't eased in all this time."

"Surely you've found pleasure with the subs you've played with. You don't need me." Katie had to know if she was just a game to him, unfinished business that he could cross off his to-do list.

He studied her face, his eyes seeming to look

right through her.

“None of them were you. And since you came back into my life, it’s your face I see when I’m in that room. Your body I want.”

Her pussy throbbed and her breasts ached at his words. She was almost frightened at how badly she wanted him. Maybe even craved him.

He nipped the soft lobe of her ear and traced the shell so lightly a shiver skated over her.

“What about you?” he whispered. “Did you ever think about me when you were with others?”

All the time.

She wet her lips. “Y-yes. I did. But here’s the other thing. If we’re going to make this work, no more subs for you. No one but me. Surely you don’t think I could stand to have someone else topping me after we’ve been together.”

His smile was slow and sexy. “You took the words right out of my mouth. I don’t want anyone but you again. Ever. We have the real thing now, Katie. We don’t have to pretend. Are you willing to take it further? See if we can make it work?”

Was she? It almost seemed as if the moment he agreed there’d be no one else for either of them, the decision had already been made. She nodded, so consumed by sudden lust she was unable to form words.

“All right, then.”

Chapter Seven

Reece licked her ear again.

"I'm going to take my hand off your wrists," he told her. "But in your mind I want you to pretend they're still bound together, staked to the ground behind your head. You're still unable to move them." His smile was slow and hungry. "If you disobey me and move them, I'll have to punish you."

And lord, how he hoped she would disobey him. He couldn't wait to spank that ass, turn it bright red. See the heat streak down to her sweet, little cunt. Feel it sopping with her juices.

Control yourself, Halliday.

And he certainly needed to. His cock was already so swollen and painfully hard he had to shift his position to keep from doing damage to himself.

"I'm going to pull up your top," he told her. Describing what he was doing to her had always been a turn-on for both of them. "Then I'm going to open your bra and pay a lot of attention to your gorgeous nipples. Feel the fabric slide up your skin, Katie? Oh, lord, you still wear those skimpy little lace bras I always loved."

He took one nipple in his mouth through the fabric and grazed it with his teeth. Answering heat flared in her eyes.

"You always liked that, Katydid. And I loved doing it." With one hand, he deftly opened the front clasp of her bra and brushed the lace aside. There were those perfect nipples, staring at him, tempting him. "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to buy you a pair of nipple clamps. Thin bars that

squeeze these little berries real tight. Then I'm going to suck on them and bite them until they swell to twice their size and turn that dark shade of red I love so much. But for now this will have to do."

He pinched one nipple between his thumb and forefinger, squeezing its hardness, and flicked his tongue back and forth against the tip. Katie moaned with each pass of his tongue and rocked back and forth slightly.

Reece raised his head. "Don't move," he ordered. "No matter what I do, I do not want you to move. Not one part of your body. You may nod if you understand."

When she indicated her understanding, electricity sizzled through him. She had no idea how much he wished he had her in his private room, wrists manacled and arms stretched to the ceiling, forbidding her to move while he tormented her breasts. He realized with a fleeting thought that if this thing between them worked, he'd have to make a lot of modifications to his bedroom. He had no intention of taking Katie to Rawhide to play unless it was a Sunday when they would be alone.

Drawing himself back to the moment, he used his teeth and tongue on her compressed nipple until it darkened and plumped even more. Sweet, little sounds rolled from her throat, and he felt the tension in her body as she struggled to keep herself still. He turned to the other nipple, giving it the same treatment, loving her small moans and whimpers. His problem would be maintaining enough control over his own body to do all the things he wanted with her. To her.

And it hit him with the force of an explosion that he'd never stopped loving this woman. Never stopped wanting her or needing her. If anything, he loved her even more today than he had ten years ago. Now it was a mature love, one that had much

more depth to it.

Did she feel the same way?

Moving his mouth down her body, he paused at her navel to rim the whorl of flesh with the tip of his tongue, drawing circles and then licking the spot over and over. Katie quivered as his mouth traveled over her skin, and he could tell the tremendous effort she was exerting not to move. Reece grinned to himself. He was about to ramp that up.

With one hand, he flicked open the button at the top of her jeans and slowly drew the zipper down. Two things hit him so hard he almost came in his jeans. Katie was wearing the tiniest scrap of see-through green silk over her mound, and her cunt was completely bare. Shit! How was he supposed to hold himself in check when he saw that?

“Lift up,” he ordered, kneeling to take off her boots, then her jeans and what passed for her panties.

He nudged her legs apart and stared at the very naked pussy exposed to him.

“Bend your knees,” he ordered. “Spread your legs as wide as you can and plant your feet. After that stay absolutely still, no matter what I do.”

He shifted so he was between her outspread thighs, staring at that beautiful cunt with absolutely nothing to shield itself from his gaze.

“Still just as pink and pretty as ever,” he said. “Only now there’s nothing to hide it from my sight. I’m guessing you wax. It’s so completely clean.” He looked up. “Did you just have it done?”

Katie nodded.

Reece smiled. “Did you wax for me, darlin’? I can think of a lot of other things to do with wax on your sensitive places.” He touched the very tip of her clit with a finger. “Like right...here.”

Her body twitched in automatic reflex. Reece shifted his gaze to lock with hers. “I said don’t move,

remember? We'll let this one little hitch go, but the next time..." He smoothed his open palm down her thigh. "The next time your ass is mine."

Reece slid one finger into her open cunt, pulling it back out covered with her liquid. Again, holding her gaze with his, he moved his finger slowly back and forth over the tip of her clit. Katie was always big on clitoral stimulation. How long could she hold out with his teasing?

"I know you love this, sugar. And this little bundle of flesh is so pink, so swollen, so responsive to my touch."

He teased it again, deliberately pressing just a little harder, knowing what would happen. Sure enough, despite the muscles straining in her body, Katie reacted automatically, her body jumping at the contact. He pinched the little bundle of nerves, watching her face.

"Well, that does it, darlin'. I think I need to show you who's in charge here."

With movements so fast he even impressed himself, he lifted her, turned her, and draped her over his thighs, her nicely rounded ass staring up at him. Jesus. He didn't know if he wanted to spank her, probe her with his fingers, or just shove his cock into her and ride her over the mountain. Pressing one arm across her back to hold her in place, he slid a hand over the upturned globes, stroking, teasing, making her wait for it. He could feel her hold her breath in anticipation.

One fingertip traced the crease where her ass met her thigh, back and forth, a whisper of a touch, ramping up the expectation even more. Only, as his erection became more demanding, he wondered just who he was teasing here.

Smack!

The palm of his hand landed on Katie's flesh with a satisfying contact. Warmth blazed along his

arm. Shit. This was better than he'd ever dreamed.

"Oh!" The word burst from her mouth.

For a moment he thought she might try to pull away, but she wriggled her hips at him, inviting further punishment.

Damn.

Smack!

The sound, an aphrodisiac itself, echoed in the air. Reece nudged her thighs apart and plunged two fingers into her cunt. Soaked. Oh, yeah, she was definitely getting off on this. Submission was the key to Katie's sexual satisfaction, and he was just the one to satisfy her.

He spanked her again and again, alternating between her ass and the drenched lips of her pussy, aroused by the flush of red that spread over her skin. Katie wiggled more as the slaps got harder and hot little moans burst from her mouth, exciting him even more. He counted until he reached fifteen, making a mental note to have her count next time, he trailed his fingers through the wetness of her folds, dragging her juices up into the cleft of her buttocks, and using them to moisten the tempting tight hole of her anus.

"I'm going to fuck you here, Katydid," he told her in a husky voice. "I'm going to tie you up and spread plenty of lube inside and then I'm going to give you the most intense orgasm you've ever had." He rubbed his hand over her skin again. "But first I'm going to get a brand new butt plug and slide it in here and make you wear it for a week. Stretch you out good so you'll be ready for me. And you'll take it."

He flipped her over, stunned by the intense look of desire in her eyes and the flush on her face. And at her next words.

"Yes, Sir. Whatever you wish."

She was still in subspace, totally there for him. He cursed his bad planning that they were out in the

middle of nowhere with no toys, no restraints, nothing to give them additional pleasure. He lifted her to him and ravaged her mouth, sliding his tongue everywhere, pulling her small one into his own mouth. Stopping only when they were both breathless.

"I want us to do this, Katie. This is your last chance to back out."

She shook her head. "No. I want to please you."

Emotion raced through him, clutching at his heart as much as his balls and his cock. For the first time since that awful night, he was optimistic about their future together.

Laying her back down on the blanket, he shucked his clothes and boots, yanked a condom from the pocket of his jeans, and rolled it on with hands that trembled slightly. He lifted her legs and bent them back, positioned himself at her entrance and with a roll of his hips, drove into her.

"I want it all with you, Katydid. Every last bit."

He punctuated his words with thrust after thrust of his cock into her wet grasp. Katie wrapped her legs around him and pulled him tightly against her, dragging him in deep. He held himself for a moment, looking hard into her eyes, reading total and complete submission there. Lightning singed along his spine and into his balls. He was ready *now*. And, from the fluttering walls of her cunt clenching around him, he knew she was, too.

In, out, again, again, faster, faster. When they fell over the edge and crashed together, both bodies shook with the force of the impact. He wasn't sure he'd ever stop coming, spurting heavily into the latex reservoir. But then at last they were both still, covered in sweat and dragging air into their lungs. When he could finally move, he slid from her carefully and rolled to the side, closing his eyes.

He was startled to feel hands touching him and

looked up to see Katie kneeling beside him and carefully removing the condom. The tip of her tongue peeped out between her lips as she concentrated on her task. When she had it all the way up to the head, she reached for his jeans and the handkerchief she knew he always carried in a back pocket. Meticulously, she finished removing the condom, carefully wiped any excess from his cock and his balls and wrapped the used latex in the square of cotton.

“We don’t want to leave it out here for the animals to eat and choke on,” she told him in a soft voice. “May I put my clothes back on, Sir?”

He was amazed at how quickly she’d accepted this role with him. He’d expected he’d have to coax her into it, tease her, especially after what she’d said earlier. Take it one step at a time. But it was as if everything that had happened in the intervening years had disappeared and the old magic rolled right over them. In a new form.

He cleared his throat. “Yes. You may dress.”

He pulled on his own things, watching her as she did the same. When they were both finished, she stood before him in a submissive posture, but he didn’t miss the tiny smile teasing at her lips. He laughed aloud.

“You little witch. You were all prepared for this, weren’t you?”

She grinned at him. “Be serious, Reece. I didn’t think you asked me out here just to eat fried chicken. I knew if I showed up, we’d both be taking a whole new step in our lives.”

He pulled her close and cupped her chin, tilting her face so he could look into her eyes.

“Are you saying you’re willing to take this further? See if we can make it work?”

She swallowed before answering him, as if what she had to say was difficult. “On one condition.”

A smile quirked the corner of his mouth. "A sub laying down conditions?"

"This sub is, if you want more."

He sighed. "Okay, let's have it."

"Remember what I said about you having a strong personality? Being afraid you'd swallow me up?"

"And I told you there was nothing to worry about. That I'd always want you to be Katie."

"A relationship like this can only be built on complete trust, Reece. You know that. And I have to be sure that if I needed it, you could bend for me. Respect what I needed."

"Sugar, I promise you—"

"No." She reached up and touched his lips. "Here's what I want. Give me one night, even part of one, to reverse roles. Accept me as your Mistress as you want me to accept you as my Master. If you do that for me, I'm yours. Can you trust me enough to give me control for, oh, say, one hour? Can you, Reece? Do you love me that much?"

His gut twisted as he thought about it. What she was asking would be very tough, but he knew it was some kind of test for her. Had a Dom abused her trust one time? Was that what this was all about? He'd have to do some research, but he knew his answer couldn't wait. In or out, he told himself.

"All right. Yes. I'll do it." He ran his knuckles over her cheek. "Next Sunday night. At Rawhide. The club will be closed, and we'll have all the privacy we'll need. Unless meeting me at the club bothers you." He paused. "I don't have things set up in my bedroom." He grinned. "Yet."

She tensed for a moment, obviously not expecting things to happen this fast. But then she smiled back at him.

"All right. Rawhide's not a problem. There won't be anyone around." Then the smile disappeared, and

she frowned. "What if Clint decides to work in the office that night?"

"I'll take care of Clint." And that was a conversation he really wasn't looking forward to. "And Katie?"

"Yes?"

"No matter what, I love you."

Her features softened, and she smiled. "I love you, too, Reece. I guess I always have. Maybe things are working out the way they're supposed to after all."

"I may not be at Rawhide much this week," he told her.

She frowned. "Avoiding me?"

"Not at all. But playing with any of the subs has suddenly lost its appeal for me." He grazed his knuckles across her cheek, tucked a stray piece of hair behind her ear. "I'm saving myself for next Sunday."

Her beautiful mouth turned up in a grin. "Good."

He cupped her cheeks with his hands. "You know I wouldn't do this for anyone but you, right?"

She nodded. "I just want us to be able to trust each other, Reece. Can you understand that?"

He brushed his thumb at the corner of her mouth. "Did something happen to you, Katydid? Something that shattered your trust?"

She tore her gaze away from his and looked down at her feet. "I just have to be sure," she told him.

He sensed this wasn't the time to push her. "See you next Sunday, then. Seven o'clock."

"Seven o'clock."

"Good." He grinned. "Let's get out of here before I tear your clothes off again."

Back at the house she started toward her car, then turned back. "And Reece? Be sure you're properly prepared."

He knew the paces Mistresses put their subs through. How much of that did Katie expect from him? A powerful shot of lust surged through him, tightening his balls and swelling his cock. He stood in front of the house for a long time after she drove away, wishing someone would come along and give him advice on how to handle the situation.

Chapter Eight

The week stretched interminably for Reece. He drove himself mercilessly at the ranch, riding from dusk until dawn, some nights so tired he could hardly get his boots off. Pushing everyone so hard his brothers finally cornered him in the barn at the end of a particularly difficult day.

“Okay,” Mark said, crowding him against a stall door. “Enough of this shit. What the fuck is going on?”

“I have no idea what you mean.” Reece glared at him, lifted his hat, wiped his forehead, and jammed the hat back in place.

“He means,” Vince said, “you’ve been the biggest asshole all week. The men are threatening to quit if you don’t quit riding them so hard. We’ve ridden fence so many times I think we can all count the fence posts in our sleep. And that’s a lot of damn acreage.”

“They get paid to work hard,” he growled.

“But not ridden into the ground. Shit, even the cattle complained the other day when you pushed so hard to move that one herd to a different pasture.”

“Yeah,” Mark grinned. “I actually heard one of them ask what got your shorts in such a twist.”

“I think it’s because he hasn’t gotten laid,” Vince told his brother.

Mark lifted an eyebrow. “You could be right. His truck’s been parked here every night. Our big brother hasn’t been out doing his usual tomcatting.”

“You two leave my sex life alone,” Reece snapped and tried to push his way past them.

Vince put a hand on his shoulder. When he spoke, his voice has softened. "We're just concerned is all. This isn't like you. If something's wrong, you know you can talk to us about it."

"Nothing's wrong. Now if you'll excuse me, I need a shower."

"And an attitude adjustment," Mark called after him as he stomped off toward the house.

As soon as he was inside Reece headed for the bar in his den, pouring two fingers of his favorite bourbon into a glass and downing half of it in one swallow. He didn't need his brothers riding his ass. Not this week. And Clint had managed to add his two cents worth when Reece checked in with him during the week. Ostensibly, he'd called to check on some minor things but actually to check on how Katie was doing.

Clint knew exactly what he wanted.

"I think this is a big mistake," Clint told him. "And if you screw up the situation at the club, I'll be forced to beat your ass black and blue. But I know you'll do what you want anyway. Just try to use what's left of your brain. And yeah, I'll keep an eye on her when you're not here."

He wondered what they'd all think if they knew about his date with Katie on Sunday night and what the real purpose was. He was having plenty of second thoughts about it himself. He knew his own personality, alpha born and alpha bred, with the genes and desires of a full Dom. But Katie needed to know he would give over the same control to her that he was asking her to give to him, and he loved her enough to make the effort. He just hoped he didn't screw it up.

By the time Sunday rolled around his nerves were so raw he had to make a conscious effort to keep himself together. He allowed himself one small drink before he left the house, sipping it slowly.

Alcohol and BDSM play didn't mix in his book, and the club had strict rules about it. People lost control, lost their rational self, and bad things could happen. He didn't plan for that to be the situation tonight.

Katie's car was already in the parking lot when he let himself in the back door. He walked slowly down the short hallway to his private room, assuming that's where she wanted to play. And was surprised to see her standing outside the door, waiting for him.

"I didn't want to do this where you take your subs." She handed him a key card. "Room five. I'll give you a few minutes to get ready."

His nerves were jittering again as he let himself into the room. He loved her. He could do this.

He'd taken a long time showering and preparing his body at home. Now he stripped off his clothes, laying them neatly over a small chair in one corner, and lifted the bottle of oil she'd left on the table next to it. While he rubbed it everywhere on his body, including his balls and cock, he looked around to see what she might have chosen for tonight's play, but everything was still put away. Did she want him to imagine? To anticipate? Well, he damn sure was doing that.

Finally he capped the bottle, set it aside, and stood beneath the spotlight, waiting as so many subs had waited for him. The heat of the light activated reagents in the oil and a layer of warmth spread over his skin. His cock and his balls tingled. Ceding control was so foreign to his nature. But then he remembered taking control was just as strange to Katie. How would she handle it? Would she freak out? Would he? Anticipation and nerves battled inside him. Was this the way his subs felt when they waited for him?

His heart tripped when he heard the swish of a key card in the slot and the door click as it opened.

And when Katie stepped inside, his heart damn near stopped beating.

Her mass of dark hair curled wildly about her face, her eyes—which he hadn't paid enough attention to before—were heavily made up, the lashes thickened with mascara. Her plump lips were colored a deep rose. But it was the outfit that stole his breath. Fingerless mesh gloves rose to her elbows. A dark red bustier pulled in her waist and pushed her breasts upward so all but the underneath slope showed, the nipples poking out temptingly. Garters stretched down to hold sheer, black hose in place, and her feet were shod in red stiletto heels. And that was all she wore.

Her legs climbed all the way to there, and *there* was her naked pussy fully exposed beneath the bottom edge of the bustier. It already glistened with cream. His cock flexed involuntarily, and electricity sizzled through his testicles. God, he wanted to bend her over the padded bench and paddle that sweet little ass until it matched her lipstick. Then plug her ass with a vibrator, clamp her nipples, and make her kneel to take his cock into her mouth. Only before he came, he'd get behind her and plunge into that hot, little cunt.

Shit. He was in big trouble here.

"I see you are properly oiled but also fully aroused." She stepped closer and touched his shaft with the tip of one finger. "You may not come until I give you permission. Understood?"

He nodded and cleared his throat. "Yes, Mistress."

"Good. Very good."

She stepped to the wall and depressed a button. Manacles descended from the ceiling on lengths of chain until the dangled just above his shoulders.

"Place these cuffs around your wrists and lock them in place," she ordered, something sparking in

her eyes.

Reece locked the cuffs carefully into place, then waited while she pushed the button again and the cuffs rose until his arms were stretched high over his head. Taut but not too uncomfortable. Good. Obviously she wasn't into intense pain.

Katie walked behind him, and he heard her unlocking the doors of a wall cabinet. Sliding open a drawer. When she walked in front of him and knelt down, her soft as silk hair brushed against his thighs. He had to grit his teeth to keep his cock from exploding. He concentrated on breathing evenly as she locked his ankles to a spreader bar, his legs about three feet apart. He'd used one many times on his subs, enjoying the feeling of helplessness it created for them. Now he knew how they felt, and he was stunned at the heat that rolled through him.

"I think we're ready to begin." Her voice was low and sultry. "I'm looking forward to this." She stood on tiptoe and kissed him. "But first you must give me a safe word."

Safe word? Would he need one with her?

"I'm waiting. Do I need to punish you for refusing to give me one?"

"No." His voice was thick and he cleared his throat again. "Katydid."

Her eyes flared, and for an instant, he was afraid she'd tell him to pick another one, but she simply dipped her head once.

"Fine. Now we're ready."

She disappeared behind him again, and when she returned, she was holding a complex cock ring. If he hadn't been watching her so closely, he'd never have noticed the slight trembling of her hands. So. She wasn't quite as in command as she pretended to be. It gave him confidence and made him relax fractionally.

"I understand that this can help restrain orgasm

if used properly. And tonight I want you to experience all the things I have planned before I allow you your release.” She stared into his eyes. “You do trust me, don’t you?”

“Yes.” He heard the hoarseness of expectation in his voice. “I trust you.”

A smile flirted with her lips. “Good. Very good.”

Reece had to clench his jaw to maintain control while her fingers, soft as spun silk, wrapped the cock ring beneath his balls and around the base of his penis. The oil warmed his skin, but not nearly as much as her touch. Every nerve ending was firing, every sense on high alert. It gave him an explicit understanding of what his subs felt when he played with them and that gave him an even greater sense of power. But in a good way. A way that let him know how much pleasure he was able to give them even as they pleased him.

When she had the apparatus firmly in place, she ran the tips of her fingers across the surface of his sac and up the length of his cock. He shuddered. He couldn’t help it.

“Does my touch arouse you?” Fire danced in her eyes. “Here?” She stroked the thick head. “And here?” She squeezed his sac gently. “Tell me. The words.”

“Yes.” He released a breath. “It arouses me.”

“And this?” She pressed her mouth to one nipple and took it between her teeth.

Reece shuddered, his pulse racing.

“Ah. You did not answer me immediately. I think, underneath that arrogant attitude you wear, you really want me to punish you.” She nipped at the other nipple. “You can tell me how the sting of the lash you use on others feels to you.”

She walked back to the cupboard, and he heard her moving things around. Then she was back, holding a single tail whip just like the kind he

preferred. When she trailed it lightly over his skin, he couldn't control the shiver that raced through him. Jesus. She'd certainly learned the art of control from someone.

"I thought about blindfolding you," she went on in a conversational voice. "It makes all the other senses so much more acute. But I wanted to be able to look in your eyes." She stood directly in front of him now. "See exactly what you were feeling. The eyes are the mirror of the soul, you know."

She moved around his body again, the tail of the whip whispering over his skin. Suddenly Reece realized he wanted to feel that pain. Wanted her to use the lash to sting him. Was this how his subs felt, craving the kiss of pain to reach the edge of pleasure?

He summoned every bit of control to remain still when she trailed the whip through the crease of his buttocks, stroking it up and down, teasing at his anus. His buttocks clenched involuntarily.

"I see you like that."

Reece derived some small satisfaction from the unsteadiness of her voice and wondered if she'd really be able to carry through with the whole thing. Whatever happened, he'd do what he needed to because he loved her so damn much. He'd spent the week discovering just how very important she was to him and what an important part she played in her life. He desperately wanted her not only as his sub but also as his life partner. He wanted her to feel the same way, and if this was what it took, so be it.

But as her slim fingers probed the entrance to his rectum, he ground his teeth together. Maybe it wouldn't be quite as easy as he thought. His cock jumped within its bindings, and he looked down to see a drop of fluid beading at the slit.

Her fault. She makes me too damn horny.

Katie ran the tip of her finger over the broad

head of his cock, spreading the liquid over the skin.

“Naughty boy. Now I really do need to punish you.”

She walked around behind him, and in a moment, he heard the hiss of the whip in the air and felt its sting on his back. His muscles contracted in response to the pain, but he was shocked at the intensity of the lust that surged through him. No wonder his subs loved to be punished with it. Holy shit! Again the whip snapped, and another blade of pleasure/pain sliced through him. His balls felt unbearably full, his cock hard and swollen. How long did she plan to do this? Could he take it all, as he made his subs do for him?

The whip cracked once more, then he felt her fingers trailing through the crevice of his ass again.

“I understand you like to fuck your subs in the ass,” she said in a conversational tone. Only someone who knew her well would have detected the trembling in her voice.

Reece clenched his fists to steady himself. “I can’t believe they discuss that.”

“You have a preference card, remember?” she reminded him. “So a new sub will be prepared to properly serve you. Anal sex is listed as one of your top preferences. Is that correct?”

When he didn’t answer, her whip landed on his taut buttocks. His cock jumped in the harness and every muscle low in his belly clenched.

“I didn’t hear you answer me.” She was in front of him again, close, rubbing the wet lips of her pussy against his throbbing erection.

He stared into her eyes, seeing desire burning as hot as his own.

“Yes. I love it. Right now I’d do anything to fuck you in the ass.” He cleared his throat. “Mistress.”

Rub, rub, rub. Jesus, she was driving him insane.

“If you are a very good sub for me, I may just give you permission to do that.”

God, yes. Please.

“Would you like to know how that feels?” she asked, a teasing smile pulling at the corners of her mouth.

Oh, shit.

“I would enjoy whatever pleases my Mistress.” Only he wanted to be the one calling the shots. Reece wasn’t sure how long he could keep this up.

“Hold completely still for me,” she ordered, moving out of his sight again.

In a moment, he felt her fingers separating the cheeks of his ass and a slim finger spreading cool gel on his tight hole. When she inserted her finger, massaging the lube into the dark tissues, he nearly lost it. How would he take whatever else she had in mind?

“You know,” she said in a low, intimate voice. “The instructions for the cock ring say not to leave it on for more than twenty minutes or there can be physical damage.”

Reece was well aware of that. Clint had actually had to revoke someone’s membership because they refused to follow directions and nearly injured a sub. He couldn’t imagine Katie wanting to inflict that on him.

“So we’d better move along,” she continued. “Take a deep breath, Reece. You know the drill. Deep breath, hold it in, let it out when I tell you to.”

In the next instant, he felt a metal wand entering the dark tunnel of his rectum with a slow, steady pressure. The minute it slid over his prostate and hit *that spot*, it took every bit of discipline he had not to come, especially when she began to move it in and out with slow, even strokes.

Oh, shit! Oh, shit! Oh, shit!

Now he knew exactly how his subs felt when he

aroused them with anal play. A surge of lust stronger than anything he'd felt in a long time surged through him. The pleasure was so intense it consumed him. Release hovered so near he had to beat it back.

But he had to show her he trusted her. That he could put himself in her hands. Do whatever she ordered. Follow her discipline.

He was shocked when the wand slid out and he heard it fall to the floor. Then Katie's slim fingers were unbuckling the cock harness and tossing it aside. She threw her arms around his neck and showered kisses on his face.

"Oh, Reece," she murmured. "I don't want to be the top. I just needed to see if you could...if you would..."

Her body was trembling, and he wished his damn hands were free so he could put his arms around her.

"Ssh, ssh," he soothed. "It's all right. Finish it, Katie. I'll do whatever you ask of me."

"I know." Her words were half sob. "I know it now. But I had to be sure." She fumbled to unfasten all the shackles and free him, then dropped to her knees before him. "I wish to serve you, Sir," she said in a tremulous voice. "If, that is, it pleases you."

He reached down and lifted her to her feet, shoving his fingers through her hair to clasp her head, his other arm around her waist.

"It will always please me, Katydid. You never, ever have to worry about losing yourself with me. Outside the bedroom, I always want you to be the strong, independent woman you've grown into. Can you believe that?"

She nodded against his shoulders. "I do now. I just had to be sure."

"However," he told her in a rueful voice, "we still have a problem."

She tensed and raised her eyes to his. “A problem? What do you mean? What’s wrong?”

Chapter Nine

Katie stood there as Reece slid his hands along her arms, skimmed her shoulders, and cupped her face, taking a moment to brush his lips against hers. God, he tasted so sweet. Addictive. How had she ever run away from that?

“Put your hand on my cock,” he ordered in his Dom voice. “Now, Katie.”

At once, every need for control vanished. She fumbled between them in her haste to find the hot, engorged shaft. Hell, she’d certainly done her job. The man was nearly ready to come standing there. She ran her fingers over him lightly, stroking, teasing. His hands on her tightened, tension running through him.

“I should paddle your ass for what you put me through,” he told her, his mouth barely a breath away from hers.

Immediately, cream flooded her pussy, and her nipples tingles, lust curling like a dark ribbon inside her.

Yes, yes, yes! Do it. Now.

But she kept her mouth shut.

Reece smiled. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you, Katydid.” One hand moved behind her to cup her ass, squeezing just enough to send a pinch of pain through her. “I’d bend you over that bench there, strap down your wrists and ankles, and turn your wonderful ass bright red. Then I’d...” He stopped. “I think that’s just what I’ll do. Right now. Only instead of the paddle I think you need to feel the whip.” He lowered his voice. “My favorite, you know.

I love to hear the hiss and pop as that thin tail snaps through the air before touching flesh. See the bright red stripes it leaves. I never realized until tonight the tremendous pleasure that comes from riding the edge of pain." He nibbled her ear lobe. "Would you like me to use the whip, Katydid?"

Like it? She could barely control the fever racing through her at his words. The walls of her pussy fluttered and throbbed, and her clit and nipples ached unbearably just at the thought.

Katie shivered as his hands moved over her, unlacing the bustier, unhooking the garters and pushing the garment from her body. She trembled in anticipation as his gaze took in every inch of her exposed body. One finger trailed through her slit, gathering the cream, and he deliberately licked it from his finger. Her mouth watered as she watched the sensuous move.

"I think we'll leave on the stockings and gloves," he said. "They're a nice touch. Come here, sugar."

He led her, unprotesting, to the bench, bending her so her ass was tilted into the air. As he fastened the cuffs to her wrists and ankles, his hand smoothed over her body, touching everywhere. She groaned as fingers probed her pussy and she heard his grunt of satisfaction when he found her sopping wet.

"Oh, yeah. You love this, don't you, my sweet subbie." He placed a kiss on each cheek of her ass. "Get ready, Katie. Because when we're done I'm going to fuck that sweet ass of yours until you scream your head off with pleasure." He leaned over her, his mouth close to her ear. "And maybe I won't let you come. Maybe I'll make you wait, walk around horny as hell for what you put me through."

"Oh, please, Sir. Please let me come." She was breathless just thinking about him leaving her teetering on the verge. When she tried to hitch her

body so she could rub her clit against the edge of the bench, he put a hand at the small of her back, holding her in place.

“Uh, uh, uh. No cheating.” He leaned over her again, close enough this time that she could feel the warm oil on his skin. One hand slid between her and the padding to find her throbbing clit. He pinched it lightly. “This what you want, Katydid? For me to pluck your clit until you come?”

She nodded, gritting her teeth against the surge of sensation. She wanted to come *so badly*. Working him over had aroused her more than she ever expected.

He laughed, a low rumbling sound. “Or maybe I’ll take pity on you and give you the biggest orgasm you’ve ever had. You’d like that better, wouldn’t you.”

“Oh, yes, Sir. Please, Sir.”

Katie had never been this aroused with any of her Doms, not even the ones who were so clever about teasing her and holding her on the edge. Especially...

Don’t go there.

Some day maybe she could tell Reece about her last relationship that had ended so badly, self-destructing because her obsessively possessive Dom knew he could never own her completely. That someone else had a hold on her that couldn’t be broken. The last night they were together he flew into a crazed, jealous rage, so vicious she’d moved out immediately and begun making plans to leave Atlanta. The offer to manage Rawhide couldn’t have come at a better time. When she discovered it would also bring her back to this complicated situation with Reece, her eagerness was mixed with anxiety but she’d held the secret hope that the connection was still there between the two of them.

“We’ll see how well you take your punishment. I

like to use the whip as an instrument of foreplay. And it will leave such nice marks on that beautiful ass of yours.” He kissed the small of her back. “Reminding you who you belong to. And you do belong to me, Katydid. Make no mistake.” She heard him doing something behind her. “But the paddle first, to warm you up.” He chuckled softly. “And remind you never to run off and leave me again.”

The heavy padded board smacked her ass with a stinging slap, heat raced along the surface of her skin, and she jerked in her restraints.

“Ten,” he told her. “Ten with each. Count with me. I like my sub to count out each one.”

The paddle slapped again.

“Ow! Ow! Ouch!” It stung, and heat bloomed on her buttocks, but oh how fast it streaked to her desperately needy pussy and warmed her clit. “Two!”

Again the paddle fell, and this time lust mingled with the pain. Every molecule in her body wanted him to fuck her. Hard. Now. But she breathed through the desperation and waited for the next rush of sensation.

“Three.”

She counted them out for him, pushing through the pain, welcoming the pleasure, delighting in his sounds of satisfaction. When they reached ten, her ass and her pussy were so inflamed the heat consumed her and aroused her to the point of distraction.

Fuck me, fuck me, fuck me.

Katie heard the thud as he dropped the paddle, then the hiss and crack as he snapped the whip through the air. His favorite, that single tail whip. She remembered how horny she got when she’d spied on him, watched him use it on India. And tonight she’d felt the fire rise within *him* when she’d caressed *his* body with it.

She closed her eyes, waiting, jerking when she

felt the first sting.

“One.” His voice was firm, commanding. “Count with me, Katie, or we’ll make it twenty.”

Again the lash fell, a streak of fire against her already heated flesh.

“T-Two,” she stuttered and tried again to press her throbbing, aching, hungry clit against the leather of the bench.

Again the whip kissed her skin. And again, all the way to ten. Her entire body was on fire by the time he finished, her pussy dripping wet, her pulse pounding so hard she was sure Reece must hear it.

Reece moved his hand slowly over the sweet, red ass upturned to him, then bent and slowly kissed each and every welt. When his fingers slipped between the folds of her pussy, he smiled to himself at the copious amount of liquid he discovered. Oh, yes, she was hot and ready. What a delightful little sub. Better than he dared hope for. But more than that, she was his heart. Had he proved to her this relationship could work? That he gave her his trust as easily as he wanted hers?

Reece unfastened the shackles and eased her from the bench, pulling her into his arms, rubbing her sore bottom. Each stroke of his hand on her skin sent fresh liquid into her aching cunt. He put a hand beneath her chin and tilted up her face. Her eyes were closed, her cheeks flushed.

“Look at me,” he ordered.

Slowly she opened her eyes.

“What do you see on my face? Is there anything there or in my eyes but complete love for you? Answer me.” His breathing halted as he waited for her answer.

Finally she shook her head. “No. Yes, I see you love me.”

“And do you believe me when I say I’ll always love you? And this will work because I will never

take more than you want to freely give?" He paused. "Say it, Katydid. Say the words."

"I love you." The words slid from her mouth on an exhalation of breath. "And I believe you."

The tension eased from his muscles. "All right, then. Now get on your hands and knees because I'm going to fuck you senseless in that beautiful ass of yours."

She tensed slightly as she arranged herself in the position he requested, then visibly relaxed as he prodded at her anal sphincter, inserting a finger to lubricate her tissues. When he was sure he'd smoothed enough gel into her tunnel, he applied the lube liberally to his raging hard-on.

He reminded himself to go a little slow, but he was so damn ready for her, so damn horny it was a real effort. Then the head of his cock was there, pushing, pressing, shoving. She drew in a deep breath and let it out. Then another, and another as he inched his way into her.

Jesus, she was tight as a fist, her hot tissues gripping him so hard he had to fight for control. From behind her he slid one hand between her open thighs, invading her folds until he found her hot, throbbing clit.

And then he rode her, a steady in and out movement, increasing in pace, increasing in force as the friction rubbed his cock and his balls tightened. Katie was making the most delicious little sounds, whimpering and crying and then shouting his name. He stroked her clit, again, again, as the familiar icy tingling raced up his spine and into his testicles. And then, then, then...

"Now, Katie. Come. Right. Now."

They exploded together, the force so violent it shook his entire body. She shuddered beneath him, crying out, pushing back against him, her ass milking him. He spun out, whirling, tumbling,

twisting before finally coming to rest.

They both fell forward, collapsing on the floor, exhausted. Reece turned to keep his weight from her and lay with her in his arms, rocking her, while his heartbeat did its best to return to normal and his breath seesawed in and out of his lungs. He stroked her hair, kissing her forehead and murmuring nonsense to her until they had both recovered. He tilted her chin up and looked into her face.

“Come home with me, Katie. Stay with me. Not just tonight but forever. Be mine.”

She frowned. “But...the club. Your friends. I mean...How will we manage it all? What will people say?”

“We’ll work it out. All of it. I promise.” He sighed as he tucked her head beneath his chin. “It’s you I always wanted, you know. The only person who could fit into all the pieces of my life.”

She sighed and nestled against him. “I’ve been running away from it for years, Reece, but I’ve never left it behind. Yes, I’ll be yours. Always.”

He tightened his arms around her, his heart at peace for the first time in a long time. Katie was the only woman who could blend his two worlds and be at home in both. They still had challenges to meet, but those challenges were nothing as long as the two of them were together. He and his perfect little subbie.

Reece smiled to himself as he thought of all the alterations he was going to add to his bedroom right away. Especially a hook over their bed to hang the whip on, a constant reminder that it bound them together. Forever.

About the Author

Desiree Holt is flavored with the rich experiences of her life, including a long stretch in the music business representing every kind of artist from country singer to heavy metal rock bands. For several years she also ran her own public relations agency handling any client that interested her, many of whom might recognize themselves in the ages of her stories.

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

Visit Desiree at
www.desireeholt.com and
www.desireeholttellsall.com

To chat with Desiree Holt and other Wild Rose Press authors of erotic romance, join us at www.groups.yahoo.com/group/thewilderroses.

Desiree Holt

Also Available

Eight Second Ride

by

Desiree Holt

Jessie Wade is a tough as nails sheriff until bull rider Kyle Mitchell ends up in her jail. With his bone-melting good looks and seductive voice, he knocks Jessie's defenses down one by one and awakens the sensuous woman she's hidden beneath her uniform. But Jessie can't afford to be soft. Or allow herself to fall for a cowboy who's never in one town longer than it takes to ride a bull.

Kyle never backs down from a challenge, but after a passionate night with Jessie, he realizes there's a hell of a woman behind the handcuffs and badge. Can Kyle convince Jessie he can take her for more than an eight-second ride?

Chapter One

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

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

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

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

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

Boots. Check.

Jeans. Check.

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

Champion belt buckle! Okay! Check.

Shirt. Check.

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

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

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

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

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

Holy hell! This was the sheriff?

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

Kyle did his best to clear the frogs out of his

throat and twist his dry lips into a smile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Your name Kyle Mitchell?" the man asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where?

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

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

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

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

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

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

wallet and fished out the required money.

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

"Got one right here."

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

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

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

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

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

"But—"

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

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

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

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